The Causes of Modern Conquest

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Abstract

Although conquests of entire states became rare after 1945, recent research has shown that conquests of small pieces of territory persisted. With puzzling frequency, states continue to such aggressive actions - and even fight wars - to occupy what are often remarkably small pieces of territory. This study investigates the causes of conquest attempts since 1945 by combining new conquest data with new geo-spatial data on territorial disputes. We argue, first, that the traditional explanations for territorial conflict predicated on the value of the territory resources, strategic location, population, and ethnic composition fail to explain patterns of modern conquest, in part because they do not accord with the small size of the seized territories. We further argue that established non-material explanations for aggression - such as status dissatisfaction and domestic diversion - will also struggle to explain modern conquest. We theorize instead that the roots of modern conquest lie in civil-military relations. We develop a theory of why militaries hold distinctive preferences for seizing small pieces of disputed territory and, therefore, why states in which militaries hold more power are more likely to attempt conquest.

Introduction

Two incompatible perspectives have dominated thinking about territorial conquest since 1945. One view holds that a norm of territorial integrity strengthened after World War II, greatly diminishing the incidence of conquest and all but eliminating it by 1976.[1] A second view assumes that territorial conflict and conquest retain the central role in interstate conflicts that they long held historically. Without necessarily making that assumption explicit, these studies aggregate the post-1945 era with earlier periods and apply the results to contemporary cases while asserting the policy relevance of territorial conflict research (CITES).

We begin from a third perspective on modern conquest, one that acknowledges conquest changed dramatically after World War II while focusing on the types of conquest continued to occur. Although conquests of entire states became rare after 1945,[2] conquests of small pieces of territory persisted. MORE

This history leaves a central question - and puzzle - unresolved: Why do states risk war - in some cases, fighting and losing wars - for the seemingly paltry prize of a small border region or disputed island? More specifically, what motivates states to desire these territories to this extent? Who benefits from possessing them? Or, who benefits from seizing them? That distinction will become important.

Past research has emphasized the value derived from possessing territories in terms of resources, production, strategic location, and ethnic kinship, among others.[3] However, the territories in question are often too small for these conventional explanations to come into play. We argue that a motive to seize - and to be seen to seize - the territory better fits modern conquest. Yet even there, we will argue that there are good reasons to doubt the explanatory

[1] Zacher 2001; Fazal 2007; Atzili 2011; Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016; Pinker 2012; Hathaway and Shapiro 2017.
[2] Fazal 2007.
[3] Huth 1996; Huth and Allee 2002; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Toft 2014.

power of traditional explanations for symbolic aggression such as status dissatisfaction vis a vis the international community and diverting the domestic audience from other issues that leaders are unable to resolve.

Instead, we combines status/prestige arguments with theories of civil-military relations to argue that states engaged in territorial disputes will be more likely to seize territory when their militaries participate in the foreign policy decision-making process. We build on but depart from existing theories about the effect of civilian control on the military by MORE

We leverage three recently-created datasets to test this theory of modern conquest against an array of competing explanations. (We use the phrase modern conquest as a shorthand for conquest attempts after 1945.) First, Schultz's geo-coding of Huth's territorial disputes data from 1948 to 2000 makes it possible to incorporate GIS data on territories' size, natural resources, population, and more. Second, we use Altman's more comprehensive data on conquest attempts as our outcome of interest. Third, to explain those conquest attempts in terms of civil-military relations, we draw on White's data on the share of cabinet position held by military officers.

RESULTS SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The study proceeds as follows. First, we briefly lay the basis for the puzzle of modern conquest that this paper seeks to answer. Second, we review the traditional reasons why states are thought to value territories enough to fight over them, exploring these reasons' limitations with respect to conquests of small territories. Third, we turn to the best-developed explanations for status and prestige motivated aggression, including domestic political explanations. Again, we point to reasons to doubt them as causes of modern conquest. Fourth, we elaborate a military prestige theory of modern conquest. Fifth, we explain our research design. Finally, we present results showing that traditional theories of territorial and interstate conflict fall short as explanations of modern conquest, while our civil-military theory receives greater support.

The Puzzle of Modern Conquest

The puzzle of modern conquest is that so many states decide to seize territories at significant risk of war that are seemingly too small to confer significant benefits to their possessor. Although small suggests area, we use the word more broadly for territories that are of low intrinsic value to the states that claim them. This usually means a small geographical area, but it is also a function of population, resources, and more.

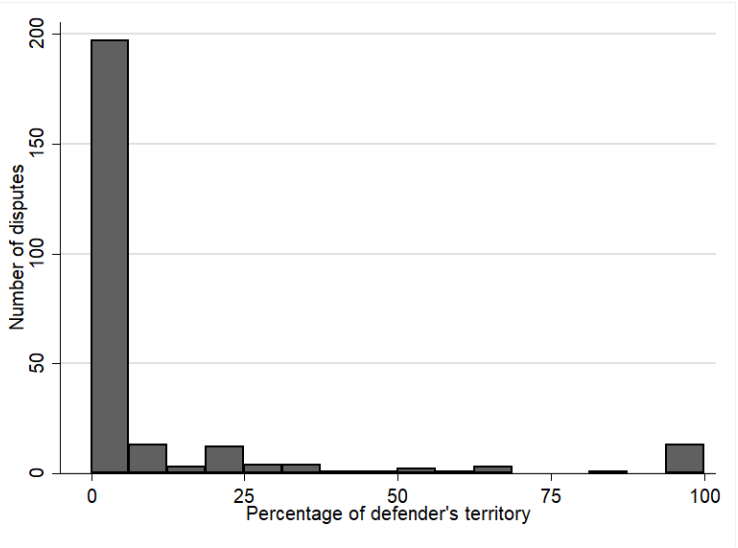
Figure 1 displays the size of all territorial disputes from 1948 to 2000.[4] Specifically, it shows the proportion of the defenders territory claimed by the challenger and the high concentration of small disputes. The concentration of cases below 5 percent is the striking feature, although the much smaller cluster of claims to entire states is also noteworthy. ??? of all territorial disputes involved less than one percent of the defender's territory. Moreover, 1 significantly understates the small size of the territories seized in conquest attempts. What states claim and what they seize are related but not equivalent. States rarely seize more than they claim, often seize what they claim, and often seize only a small part of what they claim. Consequently, small disputes produce small conquest attempts while large disputes produce a mix of large and small conquest attempts. For example, India and Pakistans dispute over Kashmir encompasses a region of substantial size, population, and value to each side. Yet the actual conquest attempts between India and Pakistan since the 1940s tell a different story: a few hills in Kargil in 1999, the mountainous Siachen glacier region in in 1984, and a small marshy part of the Rann of Kutch in 1965. Even in the 1965 War began with a Pakistani incursion into one part of Kashmir, albeit with significant strategic implications.[5]

