

What's Stopping You?: The Sources of Political Constraints on International Conflict Behavior in Parliamentary Democracies

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Much of the work on the democratic peace treats democracies as a homogenous set. In this paper we focus on the heterogeneity of established parliamentary democracies in terms of the domestic constraints on their conflict behavior. We emphasize the constraints emanating from two aspects of a ruling coalition: 1) its political position, that is, whether a government is “right” or “left”; and 2) its structural complexity. We present a model of the relationship between levels of conflict and the domestic political constraints on the use of force. The model concludes that states that have *low* political costs associated with the use of force are more likely to become involved in militarized interstate conflict; and that, once involved, states with *high* costs are more likely to allow their conflicts to escalate. We find that right governments (which face low domestic costs associated with the use of force) are more likely to be involved in militarized disputes, while left governments (which face high costs) are more likely to see the disputes in which they are involved escalate. Our evidence suggests that structural complexity is largely unrelated to the likelihood of either involvement in or escalation of militarized interstate disputes.

This paper analyzes two sources of domestic political constraints that may work upon democratic leaders to affect their states' international conflict behavior. It begins with recognition of the "democratic peace": democratic states have never (or have very seldom) waged war on each other. Work on the democratic peace suggests two competing causes for this empirical finding, which we use to direct our investigation. First, the complex political structure of democratic states makes the adoption of political decisions costly and time-consuming, impeding democracies from engaging in international conflict. Second, democratic norms stress the peaceful resolution of differences through compromise. Both of these frameworks rightly highlight the differences between democracies and non-democracies, but they do not examine the ways in which democracies differ among themselves. Using the theoretical arguments for the democratic peace as a guide, we analyze how varying political and structural conditions at the domestic level affect democracies' conflict behavior.

We focus on the conflict behavior of a subset of democratic states – established parliamentary democracies – to investigate these impediments to conflict. We do this through a model that analyzes the sources of domestic political costs for the use of force and their effects on the escalation of international disagreements to the use of force and beyond. We determine if variations in governmental structure and political preferences within established democracies account for expected differences in conflict behavior in two ways. First, we investigate the effect of who rules. Specifically, we look at the political position of the ruling parties to see whether "right" governments behave differently from "left" governments. In doing this, we argue that while they share beliefs in fundamental democratic principles, "right" parties have somewhat different values

from “left parties.”¹ Second, we look at the structural complexity of the ruling coalitions. The structural explanation for the democratic peace leads one to expect that more complex governments should engage in less (and less serious) conflict than simpler ones.

We begin with a brief review of the pertinent aspects of the democratic peace literature. Our review directs us to investigate the sources of constraints that we do, and leads to a concern that the field has failed to allow for or to investigate the heterogeneity of democratic states. We believe that some democratic states may be more peaceful than others, and disaggregating “democracy” may reveal important things. We then outline our model of the effects on international conflict of political costs and the sources of those costs. We test our hypotheses and discuss the results of our analyses. We find that right governments are more likely to be involved in militarized disputes, while left governments are more likely to see the disputes in which they are involved escalate.

Democracy and Peace

To develop our argument, we need not present a complete review of the extensive literature on the democratic peace.² Instead, we summarize the most salient aspects, sufficient, we hope, to frame our argument. We draw two lessons from the literature, the first regarding the two general explanations for the causes of the democratic peace, the second about the way democracy has been investigated.

¹ We will dispense with the quotation marks around “left” and “right” for the remainder of this paper. We want to make clear, however, that we mean these concepts to be understood within the context of the established democracies in a manner to be defined later.

² To present a mere sampling of the work on the topic, we suggest: Small and Singer, 1976; Chang, 1984; Weede, 1984; Bremer, 1992; Maoz and Abdolali, 1989; Maoz and Russett, 1993; Russett, 1993; Dixon, 1994; Ray, 1995; Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter, and Huth, 1996; and Gleditsch and Hegre, 1997.

The first explanation for the democratic peace argues that the complex political structure of democracies impedes their ability to reach the decision to use force (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992; Morgan and Campbell, 1991; Fearon, 1994). The second focuses on the common norms that democracies hold, stressing that democratic values emphasize compromise and condemn the use of force to achieve desired outcomes (Maoz and Russett, 1993; Doyle, 1986). These perspectives point to different sources of political costs that may be sufficiently high so as to affect the foreign-policy behavior of the state. Leaders, democratic or not, may prefer utilizing force in pursuit of a national goal but may be precluded from doing so by these costs. The first source of these costs is, of course, structural: the more difficult it is to achieve a sufficiently strong agreement from among the relevant political actors, the higher the costs associated with the contemplated action. The second speaks to the values or preferences, not directly of the leaders themselves, but of the “selectorate” (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, 1995), those responsible for placing and maintaining the leader in power. Acting contrary to the preferences of supporters may provoke retaliation, and that concern may stop the leader from taking a contemplated action. That is to say, the normative costs that affect state behavior emanate from the polity as a whole and from the leader’s supporters. The supporters’ preferences matter.

Our second point regards the manner in which the effects of democracy have been investigated, specifically how “democracy” is operationalized. In nearly all cases – and regardless of whether the interest is in conflict escalation, initiation, or management – the indicator of choice is some form of the Polity index. For example, Benson and Kugler (1998), Maoz and Russett (1993), Mousseau (1998), Gleditsch and Hegre (1997), Dixon

(1993), Henderson (1998), Bennett and Stam (1999), Ward and Gleditsch (1997), and Thompson and Tucker (1997) have all either used the Polity democracy indicator or created a regime-type index based on the subtraction of the Polity autocracy indicator from its democracy counterpart. The latter procedure results in a 21-point scale that ranges from negative 10 to positive 10. Many of them subsequently choose a cutoff above and below which a regime is considered democratic or not.

One result of these methods of indicator construction is that “democracy” becomes a rather homogeneous category, with identical scores denoting identical positions on a number of institutional dimensions. For example, a seven – on either the democracy score or the index created using the autocracy and democracy indicators – implies that the leadership in any country with this score should face the same constraints and respond similarly to certain stimuli. But that same score of seven may mask considerable differences across states. Differences may include parliamentary versus presidential systems of government as well as different ideological orientations of different political leaders. In effect, a seven is a seven is a seven regardless of observable variations across this value on a democracy indicator.

