

Ideology and International Conflict*

Lindsay Hundley[†]

Abstract

Do ideological ties affect international conflict, and if so, why? Existing research has produced little consensus on this question, but these investigations pool together the different types of disputes states can have. I argue that ideological similarity *specifically* reduces the likelihood of regime-related disputes. First, states that share common legitimating principles are not threatened by the possibility that a leader has ideologically-revisionist preferences. Second, concerns about political contagion motivate states that share an ideology to prop each other up against domestic threats and to refrain from using subversion to pursue their other foreign policy interests. Using a variety of conflict data sets, I show that pairs of countries that legitimate their rule according to similar principles are less likely to intervene in civil conflicts against one another, less likely to experience policy/regime disputes, and are more cooperative than pairs of ideologically-dissimilar states. Overall, these findings suggest that regime disputes are not simply the product of other foreign policy rivalries, but a source of international conflict in their own right.

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[†]Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), Stanford University, Email: lhundley@stanford.edu

1 Introduction

In recent years, the world has increasingly witnessed international conflict along ideological fault lines. Western policymakers warn that authoritarian countries like Russia and China are seeking to exploit divisions within liberal societies to promote autocratic tendencies, while for decades, authoritarian countries have accused the West of doing the same—of manufacturing domestic uprisings as a way to force liberalism upon them. Of course, these dynamics herald back to the Cold War, where international conflict was defined by ideological competition between capitalist and communist regimes, and before the Cold War, to the Concert of Europe. For the 70 years following the French Revolution, European powers frequently found themselves in conflict promoting monarchical or republican regimes.

Despite these and numerous other examples, there is little consensus in the existing literature about whether ideology has a systematic effect on the relations between states.¹ Realists, for instance, have long argued that behavior that appears to be ideologically-driven is often just the pursuit of power or other material interests in disguise (Morgenthau 1948, Krasner 1978, Waltz 1979, Walt 1987, and Mearsheimer 2001). Yet, more recent work—especially that by Haas (2005) and Owen (2010)—challenge this view, suggesting that clashes between different political ideologies are a driving force of international conflict. Somewhere in between these two poles lies the literature on the democratic peace.² While there has been substantial research attributing the democratic peace to institutional constraints (e.g. Lake 1992; Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001; Bueno de Mesquita et al 1999; Reiter & Stam 2002), some strands emphasize features of liberal ideologies that make democratic states more pacific towards one another (e.g. Doyle 1986; Maoz & Russett 1993; Owen 1994; Risse-Kappen 1996). So, it remains unclear whether ideological ties ever matter, and if they do, whether any effects are unique to liberalism in particular.

I argue that scholars have largely missed the pacifying effect of shared ideological ties, in part, because they have failed to distinguish between the types of disputes that states have. Most studies of international conflict black box the issues over which states are fighting or focus more exclusively on territorial disputes.³ However, while scholars have persuasively shown that territory is a source of prolonged conflict between states (e.g. Simmons 2005; Rasler and Thompson 2006; Senese and Vasquez 2008; Rider 2009; Carter 2010; Fearon 2018), it is by no means the only issue states conflict over. Even among the dyads characterized by frequent and repeated hostilities (often deemed “rivals”), fewer than half involve conflicting

¹Importantly, ideological competition is not only reserved for great powers. Liberal and conservative regimes in Central America frequently attempted to topple one another in the 19th century, and politics in the Middle East has involved a complex history of conflicts between various secular and Islamist regimes.

²There is also a small body of work investigating the possibility of an autocratic peace. See for example, Werner (2000); Peceny et al (2002); Souva (2004); Bennett (2006); Letkzian & Souva (2009); Gartzke & Weissiger (2013); and Conrad & Souva (2011).

³For prominent calls for an issue-based approach to studying international conflict, see Diehl 1992; Hensel 2001; and Hensel et al. 2008. For a useful review of the literature on territorial disputes, see Toft (2014).

territorial claims (Tir and Diehl 2002).

Aside from territory, disputes over other countries' regimes are another important source of international conflict and competition. Between 1816 and 1992, there were 100 cases of governments forcefully removing the leadership of other countries (Downes and Monten 2013). These cases of foreign imposed regime change represent twice as many instances of other externally-driven state deaths—like those through territorial conquest and annexation—in the same time period. They represent almost three times as many instances of those state deaths that were violent (Fazal 2004). Regime disputes generate far more conflict than the particular instances of successful and direct removal of foreign political leaders with military force. Militarized disputes also proliferate as a result of countries providing aid to domestic actors seeking regime change and the efforts of targeted states to retaliate (Gleditsch et al. 2008). Beyond the militarized incidents directly related to countries intervening in the regimes of others, the anticipation of these adverse interventions can greatly contribute to hostilities between these states.