Figure 2 displays the number of conquest attempts in each year since 1920, grouped by the size of the seized area. Conquest attempts are DEFINITION Approximately half of

[4]Figure 1 uses data from Schultz (2017) and closely resembles Figures 2-3 in that article.

[5]The primary bone of contention in the 1971 War was the secession of West Pakistan (now Bangladesh), which does not meet our definition of conquest.

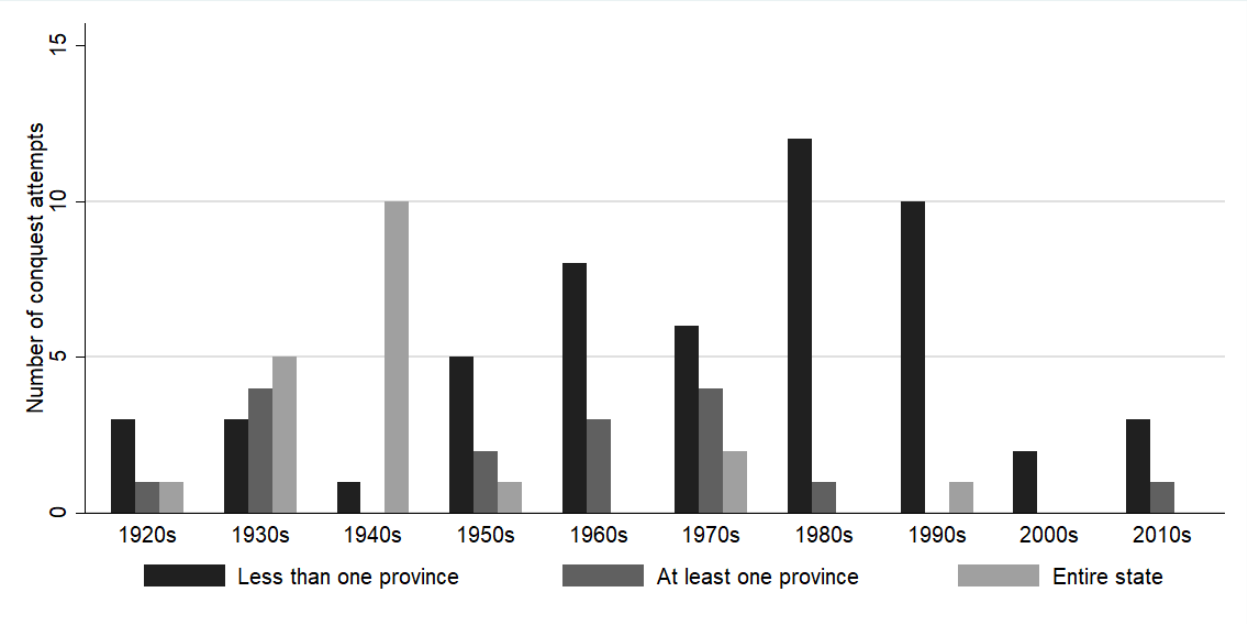
Figure 1: Territorial disputes as a percentage of the defender's territory. 1948–2000



these conquest attempts succeeding at retaining control of the territory, whereas the other half lost control fairly quickly usually because defenders use force to retake the territory.

Conquests of small territories matter to a surprising extent; attempts to conquer territories of surprisingly small size and/or low intrinsic value account for a significant proportion of interstate wars in the modern era. These include the Kargil War (1999), the Badme War(1998-2000), the Cenepa War (1995), the Falklands War (1982), the Ugandan-Tanzanian War (1978-1979), and the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1978-1979). These compare to several wars that fit the more traditional mold of fighting over larger territories in terms of size and population, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh War and Iran-Iraq War. As the sole example of one state attempting to conquer another since 1975, Iraqs 1990 invasion of Kuwait exemplifies the type of conquest that rarely occurs anymore. If Iraq had behaved like other states attempting conquest in the modern era, Iraq would have limited its aims to occupying a small strip of land along the border, as Iraq did in 1969, or seizing the disputed Kuwaiti islands of Warbah and Bubiyan. Overall, territorial conquest attempts figured prominently in about ????? of the ?????? interstate wars since 1945. Scholars and analysts increasingly

Figure 2: Conquests attempts by decade and approximate size, 1920–2019



worry that great powers such as the United States will get drawn into war over small stakes.[6]

The small size of modern conquests is one of the defining facts of territorial conflict since 1945, but it plays a central role in only a small portion of thinking about these disputes. Important research by Schultz made it possible to establish the small size of contemporary territorial conflict and to begin to explore its implications.[7] Schultz and Goemans adapt the bargaining model of war to this prevalence of limited territorial aims, showing that it enables states to make credible demands and bargains where otherwise limited demands would merely signal low resolve.[8] In earlier work, Wiegand recognized the puzzlingly small size of a large number of territorial disputes and sought to explain why they endured for so long despite seemingly low stakes. She concluded that states would maintain these territorial claims for decades to use them as a source of leverage for coercive bargaining over other issues with the holder of the territory.[9] We share Wiegands skepticism about the value of possessing

[6]See, for example, O'Hanlon 2019.
[7]Schultz 2017.
[8]Schultz and Goemans 2019.
[9]Wiegand 2011.

these small territories. However, her argument better suits the large pool of small territorial disputes that simmer without escalating to conquest or war; it is less compelling as a theory of conquest given its costs and risks.