This homogeneity assumption forms the basis for much of this research on the democratic peace. Our understanding of domestic and comparative politics suggests that the homogeneity assumption is misleading and that there are significant and possibly important variations within and across democratic political systems. Investigating democratic heterogeneity may help us understand why democracies behave differently from non-democracies. We align ourselves with recent work that has begun to disaggregate democracies, and to see how foreign policy is affected by different

parliamentary structures (Prins and Sprecher, 1999; Ireland and Gartner, 1999; Kaarbo, 1996; Tillman and Reiter, 2000).

The Model of Domestic Costs and Conflict Behavior

In the next section, we present the first part of our model of the relationship between international bargaining, conflict, and the political constraints on the use of force. It argues that there are two major sources of domestic political costs for the use of force – the preferences of the government’s supporters and the complexity of the ruling coalition. The second part of the model focuses on conflict behavior and concludes that states with low political costs associated with the use of force are more likely to become involved in militarized interstate conflict; and that, once involved, states with *high* costs are more likely to see their conflicts escalate.

Political Orientation and International Conflict Behavior

In this section we argue that the general political preferences of parties in democracies affect the costs leaders face in using force in pursuit of national goals. Our initial assumption is that political leaders wish, above all, to retain political power, which implies that pursuing national interests in a manner consistent with the preferences of the supporters is valued. Our second assumption is that their foreign policies will affect the likelihood that their political allies will continue to support them (Norpoth, 1987; Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller, 1992; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, 1995; Reiter and Stam, 1998). This means that foreign policy will reflect the orientation of the leader’s supporters. If the leaders fail to pursue those policies, they can be removed from power in the next election, or the party’s rank-and-file may oust a leader straying from the preferred policy before an election occurs.

There is evidence that left and right parties in established democracies generally have systematic differences over foreign policy and defense issues.³ In their study of ten industrial democracies, Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge (1994) conclude that right parties are considered to be "pro-military" (40), which involves the "need for a strong military presence overseas [and] for rearmament and self-defense" (274). Left parties, on the other hand, are "anti-military" and "pro-peace" (40), reflecting a belief in "peaceful means of solving crises...and [the] desirability of [the] relevant country joining in negotiations with hostile countries" (274). Schulz (2001) analyzes party platforms in fifteen democracies, and concludes that "parties of the right tend to be more hawkish than parties of the left." Left political parties generally have political platforms that call for reductions in the size and scope of militaries, the use of diplomacy over force, and attention to issues of social welfare. The evidence of general foreign-policy differences between left and right parties is supported by work that looks more directly at voters. In Sweden, for example, the general pattern is that voters who place themselves on the left are significantly more likely to be "accommodationist" in foreign policy while right voters are "hardliners" (Bjereld and Ekengren, 1999, 512).

This general pattern where the left tends to be more "dovish" than the right is similar to what is found in the United States. While a foreign-policy consensus may have existed prior to the American war in Vietnam, that experience led the American left and

³ "Left" and "right" are labels of convenience that convey understandings about and cloud differences in policy preferences. Generally, however, in the richest and most politically stable states, "left" has tended to apply to parties that support the welfare state as well as state ownership and control of the economy. "Right" parties, generally, have supported the middle class, and now are seen as favoring "rapid and widespread privatization and deregulation" (Huber and Inglehart, 1995, 84; see also Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge, 1994). Our focus is on whether the government's political orientation, so defined, affects its foreign-policy behavior.

right to draw different lessons; the left concluded that “military power was no longer the most critical resource in the new world order and that the United States should think less in terms of national security and more in terms of global economic interdependence” (Schneider, 1983, 40). Since Vietnam “the lines of cleavage on domestic and foreign policy issues have increasingly come to overlap” (Holsti, 1992, 458). Generally, mass opinion on foreign policy is affected by broad ideological beliefs, with conservatives tending to be more hardline than liberals (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992).⁴ Fordham (1998) argues that the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. have clear differences on macroeconomic policy, and that this party difference contributes to the propensity for the U.S. to use military force to achieve foreign-policy goals. In a similar fashion, Eichenberg reports that in both Europe and America “those toward the left... are generally less threatened, less disposed to defense spending and less inclined to adopt a militant attitude in security matters” (1989, 214).

Our consideration of the effect of party positions on foreign policy leads us to expect that governments made up of right political parties have, generally, lower domestic political costs associated with the use of force than do governments consisting of left parties. As political orientation is not the only or the overriding factor affecting a leader’s foreign-policy decision, we do not expect it to have a tremendously large effect on conflict behavior. Nonetheless, we are led to expect political orientation to have a discernible role in determining the level of costs of the use of force.

⁴ Murray and Cowden (1999) stress that ideology plays a central role in structuring *elites’* foreign-policy beliefs. Also focusing on elites, Holsti and Rosenau utilize their three-part schema and conclude that “Cold War Internationalists were the most conservative, while those high on the other two scales [Post-Cold War Internationalists and Neo-Isolationist] were very liberal” (1986, 397).

Political Structure and Conflict Behavior

The second source of political costs associated with the use of force is the political structure of democratic states. All democracies share the basic ingredients for this constraining complexity, but some forms of political constraints are present to greater or lesser degrees. We focus on two such varying elements of governmental complexity, the presence of pivotal parties and the size of the governing coalition.

Pivotal parties are those members of a governing coalition that can render an otherwise winning coalition losing by their defection⁵. Any such party that strongly disagrees with a proposed policy is able to threaten to bring the government down, thus possibly vetoing adoption of the policy. Coalition leaders may find it more difficult to achieve the necessary agreement to pursue a militarized foreign policy if one or more critical members of the coalition are able to block it. Achieving the acquiescence of pivotal parties may require that leaders buy off opposition with side deals. Further, as the number of pivotal parties in a coalition increases, so will the difficulty of reaching political agreement and the political costs. The presence of pivotal parties, we expect, increases the costs associated with the use of force, making conflict involvement less likely and making the probability that conflicts will escalate, should they occur, greater.