In this paper, I argue that sharing an ideology can significantly reduce the likelihood of these regime-related disputes, as opposed to territorial ones. I define ideology in terms of the principles states use to legitimate their rule domestically, as opposed to understanding ideology as a theory of foreign policy (e.g. Morgenthau 1948, Snyder 2013) or focusing on specific ideologies that call for universal norms (e.g. Walt 1987; Smith 1994; Desch 2007). Conceived in this sense, leaders care about ideologies because they are a significant basis for their hold on to power at home. At the international level, there are two dynamics at work that cause leaders to see states with different ideologies as potential threats to their power and states with similar ideologies as, at a minimum, not threatening, and possibly even bolstering their rule.

First, when states legitimate their rule according to different principles, leaders are more likely to fear—correctly or incorrectly—that the other has regime revisionist preferences. If a leader believes in the ideological principles he or she advocates, that leader may have a normative preference for spreading those principles abroad. This possibility creates uncertainty among ideologically-dissimilar states over whether the other has regime-revisionist preferences. Leaders of different regimes, therefore, often regard each other with suspicion. Even without active efforts to promote one's ideology abroad, leaders are unsure whether the other will intervene against their regime in the future. This dynamic can lead governments with no inherent ideological preferences to subvert governments they believe hold ideologically-revisionist preferences against their own. By contrast, governments that legitimate their rule according to similar principles have little reason to fear the other has such revisionist preferences.

Second, concerns about political contagion may drive states to try to undermine governments with different ideological principles, while ideologically-similar states face incentives to cooperate. Various studies have documented that revolutions and other political upheavals

tend to spread to other countries, and this is especially likely among states with similar political systems.⁴ Undermining a new revolutionary regime is one way to remove the threat of ideological contagion at its source. For example, the Holy Alliance authorized interventions in Italy in 1821 and in Spain in 1822 to reinstall absolute monarchies after republican uprisings there. Moreover, even if states have little hope for toppling another's regime, fueling domestic unrest in ideological competitors can make targeted governments less appealing models for domestic opponents to try to replicate.

Notice how the dynamic differs among ideologically-similar governments. Concerns about political contagion do not create incentives for governments that share political ideologies to undermine each other; rather, they create incentives for them to prop each other up against domestic threats and to see each other thrive. In fact, contagion concerns may even constrain states' use of subversion to achieve other foreign policy goals. To use an example where shared ideological threats have generated similar dynamics, consider Iran and Iraq in the lead up to the Iranian Revolution. Despite severe foreign policy disputes—including a territorial conflict over the Shatt al-Arab waterway—Saddam Hussein did not seek to exploit or aid anti-Shah opposition in Iran. Instead, Hussein exiled Khomeini from Iraq at the Shah's request because he feared that a successful Islamist revolution in Iran would embolden the al-Dawa movement in his own country that opposed his secular Baathist regime.

I offer three pieces of correlational evidence for these arguments. My approach exploits the fact that some institutional arrangements are tied to shareable, or generalizable, ideological underpinnings (i.e. liberal democracies, communist regimes, and monarchies) while others are not (i.e. personalist, non-communist party regimes, and military regimes). First, I show that pairs of countries with common ideological underpinnings are both significantly more likely to intervene in support of each other in civil wars and less likely to provide aid to rebel groups than pairs of countries that do not legitimate their rule in similar ways. Second, because regime conflicts entail more than just the provision of aid to opposition groups in civil wars, I show that pairs of liberal democracies, communist regimes, and monarchies are all significantly less likely to engage in policy and regime militarized disputes (MIDs) with one another than other types of dyads. Importantly, however, shared ideology does not reduce the likelihood of territorial MIDs. This suggests that ideological similarity does not have a pacifying effect on all kinds of international conflict, as theories emphasizing in-group/out-group dynamics or lack of mutual understandings would predict (Haas 2005).

Third, I use data from the peace scale (Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016)—which incorporates information not only on the occurrence of military conflict between states but also information on other aspects of states' diplomatic and cooperative behavior—to examine how ideological ties affect the overall quality of relations between states. I show that relations between ideologically-similar states become significantly more hostile when one state under-

⁴For selected research on the contagion of regime contention, see Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Weyland 2009; Hale 2013; Wejnert 2014; Gleditsch and Rivera 2017.

goes a regime change, while mixed dyads become more cooperative after one state becomes more ideologically similar to the other. Overall then, the analysis suggests that ideological cleavages are an important source of regime conflict between states, and as a result, can help us understand the broad patterns of hostilities in the international system.

I also conduct a series of additional tests to rule out alternative explanations for these results, including whether the results are primarily detecting the effect of the democratic peace, general institutional affinities, incentives stemming from US-USSR Cold War competition, or shared foreign policy interests more broadly. Specifically, I show that the evidence for a Marxist peace and a monarchical peace are often just as strong—if not stronger—than the evidence of the democratic peace and that states that share institutional arrangements but not necessarily ideological ties do not display similar patterns of behavior. Further, the results hold when subsetting the data to contiguous dyads or when excluding dyads with the United States or Russia, suggesting that the results are not driven exclusively by attempts of the U.S. and USSR to promote or prevent the spread of communism in the developing world. Finally, even though my argument predicts that states develop shared interests in the success of similar ideologies and the failure of alternatives ones, controlling for shared foreign policy preferences (as measured by states' UN ideal points or alliance status) does not significantly change the results. In fact, while conflicting foreign policy interests are a good predictor of regime-related disputes in dyads without a common ideology, they do little to explain the use of subversion or other regime-related conflicts in dyads that do share an ideology.