Most recently, Altman documented the prevalence of these small conquests, showing how they gradually become the dominant form of territorial conquest. He concludes that this change in terms of the evolving relationship between conquest and war. Before 1945, conquest more often involved initiating war, then attempting to seize large pieces of territory. Since 1945, the dominant mode of conquest is to seize small pieces of territory, then attempt to avoid war. Getting away with a small gain as a fait accompli is the goal.[10] For our purposes, however, Altmans explanation for modern conquest is incomplete. It explains the opportunity to seize territory, but not the motivation. After all, an opportunity to get away with murder hardly means that an individual will choose to seize it. Detectives seek to establish means, motive, and opportunity. In this study, we focus on investigating the most puzzling dimension of that trinity: motives.[11] The question then becomes: is there some hidden value present in these small territories, or must we search elsewhere for the motive?

The Limits of Territorial Value

The surprisingly small size of territorial disputes and conquest attempts since 1945 suggests that the search for the causes of modern conquest may lead in different directions from prior eras and existing theories. Traditionally, explaining territorial conquest starts with the value of the disputed territory itself: its resources, its economic production, its strategic location, and ethic kinship with its inhabitants.[12] However, these causes seemingly become less compelling as the size and value of the territory shrinks.

[10] Altman 2019 Altman 2017.
[11] For conquests of surprisingly small territories, means are almost trivial: a military force.
[12] Huth 1996; Huth and Allee 2002; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Toft 2014.

The potential economic value of disputed territories includes the extraction of its natural resources, the agricultural potential of its arable land, and the production of the population residing there. An initial wave of research used a dichotomous indicator of economic value or (almost equivalently) resources. Using this approach, Huth's study of territorial disputes from 1918 to 1995 found that economic value correlated with a lower incidence of escalation.[13] In contrast, using mapped data on oil deposits, Caselli et al. report that dyads with oil present fight more often than non-oil dyads and that the likelihood of militarized interstate disputes rises as the distance from the oil to the border declines.[14] However, subsequent research found that while oil-rich states more often enter territorial disputes, the disputed areas tend not to include the oil deposits.[15] Despite emphasizing the contributions of oil to interstate conflict, Colgan identifies only two oil-motivated resource wars since 1945: Iraqs 1990 invasion of Kuwait and possibly its 1980 invasion of Iran.[16]

The resource motive for conquest speaks not just to the types of territories seized, but also to the types of states more inclined to seize them. For Brooks, technologically advanced economies reliant on human capital lack a motive to conquer additional territory.[17] For Rosecrance, it is states reliant on international trade.[18] For Markowitz et al. (2019a; 2019b), land-oriented states in which the government relies on agricultural and natural resource rents rather than production are more prone to conquest.[19] Cutting against this perspective, Liberman shows that the Soviet Union was able to extract value from occupied Europe after World War II.[20] However, these studies generally envision conquests of larger territories than is the norm since 1945. It is difficult for the small territories in question to contain sufficient

[13] Huth 1996, 112.
[14] Caselli, Morelli, and Rohner 2015.
[15] Schultz 2017.
[16] Colgan 2013. Also see Meierding 2016, who contests the role of the oil-greed motive in both cases and explains why gains from conquering oil deposits are smaller than many would expect.
[17] Brooks 2011.
[18] Rosecrance 1986. Also see Gartzke and Rohner 2011.
[19] Markowitz, Mulesky, Graham et al. 2019; Markowitz, Fariss, and McMahon 2019.
[20] Liberman 1998.

resources or agricultural potential to entice states to risk war. To be sure, small regions can host resource deposits. For islands, these resources might fall not on the island itself but in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Reports of oil deposits have recurred in the Spratly Islands, some of which are currently held by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Taiwan. However, whatever oil China could eventually extract is likely to be a drop in the bucket of its overall economy and of the trade it would likely jeopardize by taking such an aggressive step as conquering the remainder of the Spratly Islands.[21]

When resources are not the motive, small territories could potentially occupy vital strategic locations that contribute meaningfully to the security of the states that control them. In Huth's original formulation, strategic value includes the presence or proximity of military bases, location along invasion routes, proximity to major shipping lanes, proximity to strategic choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, and outlets to the sea for landlocked states. He finds that states more often escalate disputes over strategic territories.[22] Israels 1967 conquests of the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights offer traditional examples of this as it sought buffers between its central areas and its adversaries, Egypt and Syria. Crimea included a vital Russian naval base at Sevastopol. Yet those examples feature some of the largest conquests since 1945. Although smaller regions are less likely to exhibit strategic value, some cases do suggest this motive. In 1999, India endured hundreds of casualties to eject Pakistani soldiers from several hills in the Kargil region of Kashmir that overlooked an important road linking parts of Kashmir to the rest of India. Indias forces advanced into disputed territory in Doklam in 2017 to stake Bhutans claim against encroaching Chinese road construction. This position had strategic value to India because it overlooked the Siliguri Corridor, a thin strip connecting several northeastern states to the rest of India.

Looking beyond material value, studies have postulated several intangible and symbolic

[21] Markowitz Book Draft CITE.
[22] Huth 1996, 74,108. Also see Carter 2010.

rationales through which disputed territory holds value to states. These include territories perceived as part of the homeland, sites of religious significance, regions possessed by the challenger state at some point in its history, and areas to which the challenger has ethnic ties.[23] Due perhaps to the focus on the post-1945 era, relatively few of the conquest attempts under study involve colonies or disputes without any historical basis for the claims; fewer still focus on religious sites. Huth provided early evidence that that the irredentist motive matters, reporting that disputes with an ethnic motive were 30 percent more likely to escalate.[24] Conditions postulated to exacerbate irredentism include the ethnic homogeneity of the challenger, the ethnic homogeneity of the disputed area, the level of discrimination against that population, the domestic political power of the ethnic group in the challenger.[25] Using geospatial data, Goemans and Schultz report that trans-border ethnic populations are an important cause of territorial claims (disputes) in Africa. For example, Somalias 1977 invasion of Ethiopia sought to gain control over the ethnically Somali Ogaden region. Outside of Africa, the Russian-speaking demographics of Crimea contributed to Russias 2014 invasion and annexation. Indias longstanding dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir unmistakably includes an ethnic dimension as Muslim Pakistan seeks to integrate this Muslim-majority province from predominantly Hindu India. Yet ethnicity cannot easily explain Pakistans seizure of several hills in the Kargil Region of Kashmir in 1999, nor of marshy land in the Rann of Kutch in 1965. Both were uninhabited. Indias 1984 conquest of the Siachen Glacier similarly gained no ethnic value. Indeed, Saideman and Ayres characterize irredentism as surprisingly rare after the Cold War.[26] Small territories, quite a few without any inhabitants ethnic kin or otherwise, are rarely strong candidates for irredentism.