The second structural characteristic that may affect the ease of achieving the necessary agreement is the size of the ruling coalition. A necessary condition for a leader to pursue a specific foreign policy, particularly one that involves a significant probability

⁵ The party in a single-party government is not considered pivotal. Further, while some parties may be considered “pivotal” in the sense that they play an important role in the coalition, we mean parties to be pivotal only if numerically they can render a winning coalition losing.

of incurring a loss of life, is sufficient support to be assured of retaining power. Our argument is most simply presented algebraically. Call the total number of members of the parliament T ; the number in the ruling coalition, G ; the number in the opposition O ($T - G = O$); the probability that any given member of G supports a particular policy proposal p ; the probability that any given member of O supports that proposal q ; and let $p > q$. The necessary condition for the leader to decide to pursue a policy is that the expectation $(pG + qO) \geq ([T/2] + 1)$. Other things being equal, this is more easily satisfied as G increases. In other words, larger coalitions (those controlling a larger percent of parliamentary seats) will find it easier to reach agreement, lowering the costs associated with the use of force.

We conclude that governments that consist of right parties have lower costs for the use of force than do governments of left parties. We similarly argue that pivotal parties have the effect of increasing the cost of reaching **any** significant decision – such as using force in a state’s international relations. And, finally, we believe that large coalitions have lower costs than do smaller coalitions. The next part of our model relates the domestic political costs for the use of force to two aspects of a state’s international behavior – its involvement in and escalation of militarized conflict.

Disputes and Bargaining

International conflict, we assume, is essentially bargaining between states over some desired outcome.⁶ Each state has private information regarding its most preferred outcome and its reservation price, the agreement it is just willing to accept rather than

⁶ This is a common understanding of the purpose of international conflict. See, for example, Morgan, 1984, 1990; McGinnis, 1986; Morrow, 1986; Fearon, 1994, 1998; Mousseau, 1998.

continue negotiating. Bargaining entails costs and benefits. Both parties prefer that a given settlement be reached sooner rather than later and at a lower rather than higher level of hostility, but that the escalation of conflict, threatened or realized, may sufficiently increase the probability of achieving a more preferred outcome to be justified. If the costs of escalation are too high, on the other hand, escalation will not occur.

We assume that bargaining between states over conflicts of interest precedes militarized disputes. If bargaining does not resolve the issues at the level of normal interstate interactions, militarized actions may be initiated. In other words, the threat, display or use of military force does not, in itself, begin the bargaining process. Rather, these are stages through which bargaining may escalate, and escalation may continue past the point where relatively low levels of force are used. If a disagreement is not resolved peacefully and escalates to the point where the issue is militarized, then both states must be willing to raise the stakes to settling the issues over which the conflict began: either state could have opted to settle short of the use of force. In other words, from this perspective, which state initiates force in a dispute matters very little, and we analyze the involvement in militarized disputes rather than its initiation.⁷

Recent work comparing democratic to non-democratic states has broken down the conflict behavior of states into the decision to get involved in a dispute and the subsequent behavior of the state once involved (Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson and Smith 1999; Schultz 1999). Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (1999), for instance, argue that democracies are less likely to become involved in wars, but given that they get involved,

⁷ See Gibler and Vasquez, 1998; Bremer, 1992; Mansfield, 1992; Maoz, 1995; Rousseau, et al., 1996; Henderson, 1997; Senese, 1997; Mousseau, 1998; and Reed, 2000, for examples of similar emphasis.

are likely to commit more resources to the war effort than are their non-democratic counterparts. Their argument is institutional and rests on the fact that democracies have large winning coalitions. While the argument helps bridge many of the results associated with the democratic peace, it does not provide an easy extension for a comparison *among* democracies. For example, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* place the core of the explanation of dispute involvement and behavior on the ability to pay private or public goods to their constituencies in exchange for policy support. The selectorate – or political constituency – within democracies is always large relative to those in autocracies, resulting in comparatively little variation with democratic regimes.

Alternatively, Schultz (1999) compares two competing perspectives of how domestic political institutions affect state interaction, with the two perspectives leading to opposing predictions regarding the likelihood a democracy will challenge its opponent and that its opponent will resist the challenge. The first perspective is institutional. That is, democracies are less likely to make a challenge because the costs of doing so are high. A democracy's opponent is aware of these high costs and therefore, given a challenge by a democracy, is more likely to resist. The second perspective argues that democracies can more easily reveal their preferences and their signals are more credible. The credibility of a democratic challenge leads the opponent to back down with greater frequency. Schultz finds empirical evidence for the second perspective. Here too, however, extension of the argument to provide a comparison of democracies is limited by the emphasis on regime types and the assumed homogeneity of democracy.

Our argument is similar to Schultz's institutional perspective, though while he focuses on the opposition's willingness to resist, we focus on two separate stages of

conflict – involvement in a militarized dispute and escalation of that dispute. The logic remains similar and relies on the preferences of both sides to a dispute. We turn to a discussion of the first stage of conflict – involvement.

A major determinant of a state’s conflict behavior is the domestic political cost associated with the use of force. Our interest is in the political costs within democratic states, and we distinguish between two types of democracies. One faces low domestic costs (LC) associated with the use of force and one faces relatively high costs (HC). While the source of these costs may differ – they may be institutional or they may be a function of political norms – they affect the conflict behavior of states. We believe that, all else being equal, states with lower political costs will be more likely to get involved in disputes. In other words, they will be more likely to initiate disputes, but they will also be more likely to “agree” to be targets of a militarized dispute, as opposed to doing whatever it takes to settle the disagreement in the pre-militarized stage.

We assume additionally that information is incomplete. Wagner (2000) argues that wars are a form of bargaining in that they reveal information and change the expectations of the opponent. We follow a similar logic and argue that before becoming involved in a dispute the adversaries know very little of the political costs and constraints facing their opponents. “Complete” information might be elusive, but additional information is revealed through the interactions of the states. The assumption of incomplete information would not be reasonable if our measure of domestic cost was associated solely and directly with the regime type of a state, as that is easily and readily known; but in the current context we are interested in varying domestic costs *within* democracies. While it is obvious to a state whether its opponent is democratic or not, it is

less easy to determine what costs a state faces, given that it is a democracy. Such information is gleaned only gradually.

Some might argue that dispute involvement is a function of strategic considerations, and that the domestic costs of a state present only part of the operative logic. For instance, if the non-democratic opponent (O) of the democracy (D) is aware that D faces low costs for using force, O may behave strategically and avoid a dispute with D. Because O's strategic behavior works in the opposite direction from D's behavior (i.e., lower costs lead to greater likelihood of involvement), we may find in a large sample that involvement in disputes actually goes down as the cost within democracies of using force goes down. Our assumption of incomplete information mitigates this concern. The inability of a state to anticipate perfectly the costs that its adversary faces means that it cannot perfectly anticipate its preferences. Since D's preferences are unknown, O cannot base its decision on the level of domestic costs facing D, and the true costs should be unrelated to O's decision. D's decision is constrained by its belief about O's costs, and by its own. Its decision to allow a disagreement to escalate to the point where military force is invoked is a function of those domestic costs associated with the use of force: the more costly the use force, the less likely it is to get involved in a militarized dispute.

Because militarized action reflects a stage of bargaining between two states, the states involved in an international disagreement may resolve that disagreement before military force is invoked. Resolution is more likely when at least one of the states faces high domestic costs associated with the use of force, and so we hypothesize that *low-cost*

democracies should demonstrate an increased frequency of militarized disputes when compared with their high-cost counterparts.

We turn now to the escalation of an existing dispute. We assume, first, that actors gain information regarding their opponents' costs of using force during a militarized interaction – though we do not assume that information becomes complete. Second, we assume that domestic political costs affect a state's calculations at every stage of militarized bargaining, and are not only applicable in the initial stages of the use of force.⁸ In other words, the political costs that constrain a government's decision to get involved in a militarized conflict similarly operate to constrain its decision to escalate that conflict. With these assumptions, HC states are more attractive candidates for escalation because of both internal and external considerations. First, opponents of HC states are more willing to escalate the disputes, as they believe that HC states are more likely to capitulate rather than continue to escalate than would be LC states. Second, those opponents are more likely to allow themselves to become the target of escalation when their opponent is of the HC variety, as the likelihood that the HC state will be sufficiently resolved to escalate the dispute even further is smaller than would be the case for a LC state. Thus, while HC states get involved in disputes less frequently, once involved they are more likely to see the dispute escalated.

The two mechanisms of our model rest on the opponent's perception of the political costs within the democratic state. A third is more firmly rooted in the preferences of the democracy and in selection effects. Specifically, given that HC states

had the opportunity to settle short of the militarization of the dispute at an earlier period, they must hold a sufficiently strong preference for escalating over accommodating. In other words, HC states select themselves into only conflicts about which they care a lot. If this were the process at work, we would expect LC governments to become involved in disputes more often than their HC counterparts because the cost of doing so is small; HC states that become involved in disputes must do so because they care a lot about the issue.

This selection process and our model – by which states learn during a conflict about their democratic rivals’ relative costs for the use of force – lead to the same hypothesis but through different mechanisms. Specifically, *given involvement in a militarized dispute, those states with higher domestic political costs associated with the use of force are more likely to be involved in an escalated dispute than those with lower domestic costs.* We will test this hypothesis and seek to determine whether a selection model captures the escalation process for these states.

The next section presents the operational hypotheses that follow from our model.

Operational Hypotheses

Our hypotheses are directed to testing the effects of two aspects of a state’s government on its international conflict behavior: the political position of the parties and the structural complexity of the ruling coalition. Our discussions lead us to believe that right governments should behave differently from left governments in two ways. First, we should observe right governments to be involved in conflict more frequently than left governments. This is so because the right governments will have a lower political cost

⁸ The costs associated with the use of force are closely and inversely related to costs associated with backing down, or “audience costs” (Fearon, 1994). Our LC states are those that face higher domestic costs for backing down, while HC states can do so with lower domestic costs.

associated with the use of force. Second, right governments should escalate the disputes in which they are involved less frequently than should left governments in their disputes.

H1A: Within parliamentary democracies, coalitions of the right are more likely to be involved in militarized disputes than are coalitions of the left.

H1B: Within parliamentary democracies, coalitions of the right are less likely to escalate military disputes than are coalitions of the left.

We also investigate the effect of the structural complexity of the government. We focus on the effects of pivotal parties and the size of the ruling coalition. A pivotal party might hold a great deal of influence over government policies, and its agreement or acquiescence may be required before significant actions can be taken, raising the cost of achieving the necessary agreement for the adoption of important government policy, including the use of force. As the number of pivotal parties increases, the cost associated with the use of force likewise increases. The presence of pivotal parties, in other words, serves to make involvement in militarized conflict less likely, but the escalation of such conflict, should it occur, more likely.

H2A: Governments with multiple pivotal parties are less likely to become involved in disputes than are governments with one or no pivotal parties.

H2B: Governments with multiple pivotal parties are more likely to escalate those disputes in which they are involved.⁹

The second structural aspect we look at is the percentage of the parliamentary seats that are controlled by the government. Governments that consist of a larger percentage of seats may find it easier to gain the agreement of a sufficient number of their

⁹ We focus on the effects of multiple rather one pivotal parties for a simple reason. In all but one instance where a coalition consisted of only one pivotal party, that party was the prime minister's. In such cases the pivotal party is obviously not constraining, in the sense that more complicated and costly bargaining is

members. This means that the cost of using force is lower for larger governments; such governments would therefore be more likely to become involved in disputes, but less likely to escalate those disputes in which they do become involved.

H3A: Coalitions that contain a higher percentage of parliamentary seats are more likely to become involved in disputes.

H3B: Coalitions that contain a higher percentage of parliamentary seats are less likely to escalate those disputes in which they do become involved.

Finally, we are interested in whether the escalation of disputes is the results of a selection process, an alternative to our model of conflict behavior. To see whether that is so, we use a Heckman two-step model.

We now present our case selection, operationalization of the variables needed to test our hypotheses, the data sources, and our research design.