[23] Huth 1996; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Goddard 2006; Hassner 2003; Shelef 2016.
[24] Huth 1996, 110.
[25] Goemans and Schultz 2017; Siroky and Hale 2017; Saideman and Ayres 2000, 2008; Woodwell 2004.
[26] Saideman and Ayres 2008, 9.

Status and Domestic Politics

If the value of the territory itself offers an unconvincing set of motives for modern conquest, then perhaps the act of seizing it does so. Could leaders search for status at the international level political advantage at the domestic level motivate conquest? Conquering territory, when successful, can provide states with an unambiguous victory visible both audiences.

Status is usually construed as a ranking of states from higher to lower status and sometimes with the nature of the identity of states as, for instance, great powers.[27] Although achieving greater levels of status may motivate all states,[28] past research suggests three types of states that are most likely to attempt conquest for this reason: 1) those dissatisfied with their status in general terms, 2) those seeking to regain a territory that was taken from them, and 3) those that recently suffered a foreign policy humiliation such as an involuntary loss of territory.[29] Barnhart shows that victims of territorial losses are more likely to attempt to conquer territory not just against the state that took the territory from them, but also against other (usually weaker) states and indigenous populations for status reasons.

To offer a compelling theory of modern conquest, a status explanation must explain why seizing a small, low-value piece of territory would generate esteem from other states. Status as a cause of war is most associated with rising great powers challenging declining great powers to establish a new pecking order in a region or in the international system.[30] Seizing small pieces of territory, usually without great power involvement, is quite different from the cases that these scholars sought to explain. To be sure, states invest in a variety of status symbols to bolster their status, ranging from hosting Olympic Games to building high-profile weapon systems such as aircraft carriers and nuclear weapons.[31] Seizing territory could be

[27] Renshon 2016; Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014; Duque 2018.
[28] Morgenthau 1978; Lebow 2010.
[29] Although the value of the territory could motivate these cases, Lebow attributes them to a revenge motive that he associates with status. Renshon 2016; Lebow 2010; Barnhart 2016, 2017.
[30] Wohlforth 2009; Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth 2014; Ward 2017.
[31] Sagan 1997; Eyre, Suchman et al. 1996.

understood as such, although the small size of the territory could undercut this approach to gaining status. Moreover, material and behavioral symbols of status do not necessarily imply a corresponding increase in status.[32] Not only can the small size of the territories detract from an attempt to impress other states, but violations of international norms of territorial integrity and non-aggression could mean that seizing territory damages a states status more than it strengthens it.[33] International status as a motive for modern conquest requires that seizing a small prize in a manner likely repugnant to most of the world increases status enough to justify risking war.

Given these constraints against a small conquests capacity to elevate a states status in the international community, it is reasonable to suppose that a leader of a challenger state embroiled in a territorial dispute might be able to gain popularity by seizing territory. The primary audience is now domestic, not international. Even if the international community regards an act of conquest as a distasteful act of aggression, nationalism may entice a public to accept their leaders justifications meant to legitimize seizing the territory. Indeed, Tir theorizes that leaders will be particularly likely to use territorial conflicts to try to improve their domestic standing due to the greater domestic political salience of territorial disputes. He shows that a greater incidence of protests, strikes, and riots correlates with a higher probability of territorial aggression.[34] Jung similarly reports that territorial disputes contribute to the strength of the association between domestic unrest and conflict initiation.[35]

A domestic political motive for conquest is widely associated with diversionary war theory, the idea that leaders initiate or escalate conflicts to gain domestic political standing, often by distracting the public from domestic political problems. If the diversionary explanation holds, conquest should be particularly unlikely amid economic downturns and periods of

[32] Duque 2018, 579.
[33] Zacher 2001; Fazal 2007; Pinker 2012; Hathaway and Shapiro 2017.
[34] Tir 2010.
[35] Jung 2014.

social unrest.[36] Indeed, the best-studied candidate for a diversionary war was an attempt to conquer a territory of limited intrinsic value: Argentinas invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982. Mere days beforehand, thousands demonstrated against the regime, which went on to foster the idea that the governing junta sought to divert public attention from economic problems. However, Argentina had made the decision to invade before those protests.[37] Several studies supportive of diversionary war theory emphasize mature democracies as the antagonists, which ill-suits the set of challengers in modern conquests.[38]

Although polling data are available for too few cases (three) to offer a comprehensive analysis, these cases reveal that attempts to conquer even the smallest of territories can cause significant swings in leaders approval. First, Russian President Vladimir Putins popularity rose by approximately twenty percent after the successful annexation of Crimea in 2014, an increase that did not quickly dissipate.[39] Second, Ecuadorian President Sixto Durán-Ballén benefited even more from the groundswell of nationalism that the 1995 Cenepa War provoked, a war begun by Ecuadors infiltration of military posts into a remote border area long disputed with Peru. His approval rating rose (approximately) from 25 percent to 80 percent, gradually receding back to its former level over the next ten months.[40] Although Peru ultimately came away with control over the territory, the fighting itself ended in a stalemate and this unfavorable diplomatic outcome was not immediately apparent. Third, recently-elected Greek Prime Minister Kostas Simitis saw his 80 percent approval rating drop to 36 percent. In the crisis, Greece deployed marines to a disputed islet.[41] Turkey countered that move by seizing an empty islet nearby. The crisis ended when both agreed to a mutual pullback. This restoration of the status quo ante, in effect a stalemate, nonetheless proved

[36] Davies 2002; Mitchell and Prins 2004.
[37] Fravel 2010. But see Oakes 2006.
[38] Kisangani and Pickering 2009; Oneal and Tir 2006; Miller 1999; Gelpi 1997.
[39] Hale 2018.
[40] Project ????.
[41] Jacobides 2007.

quite damaging to the Greek Prime Ministers domestic standing.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to doubt that seizing territory offers a generalizable pathway to popularity for leaders. Even if initial conquest attempts tend to be popular, that boost in popularity is likely to collapse if the challenger is quickly forced to withdraw from the territory by the defenders military action or opposition from the international community. After all, the role of a diversionary motive in causing the Falklands War remains disputed, but the contribution of the defeat in that war to ending Argentinas military dictatorship is not. Diversionary conquest almost inherently runs that risk. Only half (FIND percent) of conquest attempts held onto the seized territory at the end of the initial conflict (FIND percent held it ten years later). Moreover, because the size of the seized territory is small, the public may hold leaders to an expectation of an easy victory. A failed attempt at conquest therefore may make the leader appear incompetent more than a successful attempt creates an image of strong leadership.

These risks befall any leaders attempt to use aggression to gain status, domestically or internationally, but we argue that the nature of modern conquest tips the scales toward the risks outweighing the rewards. The predominant strategy of modern conquest the fait accompli involves the sudden seizure of a piece of territory based on a calculation that the defender is unlikely to escalate in response. In general, successful faits accomplis are over more quickly and entail far fewer casualties than failures often none.[42] Failures tend to generate more escalation and prolong the crisis, thereby making news to a greater extent. Consequently, failures will tend to be more salient than successes. Given the frequency with which attempts fail, that incentive disjuncture creates at most a weak incentive for leaders to take the risk. For example, if India had declined to challenge Pakistans surreptitious infiltration of forces to occupy hills in Kargil, it is not clear that the Pakistani success would even have made news in Pakistan. Instead, failure contributed to the Prime Minister Nawaz

[42] Altman 2017. Altman CITE.

Sharifs loss of power to a military coup. Ironically, this coup was conducted in part by officers involved in planning the Kargil operation.[43]

Cui Bono? Military Prestige as a Cause of Conquest

Who expects to benefit from seizing small territories, and why do they believe that risking war for such small stakes is the right decision? We argue that the primary impetus for conquest tends to come from within militaries, which have distinctive biases and incentives that lead to a greater inclination to support conquest than civilians. Consequently, states in which the military officer corps has more freedom to operate outside the control of civilian leaders are more likely to attempt conquest.

0.1 Why Senior Officers Promote Small Conquests

Past research suggests that military officers tend to be more hawkish and more supportive of offensive military doctrines than civilian leaders (CITES;Posen;Sagan;Snyder?;Sechser;Horowitz and Stam?;Jost et al.). These conclusions are controversial. Other scholars conclude that officers tend to be more cautious about using military force, particularly when confronted with an unfavorable military balance, and skeptical (if not hostile) toward military operations in which political considerations constrain tactical choices (CITES).

At first glance, seizing small territories might seem to constitute the sort of politico-military half-measure that military offers tend to abhor. Traditionally, military officers are thought to prefer to have political leaders set objectives, then allow the military free rein to pursue them (Huntington?; Feaver?). Although officers may tend toward hawkishness in general, this preference set can lead them to skepticism and even opposition to military strategies with high levels of political constraints: limited war,coercion,brinkmanship, signaling,

[43] Zehra 2018.

peacekeeping, nation-building, counterinsurgency methods meant to win over a population, etcetera.[44] In the Korean War, for example, some U.S. military leaders bemoaned the limitations imposed on them by civilians, including the non-use of nuclear weapons and the unwillingness to extend the war into China (CITE). In Vietnam, Air Force officers lamented the calculated and limited use of strategic bombing and other measures meant to signal resolve rather than make progress on the battlefield Pape).[45]

However, the predominant military strategy in these conquest attempts, the fait accompli, is an important exception to this skepticism about limited-aims strategies. The fait accompli is a unilateral military operation that relies on an overwhelming local power advantage to seize an objective.[46] Officers see the opportunity to advance directly in front of them and wish to take advantage of it. By seizing the initiative and using it to ensure overwhelming local military superiority, they can rapidly strengthen their states position in a territorial dispute. Gains are made by imposition, not when credible threats elicit concessions. Taking the territory itself requires no politics, merely boldness. This contrasts with the forms of military operations listed above. To be sure, keeping the territory does require deterring the adversary from escalating to retake the territory, which is in part a political calculation. Yet military offers can focus on a clear opportunity to strengthen their states position by seizing territory, then hand off that political problem to civilian leaders.[53] Military officers appreciate the value of tactical victories, even those that do not in themselves win a war.

Military officers are not best equipped to compare the value of a small piece of disputed territory to other, non-territorial national interests. They are more likely to approach the issue in isolation from other interests and focus on the opportunity to make a gain through decisive action. Put another way, the logic of success for a fait accompli is a military

[44] Rosen 1982; Posen 1986; Feaver 2009, 63-64.
[45] Rosen 1982.
[46] Altman 2017.
[53] On why this may appeal to militaries, see Posen 1986.

calculation about what can be seized, while the logic of failure is a political miscalculation about how the adversary reacts to its sudden, initial loss. We argue that military offers tend to overweight the former.

This propensity to look favorably on opportunities to seize small territories intersects with a more self-interested motive for military officers to advocate for conquest. Masterminding such an operation can provide a far larger enhancement to military officers personal prestige and career prospects. Military promotion tends to reward both military experience and victory, giving an officer who commanded a successful operation an advantage over his peers. By doing so, that officer can hope to demonstrate boldness, courage, leadership, and competence. How can seizing a strategically insignificant piece of territory bolster an officers career prospects? The underlying context matters: many officers serve states that have not fought an inter-state war or high-intensity civil war in their career era. Even if small in scope compared to a command in a major war, a successful conquest could be the most significant and well-known military operation of their generation. The ambitious military officers audience is other members of his countrys officer corps. Importantly, this military prestige argument addresses the issues of audience and status-improving pathway that plague the national-level and leader-level prestige arguments.