Research Design and Testing

Our hypotheses center on dispute involvement and escalation. These two foci require different sets of cases. Testing the hypotheses regarding the likelihood of dispute involvement requires that we analyze state behavior, and a number of considerations drive our selection of the specific countries to be analyzed. We focus our analysis upon established parliamentary political systems, and for two reasons. First, the position of the ruling coalition forms the foundation upon which our arguments rest, and because we need to determine precisely the make-up and political orientation of the government we

required. In the analysis, therefore, we include two dummy variables regarding pivotal parties. The first measures if there is only one pivotal party, the second whether there are two or more pivotal parties.

are precluded from using divided presidential systems in our analysis.¹⁰ Second, we want to avoid the confounding effects associated with transitions to or from democratic forms of government (Mansfield and Snyder, 1995; Enterline, 1996, 1998). Finally, in transition states, “left” and “right” have significantly different meanings from what they do in established democracies.¹¹

We use quarterly observations of 15 parliamentary democracies from Asia, North America and Europe, from 1949-1992: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, Finland, the French Fourth Republic, Germany, Great Britain, India, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden.¹² We use the quarter instead of the more traditional year as our period of time for several reasons. First, governments change in mid-year, and use of the quarter allows us to measure more accurately when a change in government occurred. Second, several governments may be in power in a given year, and quarterly data provides for a greater ability to observe the conflict behavior of these several governments. Moving to this smaller unit of time also leads to a more accurate identification of the government with its involvement in a specific dispute than does yearly data. Last, some states are involved in more than one dispute in one year and disaggregating time lets us analyze these multiple conflicts.

¹⁰ Aside from the difficulty of determining the left-right position of a presidential system, the other factors we focus on – such as the size of the ruling coalition and the presence of pivotal parties – have little or no meaning in such systems.

¹¹ In newly democratizing states, “left” and “right” are more likely to capture support for democracy versus authoritarianism than support for the welfare state. See Huber and Inglehart, 1995, 82-85.

¹² The Fifth Republic in France is excluded because its mixed political structure allows the president to remain in power without parliamentary support. Japan is excluded because only one party has been in power throughout virtually its entire post-war history.

When we test our hypotheses about escalation, we change the units of analysis to the militarized interstate disputes in which the states were involved. We include only bilateral disputes in our analysis so that escalation is not affected by factors exogenous to the two immediately involved actors. Additionally, we exclude from our analysis disputes that are seizures only,¹³ as these actions are usually taken by local personnel with specific on-site concerns.

Our hypotheses require several independent variables. The first is the political position of the government. As a first step in measuring this, we use Huber and Inglehart (1997) to determine the political positions of the parties in the government.¹⁴ In the Huber-Inglehart scale right parties can take on a maximum value of 10, while the minimum of 0 would reflect the furthest possible left. We have updated the data set to take account of two changes in party composition. In some instances, (such as in contemporary Israel) two political parties have joined to form a new party, and in those cases we placed the new party at the mean of the positions of the two old parties. In a few other cases, political parties have splintered, in which case we attempted to pinpoint the most prominent issue causing the break between parties to determine which had

¹³ Seizures are the “capture of material or personnel of official forces from another state, or the detention of private citizens operating within contested territories” (Jones, Bremer and Singer, 1996, 173). The analyses we present were redone including seizures, and the results were virtually identical.

¹⁴ The Huber-Inglehart positions are derived from expert opinion. The positions of specific parties are constant over time, and we think this is a reasonable assumption to accept for our work. Party positions represent ideal points, that is, the most preferred political outcomes, on a series of issues that are collapsed into one right-left dimension. The strategic political position that parties adopt on particular issues may change over time as the political situation changes, while ideal points are relatively stable.

Since each expert who supplied information upon which the Huber-Inglehart index is based responded about only one country, the right-left scores apply to each country distinctly, not universally. This is as we want to use the value, as our argument about the costs parties incur for taking or for not taking military action is based on their positions relative to other parties as voters see them.

moved left and which right. We restricted the movement leftward or rightward of the newly formed parties to be no more than half the distance between the old party and the nearest party in the respective direction.

The coding of the political orientation of the governing coalition was developed by Palmer (1990a, 1990b) and extended beyond his initial orientation of Europe and forward in time to 1992. In this method, the political position of the governing coalition is the arithmetic mean of the positions of the parties in the coalition when each party is weighted by its number of seats:¹⁵

$$\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i PP_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i}$$

where S_i is the number of seats held by party i , and PP_i is i 's political position. These values range from 3.68 to 8.83, with a mean score over all countries and years of 5.82 and a standard deviation of 1.25. To determine the governing coalitions, we used Woldendorp, Keman and Budge (1993) and other public sources.

We have three variables to tap the structural characteristics of the government. The first is the percentage of seats held by the parties included in the ruling coalition. We define the ruling coalition to include only those parties whose members held portfolios in the government. The second and third are dummy variables that measure whether a coalition contained only one, or more than one, pivotal parties, respectively.

¹⁵ Palmer (1990a, 1990b) experimented with other methods of determining the position of the coalition. One, for instance, weighted all parties essential to the maintenance of power equally. "Dummy", or non-essential, parties were excluded from the calculation. Another method weighted all essential parties by the number of seats each held. Palmer found that the choice of method made little difference in the assignment of the position of the coalition and virtually no difference in his subsequent statistical analysis.

We include a state's power and its capabilities relative to its adversary as control variables in the analysis of dispute involvement and escalation, respectively. To measure capability, we use the Correlates of War Project's National Material Capabilities Data (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey, 1972). Relative capability is measured as $\text{Power}_A / (\text{Power}_A + \text{Power}_B)$, where Power_A is the power of the parliamentary democracy being analyzed, and Power_B is the power of its adversary. When analyzing the escalation of disputes, we include one final control variable that measures whether the opposing state is democratic, as democratic dyads may resolve their military disputes at lower levels than do other types of dyads. We use the Polity III data set, and code a dummy variable 1 if the “democracy” score of the opponent is greater than seven, and zero otherwise.

The data set on Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) is the source for our dependent variables. MIDs occur whenever there is a threat, display, or use of force by one nation-state against another (Jones, Bremer, and Singer, 1996). We use three dependent variables taken from this data set. The first is whether a state became *involved* in a MID in a particular quarter. To capture escalation we use two dependent variables. As “escalation” is not a concept that can be directly measured, use of two distinct variables increases confidence in our statistical results. The first measure is the *severity* measure of escalation, and defines a dispute as having escalated if more than twenty-five battle fatalities are incurred.¹⁶ Our second operationalization of escalation is our

¹⁶ We wanted to use a more refined measure of severity. But given our desire to restrict the analysis to bilateral disputes, there are very few disputes involving these countries that escalate very far: only three escalate to the 1000 battle-deaths threshold that the Correlates of War Project uses to define war (India-Pakistan, in 1965 and 1971, and India-China in 1961), and only two others that reach the level where at least 251 fatalities occurred. Further, we believe the twenty-five fatality lower threshold satisfied our concern that the military action of the disputes was the product of decisions by the political leaders, rather than the result of local circumstances.

response measure, which is coded as having occurred if the target of the dispute takes an action at a higher level of hostility than the first action of the initiator.¹⁷ These two measures are conceptually similar but are statistically distinct: the correlation between the two variables in our data set is .26.