Although the individual incentives of military officers take pride of place in our explanation, it is reasonable to assume that these officers take into account the broader interests of the military in which they serve. At the institutional level, successfully taking territory demonstrates capability and skill of a military as well as the utility of investing in it. This rationale for small conquests is particularly likely to appeal to the top military leaders. This incentive helps to explain why the top generals in the military - for whom promotion is no longer a concern - function as part of the transmission belt from the officers who originate these plans to actual policy.

0.2 Civil-Military Institutions and Conquest

Politico-military institutions in which militaries wield greater power over foreign policy decisions are more likely to enable senior officers to translate this support for conquest into policy. That happens through combinations of the following five mechanisms, listed below in descending order of the strength of civilian control of the military:

Insufficient Oversight: Civilians retain political control but unwittingly lose control of crucial policy decisions to military officers with hawkish incentives.[47] Example: Siachen?

Over-Delegation: Civilians retain ostensible political control but delegate crucial policy decision to military officers with hawkish incentives. Example: Peru (Cenepa).

Coerced Civilian Hawkishness: Civilian retain political control, but the militarys involvement in politics causes civilian leaders to development more hawkish preferences than they otherwise would. This could happen if civilian leaders fear a coup, or if the military enjoys a high degree of prestige and popularity among voters. Example: Imia/Kardak; Kargil?

Civil-Military Power Struggles: Civilians and the military share political power, foreign policy decision-making is unclear. This ambiguity opens up space for unilateralism, contradictory orders and actions, and poor communication and information transmission, which may lead to aggression or miscalculation. Example: ? Cites: White working paper, Brooks 2008. False optimism, over-confidence, and misperception are important drivers. Military officers who engage in conquests have to be enamored with the brilliance and boldness of their ideas to be willing to run the risks of conquest. Motivated reasoning likely plays a role here.

Military Rule: The military officers rise to the top government positions usually due to rule by military junta. In addition to their hawkish incentives, aggressive but successful military actions provide legitimacy for the junta. Example: Falklands. These arguments assume that military officers have hawkish preferences and that these when in positions of

[47] On the importance of the problem of civilian oversight of the military, see Feaver 2009.

power this translates to more conflict. We know from the literature that military regimes, states without strong civilian control, and civil-military friction or competition are more likely to initiate international conflict (White working paper; Weeks 2014; Stewart and Zhukov 2009; Brooks 2008; Lai and Slater 2006; Sechser 2004; Posen 1986; Snyder 1984; Grossman et al. 2016; Horowitz and Stam 2014?; but see Kim 2018).

Research Design

We assess our argument about military prestige as a cause of modern conquest using statistical analysis. As a first cut, we expect to observe that challenger states in territorial disputes will be more likely to attempt conquest when the military has greater influence in the foreign policy decision-making process. This empirical approach does not observe senior officer preferences directly. Rather, if we are correct that officers do have incentives to seize small pieces of territory but are constrained from acting on them, we should be able to observe the consequences of those incentives when the domestic institutional environment is more permissive.

Arbitrating between our explanation and the alternatives in the literature requires a data structure and research design that can accommodate the different analytic focuses of each family of arguments. The territorial value arguments center on characteristics of the disputed territory, which suggest that territorial disputes are the appropriate sample for investigating the causes of modern conquest. In contrast, the status and diversionary war arguments – as well as our military prestige argument – emphasize domestic politics in the challenger state. This requires a design that distinguishes between challengers and defenders. Moreover, the broader literature on conflict suggests that several dyad-specific factors are likely to influence the propensity for conflict.

These considerations inform our unit of analysis and sample. Our unit is the challenger-

dispute-year. We construct a sample that covers all territorial disputes active during 1965–2000. Our dispute data come from Huth, Croco, and Appel's update of Huth and Allee's territorial dispute dataset. A dispute features a challenger state contesting some or all of the territory of a defender state. In some cases, a defender can also be a challenger; this occurs when neither state has legal possession. For example, China and Vietnam claim the Spratly Islands, and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia claim Qaruh and Umm Al Maradim islands. Because the islands are not part of the juridically recognized territory of either disputant, both disputants appear as challengers and defenders in our data. Territorial disputes only remain in the data while they are active disputes; they drop out once they have been resolved. The sample contains 2,436 challenger-dispute-years. We observe 226 challenger-disputes over 192 unique claimed territories.

[describe Altman data]

Our civil-military explanation emphasizes the domestic institutional environment as a key factor for explaining conquest attempts. We measure the permissiveness of politico-military institutions using the Military Participation in Government dataset developed by White.[48] White codes the proportion of a country's executive branch bodies (such as state councils and cabinets) made up of military officers. This measure excludes the state leader and also excludes non-executive institutions such as the legislature. As the military's presence in executive branch institutions increases, so too should the military's de jure or de facto influence over foreign policy decision-making.

We confront two threats to inference with respect to testing our argument. The first concerns omitted variable bias. The extant scholarship suggests a number of potentially important explanations for territorial seizures. From a technical standpoint, if those factors correlate both with conquest and military participation in government, then excluding them would be a source of omitted variable bias. If those factors correlate only with the outcome,

[48] White 2017.

then excluding them would reduce the precision of our estimates but would not be a source of bias. We deal with this challenge by assessing the correlations between conquest, military participation, and different operationalizations of territorial value and status and diversion concerns.

The second concerns the problem of reverse causality. It could be that conquest attempts, whether failed or successful, alter the structure of government institutions or increase military influence in foreign policy decision-making. Failing to account for this possibility would lead to erroneous inferences about the effects of politico-military institutions on conquest. We address this issue by lagging military participation in government in all specifications. This does not fully resolve this concern, and we expect to bring additional evidence in future iterations of this paper.

Assessing explanations for modern conquest

We implement a linear probability model in which we regress a dependent variable (conquest, or in the context of our OVB analysis, military participation in government) on a set of lagged predictors. Because some states are involved in more than one territorial dispute as challenger, we cluster our standard errors by challenger.