Last, we need to consider the possibility that our model of escalation is incorrect and that, instead, some disputes escalate while others do not due to a selection process. Specifically, only highly motivated high-cost states may select themselves into a dispute, while low-cost states may have lower motivation, on average. In this case, high cost states would be more likely to escalate disputes, given involvement. To see whether that is so, we will utilize a probit model with sample selection in addition to logit analyses.

Analysis

We break our analysis into two, the first focusing on dispute involvement, the second on escalation. In our first analysis, the dependent variable is dichotomous and measures whether or not a state was involved in a militarized interstate dispute in a specific quarter. We use five independent variables in this analysis. The first is “Coalition Score”, our measure of the position of the government, where greater values indicate coalitions that are farther right. Our hypothesis is that right governments are more likely to be involved in disputes than are left governments, and the coefficient on this variable is expected to be positive. A variable measuring the percentage of seats in the parliament held by the government is our second explanatory variable, and we expect

¹⁷ All actions in the MID data set categorized as “threats”, “displays”, or “uses” of force, and within each of those categories are several steps indicating greater hostility. The result is that there are twenty ordinal ranked categories of military action (Jones, Bremer, and Singer, 170-171, 1996). See Carlson (1995) and Partell (1997) for examples of similar operationalizations of escalation using the MID data set.

the coefficient here to be positive. Next, we include two dummy variables that are coded 1 if the government contained only one pivotal party, or more than one such party, respectively; the variables take on the value of 0 otherwise. We expect the coefficient on the second of these variables to be negative. Last, the relative capability of the country is expected to have a positive effect on dispute involvement.

Before undertaking a logit analysis, we utilized two Heckman selection models – one for each of our escalation measures – to see whether dispute involvement and escalation is the result of a selection process. That analysis indicated that a selection process was not at work in either case. (The results of these analyses are shown in the Appendix.) We therefore utilized logit to analyze both the involvement and the subsequent escalation of disputes.¹⁸ The results of the first analysis, regarding the likelihood of a state becoming involved in a dispute, are shown in Table 1

[Table 1 about here]

First, the table shows that the coefficient on “Coalition Score” is positive and significant, indicating, as we hypothesized, that right governments are more likely to be involved in militarized disputes than are left governments. Further, this effect is large, and, we provide two concrete examples to illustrate this. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher

¹⁸ Beck, Tucker, and Katz (1998) have discussed how duration dependence in the analysis of binary time-series cross-section data may create problems. We employed the temporal dummy variable solution (Beck, *et. al* 1998:1268-1270; see Clark and Hart, 1998, for an example of this technique), and included all 176 of the temporal (quarterly) dummy variables in a specification of the model. This specification led to a loss of more than 40% of the cases, a high price to pay in our view. For the most part, the results of the restructured analysis were consistent with those of the logits presented here. We chose not to use cubic splines, as we have no theoretical expectation regarding the precise number and placement of the “knots” in the spline function. Additionally, the degrees of freedom in our model are sufficiently large to realize the asymptotic properties of the logit estimator. Moreover, “neither [technique] will have significant consequences for the estimation of beta” (Beck *et. al*, 1998, 1271). The “btscs” ado, written for the *Stata* (StataCorp 1997) statistical package by Tucker (1998), was used to implement this procedure.

came to power at the head of the new Conservative government. That rightward shift, given Britain's level of power, increased the probability of Britain's annual dispute involvement¹⁹ from .30 to .42, a forty percent increase. Second, in Israel in 1992, the Shamir government of consisting of Likud and four other parties fell to a Labor-led coalition under Yitzhak Rabin. That move to the left lowered the predicted probability of Israel's dispute involvement in a year from .23 to .165

Our hypothesis that pivotal parties have a constraining effect on the likelihood of dispute involvement is not supported. Coalitions with more than one pivotal party are neither more nor less likely to be involved in disputes. On the other hand, the percentage of seats held by the government has a significant positive effect on the likelihood of dispute involvement, as was hypothesized. The hypotheses regarding the effects of structural complexity have mixed support. We note, finally, that power has a large and positive effect on the likelihood of dispute involvement, as we suspected it would.

Our second set of analyses investigates the likelihood of dispute escalation, and we use two dependent variables in our tests. Here, the units of analysis are the bilateral disputes in which the states find themselves, with “seizures” excluded. Our first dependent variable is the *severity* measure of escalation, and the results of this logit analysis are presented in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

First, the results show that relative capability strongly affects the likelihood that parliamentary democracies see their disputes escalate; disputes involving democracies

¹⁹ The quarterly predicted probabilities are .085 and .127, respectively. The probability of becoming involved in a dispute in a particular year, given a probability p of becoming involved in a specific quarter, is

that are stronger than their adversaries are much more likely to escalate than are disputes where the democracies are relatively weaker. (We discuss this finding in greater detail below.) Second, disputes involving democratic adversaries are less likely to escalate.

Regarding the hypotheses and consistent with our expectations, we see that the coefficient on “Coalition Score” is negative and significant, meaning that left governments are more likely to escalate than are right governments. The results also indicate that the presence of pivotal parties does not have a restraining influence on the likelihood of escalation; indeed, the coefficients on the variables are weakly positive though not statistically significant. We expected to see the percentage of seats controlled to decrease the likelihood of escalation, but no significant effect is found.

Last, we analyze dispute escalation using our *response* measure, and the results are displayed in Table 3. Consistent with our earlier findings, the results indicate that left governments are significantly more likely to escalate the disputes in which they are involved than are right governments. This effect is a strong one and, again, we provide an example to illustrate it. Israel was involved in disputes with Egypt in 1975, when Rabin's Labor Party shared power with two smaller parties, and again in 1977, when Likud, led by Menachem Begin, formed a government with the National Religious Party. The probabilities of escalation in these cases were .23 and .08, respectively.