Territorial value

Territorial value explanations advance arguments about features specific to the territories under dispute, rather than monadic or dyadic characteristics of the disputants. Although previous research has attempted to measure territorial value, new geospatial data on the size and shape of territorial claims allows us to measure value with greater precision and in a greater variety of ways than was previously possible. GIS boundary data come from

Schultz's Mapping Interstate Territorial Conflict (MITC) dataset.[49] MITC is the first dataset to estimate the location and boundaries of disputes, and it covers all claims in the updated Huth and Allee dataset.

We combine the MITC boundary data with geographic data to calculate several measures of economic value. First, we measure the average agricultural potential of the disputed area. We calculate this measure using the Caloric Suitability Index, which estimates the potential crop yield in calories per hectare assuming low levels of inputs, rain-fed agriculture, and agro-climactic conditions such as soil quality.[50]

Second, we measure the average luminosity of the disputed area. Luminosity, defined as nighttime lights visible from space, is a proxy for economic activity.[51] greater economic activity in the disputed territory implies greater economic value of that territory. The luminosity data comes from the PRIO-GRID project.[52]

Third, we use data on onshore and offshore oil and gas deposits to calculate the total area of oil implicated in the dispute.[53] While this is a straightforward calculation for the onshore deposits, the offshore deposits must be isolated to those that would fall within the exclusive economic zone obtained by the challenger if the conquest was successful. We detail this procedure in the appendix.

Fourth, we calculate whether the territory contains valuable minerals, defined as deposits of gold, diamonds, or gems.[54] Unlike the oil and gas measure, we specify this indicator as a dummy.

Fifth, we estimate population density of the claimed territory.[55] Population density

[49] Schultz 2017.
[50] Data from Galor and Özak 2016.
[51] Min 2015; Chen and Nordhaus 2011.
[52] Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012. Original data from Elvidge, Hsu, Baugh et al. 2014.
[53] Data from Lujala, Ketil Rod, and Thieme 2007.
[54] Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012. Data originally from Balestri 2015; Lujala 2009; Gilmore, Gleditsch, Lujala et al. 2005; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005.
[55] Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012. Original data from Klein Goldewijk, Beusen, Van Drecht et al. 2011.

complements our natural resource-based measures of economic value by accounting for the possibility that densely populated areas are likely to be sites of labor-intensive or human capital-intensive economic activity.

The greater spatial precision and opportunity to measure variables in new ways comes with a trade-off: many geographic data sources do not have temporal variation. Of the five measures above, only population density is time-variant. To be clear, the advantages of being able to estimate the value of the disputed territories are considerable, as we can better isolate between-dispute differences. Still, we remain cautious in the interpretation of our results.

We also assess territorial value using two additional variables: ethnic value and strategic value. Both variables come from Huth and Allee.[56]

The regression results appear in Table 1. Two observations immediately stand out. First, examining Column 1, we see very little evidence that states are more likely to attempt conquest when disputing valuable territory. The probability of conquest is higher in disputes with oil and gas deposits, but this result is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The result for luminosity actually contradicts this finding, however: more economically valuable disputed territories are less likely to see conquest attempts. Our remaining predictors are not statistically distinguishable from 0.

Second, turning to Column 2, we see no evidence that territorial value may be a source of omitted variable bias. Even though petroleum and luminosity were correlated with our outcome, they are not correlated with our predictor, military participation in government. This indicates that while these two variables may improve the precision of our estimates in later models, excluding them would not introduce bias into our estimates.

[56] Huth and Allee 2002.

Table 1: Territorial value and conquest

	DV: Conquest (1)	DV: Military (2)
Caloric yield	0.000760	0.122
	(0.00277)	(0.117)
Luminosity	-0.00277*	-0.127
	(0.00108)	(0.0816)
Petroleum	0.00107+	0.00986
	(0.000614)	(0.0215)
Valuable minerals	0.00384	0.243
	(0.00529)	(0.188)
Population density	-0.00361	-0.00109
	(0.00225)	(0.179)
Ethnic value	0.00482	0.0156
	(0.00491)	(0.229)
Strategic value	0.00722	0.321
	(0.00614)	(0.225)
Observations	2409	2409

Note: OLS regression. All predictors are lagged. Dependent variable in column header. MPG refers to military participation in government. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered by challenger. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Status and Diversion

We operationalize national status and prestige arguments three ways. First, we use Renshon's status dissatisfaction variable. This indicator measures the difference between a state's diplomatic status, based on its rank within its relevant community of status, and its material status, based on its material capabilities.[57] Higher values indicate greater status dissatisfaction, which should correlate with a higher probability of attempting a conquest.

Second, we include measures of revanchism and humiliation. States that recently suffered

[57] Renshon 2016.

territorial losses to another state may be more likely to attempt to reverse these status losses by seizing territory of another state.[58] We follow Barnhart in coding revanchism as 1 in cases where a challenger involved in a territorial dispute lost territory to the defender in the previous 20 years, and 0 otherwise. We code humiliation similarly, except that this variable takes 1 in cases where the challenger lost territory to a state other than the defender, and 0 otherwise.

The diversionary war literature also suggests a focus on domestic variables. Two measures are common in this literature: economic growth rate and incidents of mass unrest. We obtain growth data from the World Development Indicators.[59] Following previous studies, we create the mass unrest variable by summing riots, strikes, and anti-government demonstrations using data from the Cross-National Time-Series Archive.[60]

As before, we examine the correlations between these predictors and conquest, and with military participation in government. Table 2 shows the results. Once again, the usual explanations in the conflict literature do not seem to operate in the case of modern conquest. In Column 1, we find a statistically significant but substantively small increase in the likelihood of a conquest attempt. Again, however, we have no evidence that these predictors are sources of omitted variable bias, as we observe no correlation between them and military participation in government (Column 2).

0.3 Military prestige and civil-military institutions

The evidence in the previous sections are consistent with our theoretical priors: the standard explanations for conflict and aggression in the literature do not perform well at explaining the phenomenon of modern conquest. We now turn to testing our own argument about military prestige and the permissiveness of politico-military institutions.

[58] Barnhart 2017.
[59] The World Bank 2019.
[60] Wilson 2019.

Table 2: Status, diversion, and conquest

	DV: Conquest (1)	DV: Military (2)
L.Status dissatisfaction	0.00165	0.122
	(0.00149)	(0.112)
L.Humiliation	-0.00633	-0.134
	(0.00405)	(0.186)
L.Revanchism	-0.000486	0.110
	(0.00911)	(0.454)
L.Growth	-0.0000447	-0.00907
	(0.000214)	(0.00638)
L.Mass unrest	0.00417*	-0.124
	(0.00194)	(0.132)
Observations	2409	2409

Note: OLS regression. All predictors are lagged. Dependent variable in column header. MPG refers to military participation in government. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered by challenger. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

We allow the data to inform

We subject our results to a series of robustness checks, which we report here in brief. First, we deploy an alternative indicator for politico-military institutions: civilian control of the military. We use newly developed data from Kenwick, who develops a dynamic measure that incorporates both the institutional structure of civil-military relations and norms of civilian control.[61] The key innovation of Kenwick's dynamic measure is that it allows norms to deepen by accounting for a country's historical experience with civilian control. The normative component of the measure also captures a greater diversity of potential mechanisms through which civil-military institutions constrain senior officers from engaging in unilateral fait accomplis.[62] We rerun our analyses substituting White's military participation in gov-

[61] Kenwick 2018.

[62] In this sense, White's measure is the more conservative of the two, since we are potentially miscoding

Table 3: Civil-military relations and conquest

	DV: Conquest	
	(1)	(2)
L.Military influence	0.00351*	0.00367*
	(0.00151)	(0.00153)
L.Luminosity		-0.000931
		(0.00176)
L.Petroleum		0.000430
		(0.000571)
L.Mass unrest		0.00435*
		(0.00168)
L.Relative capability		0.00181
		(0.00620)
L.Joint democracy		0.00150
		(0.00507)
Observations	2409	2409

Note: OLS regression. All predictors are lagged. Dependent variable is conquest. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered by challenger. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

ernment measure with Kenwick's dynamic control measure and report the results in Columns 1 and 2 of Table 4. Our results remain robust.

Second, we run our main model with standard errors clustered by disputes. This accounts for heteroskedasticity that arises from disputes in which challengers are also defenders. The results appear in Column 3 of Table 4.

Third, we test the sensitivity of our results to the composition of challengers and disputes in the sample. We do this by running our main model but dropping a different challenger

challengers as being constrained when they are in fact not constrained. This would bias against finding in favor of our argument. Besides this consideration, we also prefer White's measure because it is more straightforward to interpret than Kenwick's measure. We are open, however, to elevating Kenwick's measure to the main results alongside White's.

Table 4: Civil-military relations and conquest

	DV: Conquest		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Military influence	0.00371*	0.00517**	0.00367*
	(0.00155)	(0.00136)	(0.00161)
L.Luminosity	-0.00113	-0.00101	-0.000931
	(0.00180)	(0.00181)	(0.00170)
L.Petroleum	0.000359	0.000597	0.000430
	(0.000567)	(0.000580)	(0.000671)
L.Mass unrest	0.00408*	0.00380*	0.00435+
	(0.00171)	(0.00173)	(0.00249)
L.Relative capability	0.000989	-0.000503	0.00181
	(0.00634)	(0.00646)	(0.00619)
L.Joint democracy	0.00119	0.00245	0.00150
	(0.00538)	(0.00585)	(0.00554)
Military influence measure	White	Kenwick	White
Clustering	Challengers	Challengers	Disputes
Observations	2367	2367	2409

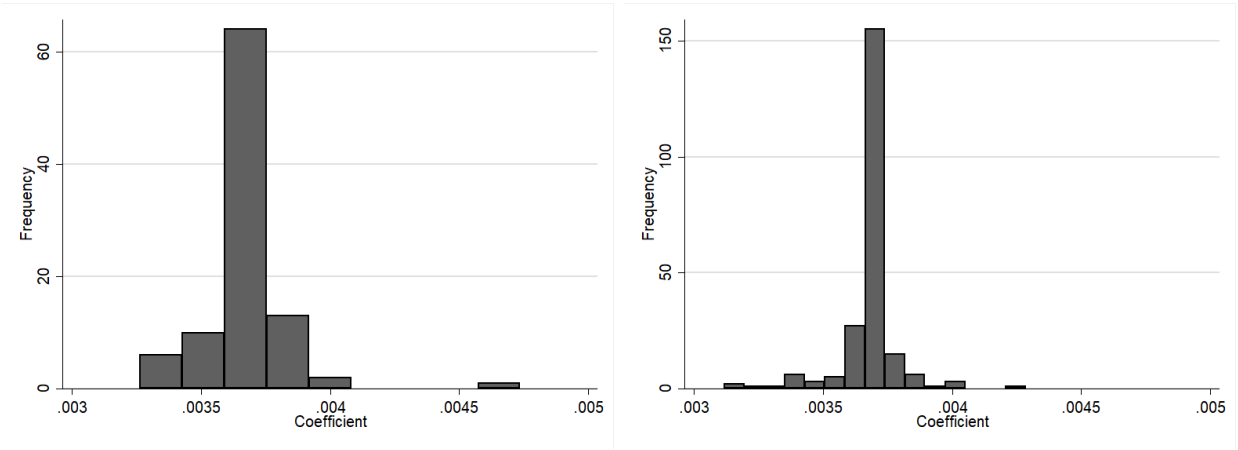
Note: OLS regression. All predictors are lagged. Dependent variable is conquest. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered as indicated. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

state each time. We repeat this exercise, but drop a different dispute each time. We plots the coefficients of the parameter of interest – military influence in foreign policy decisionmaking – in a histogram. The coefficients should distribute normally with the mean centered over the same coefficient we saw in Table 3, and indeed in both cases this is what we see.

Discussion and conclusion

Write a conclusion.

Figure 3: Sample sensitivity



(a) Robustness to dropping countries **(b)** Robustness to dropping disputes

Note: The figure plots the coefficients on military influence in foreign policy decisionmaking from regressions in which a different country or dispute is excluded in each run.

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