[Table 3 about here]

We again find no support for the hypotheses regarding the effect of structural constraints on the likelihood of escalation. Neither of the variables measuring the presence of pivotal parties nor the variable measuring the percentage of seats held by the

(1-[1-p]⁴).

government have a discernable effect on the likelihood of escalation.²⁰ In this analysis, we see that the relative capability of the parliamentary democracy and the democratic status of the adversary have no significant impact on the likelihood of escalation,²¹ though the coefficient on relative capability is, as before, positive.

To summarize, we have four main findings relevant to the hypotheses. First, in parliamentary democracies, right governments are more likely to be involved in interstate conflict than are left governments. Second, left governments are more likely to escalate disputes than are right governments. Each of these is consistent with our expectations. Third, the presence of pivotal parties seems to have no noticeable effect on dispute involvement or escalation. Fourth, the relative size of the governing coalition has a positive effect on the likelihood of dispute involvement, though no effect on the probability of escalation.

Discussion

Our effort in this paper has been to examine the role of domestic political constraints for the involvement in and escalation of militarized interstate disputes. A number of results stand out. First, the political orientation of the ruling coalition is an important factor affecting the frequency with which states become involved in militarized disputes. In other words, who rules matters: the likelihood that a ruling coalition in a parliamentary democracy will escalate international disagreements to the point where military force is invoked is greater for right governments than for left. While neither left

²⁰ Prins and Sprecher (1999) found that coalition governments are more likely to reciprocate disputes than are single-party governments. We did not find that result using either operationalization of escalation.

²¹ This, however, is consistent with Prins and Sprecher (1999) and with Senese (1997), who found that the constraining effect of joint democracy operates at some but not all levels of escalation.

nor right policy preferences challenge core democratic values, systematic variation on these values appears to affect conflict behavior. This has rather strong substantive implications, as can be seen in our calculations of the marginal impact of different political coalitions on the probability of a government being involved in a militarized dispute in any given year.

Second, our analysis demonstrates that the effect of the government's political orientation on the likelihood of escalation is quite – but predictably – different from its effect on involvement. Left governments are more likely to see those conflicts escalate than are right governments. Our explanation for this lies in the political constraints faced by coalition leaders. Constituencies that support left governments tend to have stronger preferences for negotiation and compromise than do right voters, so that left governments generally have higher costs associated with the use of force. Because the utilization of the military is more costly for left governments, lower-level uses of force lack the credibility of the implied further escalation than is the case for governments of the right.

The literature on democracies and peace stresses the importance of the role of structural constraints, which we conceived of in terms of the structural complexity of the ruling coalition. We operationalized this as the existence of pivotal parties and the percentage of seats held by the government. Our results demonstrate that, by-and-large, complexity does not have the expected impact on militarized dispute involvement or escalation. This holds both for pivotal parties for involvement and escalation and for the size of the governing coalition for escalation. We did find that larger coalitions are more likely to become involved in disputes.

We must be clear as to the extent to which these results lead to broad inferences about the democratic peace. Our results should not be interpreted as implying that the structural explanations of the democratic peace are wrong. The variance in the structure of the states in our analysis is real, but pales when compared to the variance in structure between democratic and non-democratic states. Similarly, the variation in parties' political positions in our states is small relative to the differences between democratic and authoritarian leaders. That is, our results say that *within parliamentary democracies*, parties' political positions affect conflict behavior. The results do not say that democracies' political structure is an unimportant source of the democratic peace.

We found that in the involvement and escalation of these disputes, a selection process does not seem to be at work. We do not conclude that selection processes are *never* present in conflict escalation, but only that such processes are *not always* present. In our model, the forces that operate on states (the costs associated with the use of force) operate at all levels of escalation – from lowest stages of militarized dispute through to escalated disputes. The statistical analyses tend to support that view.

There are also interesting implications that come from the results of our control variables. One finding that deserves greater attention is that the power of the parliamentary democracy relative to its opponent in a dispute is positively related to the probability of escalation (though the coefficient was just shy of statistical significance using the response measure). We offer an explanation for this result. Politically constrained leaders, such as leaders of democracies, generally are able to generate higher

audience costs when involved in disputes than are leaders of non-democracies.²² Such leaders face a greater cost in backing down in international disputes, and consequently their credibility is higher. Since non-constrained leaders are aware of the effect of these audience costs on democratic leaders, non-democracies are more likely to back down in disputes involving mixed dyads.²³ The leaders of non-democracies, aware of the differences in domestic audience costs faced by the adversaries, may nonetheless select themselves into disputes with democratic states. To do so, their motivation to become involved in disputes with democracies must be higher the greater the barriers to success they face. One of those barriers, of course, involves the relative capability of the adversary. To become involved in a conflict with a stronger, democratic country, such leaders must be highly motivated, and know that to be successful they must appear (and perhaps be) willing to escalate their disputes. In other words, disputes between mixed dyads where the democracy is relatively powerful may be more likely to escalate because the leaders of the non-democratic states must be highly motivated and must demonstrate the willingness to escalate during the crisis.

Returning to our main result, we found that right governments are more likely to be involved in militarized disputes, though given involvement in a dispute, left governments are more likely to see the conflict escalate. Empirical evidence suggests that democracies tend to be more peaceful than their autocratic counterparts. One implication

²² This argument, of course, was presented by Fearon (1994). Partell and Palmer (1999) found significant empirical support for Fearon's expectations.

²³ To be sure, not all the parliamentary democracies' opponents in our cases are non-democracies. In the disputes we analyzed, however, only 12% of the adversaries were democratic, so that the large majority of the disputes are between democracies and non-democracies.

of our analyses, however, is that democracies are not all alike – the political orientation of the government has a significant impact on that state's conflict behavior. This suggests that the social science community may benefit by investigating further the heterogeneity of democracies in terms of the domestic factors that affect conflict behavior.

APPENDIX

We tested for the presence of an underlying selection process by which states get involved in militarized disputes, and then subsequently escalate those disputes in which they are involved. According to this conceptualization, states cannot escalate unless they are initially involved in a given militarized dispute. We employ a selection model for probit models with sample selection to test this. The selection equation estimates whether a state was involved in a MID in any given quarter, and the second equation is used on the escalation of ongoing disputes. A Heckman estimation calculates an Inverse Mills ratio which reflects the correlation between the errors of the two models and is used as the starting values for calculating the maximum likelihood. For example, it is assumed that a MID is observed when

$$Z_j\Psi + v_{ij} > 0,$$

where $Z_j\Psi$ reflects a set of parameters and v_{ij} an error term. When these parameters are greater than zero the model predicts the involvement in a dispute. Furthermore, we would observe an escalation of a dispute based on the second model positing that

$$Y_i = X_j\beta + \sigma v_{2j}$$

where $X_j\beta$ reflects a set of parameters and σv_{2j} the errors associated with this model.

The utility of estimating a probit model with sample selection is that if the correlation of the disturbances (ρ) from both equations (which the disturbances themselves are assumed to be $\sim N(0,1)$) is not significantly different from zero, the estimates from the first equation (the selection equation) will be biased. A probit model with sample selection where the disturbances are significantly different from zero yields consistent and asymptotically efficient estimates in the equations of the system. If the

correlation of the disturbances from the two equations is not significantly different from zero, estimating the two probit models separately will not produce biased estimates. A likelihood ratio test for the independence of the equations, i.e., that $\rho = 0$, is employed to test this contention (STATA, v. 6.0; see also Greene, 1993, p.709).

In the selection component of our model we use the same five independent variables used in the analyses reported in the text: coalition score, dummy variables that reflect the existence of one or more pivotal parties, respectively; a variable measuring the percentage of seats in the parliament held by the government, and the relative capability of the country. We model the escalation of disputes using the same two dependent variables as reported in the paper: the *response* measure and the *severity* measure. In each instance our unit of analysis is the bilateral dispute in which the states find themselves, with “seizures” excluded. We also add two additional explanatory variables to the model: relative capabilities and a dichotomous coding for whether or not the opponent is democratic.

The results of our selection models generally confirm the trends evident in the logit analyses presented in the text. This is not surprising, as the likelihood ratio test indicated that the equations were independent and, by extension, estimates derived from the separate equations would not be biased. The variables that are significant using the logit analyses remain so using the Heckman procedure. The only change in significance (to which we refer) is that of the positive coefficient on “Relative Capability” on the *response* measure, which becomes significant.

Recall that ρ reflects the correlation between the errors of the two models, and if that correlation is zero then the independent logit models capturing the outcomes of

interest will produce non-biased results. In our selection models ρ is not significantly different from zero. This indicates that there is not a selection process evident in our data, and that our use of distinct analyses for the stages of conflict is justified. We present the output from our selection models in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

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Table 1
Coalitions and Dispute Involvement
 Dispute Involvement (1=yes; 0=no)

Coalition Score	.114** (.062)
One Pivotal Party? (1=yes; 0=no)	.437 (.344)
Multiple Pivotal Parties? (1=yes; 0=no)	-.022 (.160)
Percentage of Seats held by Government	.022*** (.007)
Power	.400*** (.037)
Constant	-4.97*** (.545)
Log-likelihood Full Model	-688.16
Log-likelihood Null Model	-765.04
Chi-square (5)	153.75
Significance	.0000
N	2471

One-tailed significance levels reported (***) $p < .01$; (**) $p < .05$.
 Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 2
Coalitions and Dispute Escalation
(*Severity* measure)

Dependent Variable:
Between 25 and 500 fatalities (1=yes; 0=no)

Coalition Score	-.392** (.185)
One Pivotal Party? (1=yes; 0=no)	.091 (.859)
Multiple Pivotal Parties? (1=yes; 0=no)	.198 (.406)
Percentage of Seats held by Government	.001 (.016)
Opponent Democratic? (1=yes; 0=no)	-1.50* (1.06)
Relative Capability	1.78** (.709)
Constant	-.403 (1.42)
Log-likelihood Full Model	-99.04
Log-likelihood Null Model	-106.61
Chi-square (6)	15.16
Significance	.0190
N	224

One-tailed significance levels reported (***) $p < .01$; (**) $p < .05$; (*) $p < .1$.
Standard errors in parentheses

Table 3
Coalitions and Dispute Escalation
(*Response* measure)

Dependent Variable:
Target country responds with equal or greater hostility (1=yes; 0=no)

Coalition Score	-.324*** (.130)
One Pivotal Party? (1=yes; 0=no)	.351 (.680)
Multiple Pivotal Parties? (1=yes; 0=no)	.239 (.310)
Percentage of Seats held by Government	.005 (.013)
Opponent Democratic? (1=yes; 0=no)	-.033 (.489)
Relative Capability	.754 (.488)
Constant	1.47 (1.15)
Log-likelihood Full Model	-146.50
Log-likelihood Null Model	-151.67
Chi-square (6)	10.35
Significance	.1107
N	224

One-tailed significance levels reported (***) $p < .01$; (**) $p < .05$; (*) $p < .1$.
Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4
Heckman Selection Model of
Dispute Involvement and Escalation*

Dispute Involvement	
Coalition Score	.058** (.028)
One Pivotal Party? (1=yes; 0=no)	.235 (.161)
Multiple Pivotal Parties? (1=yes; 0=no)	.015 (.071)
Percentage of Seats held by Government	.011*** (.003)
Power	.208*** (.017)
Constant	-2.72*** (.248)

Models of the Escalation of Disputes

	Severity	Response
Coalition Score	-.231*** (.009)	-.200*** (.008)
One Pivotal Party	.039 (.503)	.223 (.440)
Multiple Pivotal Parties	.051 (.270)	.154 (.248)
Percentage of Seats held by Government	.001 (.010)	.003 (.009)
Opponent Democratic	-.895** (.427)	-.019 (.294)
Relative Capability	1.08*** (.389)	.458* (.349)
Constant	-.380 (1.25)	.943 (1.10)

N = 2432

N = 2432

Censored Obs = 2208

Censored Obs = 2208

Uncensored Obs = 224

Uncensored Obs = 224

Log Likelihood = -776.76

Log Likelihood = -824.71

Wald χ^2 (6) = 23.82

Wald χ^2 (6) = 9.73

Prob > χ^2 = .000

Prob > χ^2 = .136

Rho = .093 (.400)

Rho = -.010 (.345)

*Note: Only one selection model is presented as the two escalation models have identical selection models.