The remainder of this article is divided into five parts. In the next section, I briefly review existing debates on the relationship between states' ideologies and their foreign policies. I then develop the theoretical arguments of this paper, explaining why ideological cleavages between states increase the risk of regime conflicts, but not territorial ones. The fourth section describes the hypotheses to be tested, the operationalization of key variables, and my research methods. The fifth section presents the results from my statistical analysis: pairs of ideologically-similar states are less likely to intervene in civil conflicts against one another, are less likely to experience policy and regime disputes, and are overall more cooperative than pairs of states that do not legitimate their rule in similar ways. I address alternative explanations for these results in the fifth section as well. Finally, in the conclusion, I reflect more broadly on future directions for a research agenda focused on regime conflicts.

2 Existing Debates on Ideology and Conflict

Does sharing ideological ties have any effect on the relations between states? While there has been an explosion of research on the effects of ideology on the dynamics of civil conflicts in recent years, there is still little consensus in the IR literature as to whether states'

political ideologies have any discernable effect on their foreign policy.⁵ Realist scholars, for instance, have long been skeptical of any genuine influence of ideology. Morgenthau (1948) suggested that while ideological rhetoric is common, such rhetoric is used as a disguise for states' "genuine" desire for power. Structural realists would go even further to dismiss the role of ideology. Because today's friend may be an adversary tomorrow, the structure of the international system would naturally select against ideologically-driven behavior (Waltz 1979). Only newly formed governments who have yet been socialized to the international system or the most powerful states facing little international threat could pursue such policies (Krasner 1978; Walt 1987; Walt 1996). For realists, examples of U.S. support for dictators like Chile's Pinochet and South Vietnam's Thieu, as well as the friction between China and the USSR after the Sino-Soviet split, provide compelling evidence against a pacifying effect of sharing an ideology.

At the other end of the spectrum lies work by Haas (2005) and Owen (2002; 2010). These authors suggest that ideological cleavages not only matter, but are one of the driving forces of international conflict and cooperation. For Haas (2005), ideological difference can lead to conflict because demonstration effects from other countries can threaten states' domestic interests, because states naturally define their in-groups and out-groups along ideological lines, and because states without a common ideology also lack common understandings of language and symbols necessary for effective communication. Owen (2002; 2010), by contrast, focuses more specifically on states' efforts to change the political institutions of other countries. In periods of transnational polarization, Owen suggests that elites face powerful incentives to promote their own ideology abroad either to prevent demonstration effects or to revise the international balance of power in its favor. To provide evidence for their arguments, both Haas (2005) and Owen (2010) conduct impressive historical surveys detailing a high rate of conflict along ideological lines.

The literature on the democratic peace falls somewhere between these two poles. Starting with Doyle (1986), researchers have uncovered a robust empirical finding that pairs of liberal democracies rarely go to war with one another.⁶ Explanations for this empirical relationship have largely emphasized the constraining features of democratic institutions.⁷ For instance, Maoz and Russett (1993) theorize that the difficulty of mobilizing a broad base of support for conflict may afford democratic leaders more time to find diplomatic solutions with one another.⁸ Others suggest that because democratic leaders must retain a broad base of

⁵For work on ideology and domestic conflict, see Thaler 2012; Gutierrez Sanin and Wood 2014; Costalli and Ruggieri 2015; Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Shubiger and Zelina 2017; Wood and Thomas 2017; and Maynard 2019.

⁶Jack Levy has described this finding as "the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations" (Levy 1988, 88).

⁷There is a vast body of research advancing different explanations for the democratic peace, and it is beyond the scope of this article to review this literature in detail. For useful reviews of the democratic peace, see Ray (1998), Hayes (2012), Schultz (2013).

⁸Maoz and Russett (1993) find evidence that support both structural and normative (discussed below) models

support to stay in office, they tend to be more cautious about the types of conflicts they enter (e.g. Lake 1992; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Reiter and Stam 2002). Finally, democratic institutions – including the transparency of the political process and electoral competition – can make democratic states better able to resolve their disputes without resorting to violence as they can more credibly reveal their intentions (e.g. Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001).

Significant strands of the democratic peace research, however, do advance arguments that we might interpret as being about ideology. Some of these theories emphasize the components of a liberal ideology, in particular. Because liberalism entails commitments to equality, consent, and non-violent dispute resolution, liberal states externalize these norms in their relations with other liberal states. In turn, liberal states are both less likely to engage in conflict with one another and more likely to form security communities together (Kant 1970; Deutsch 1957; Doyle 1986; Owen 1994; Risse-Kappen 1996). Others suggest that normative commitments to liberalism can sometimes motivate states to intervene against autocratic states in order to convert them to democratic states, in a so-called “democratic crusade” (Kegley and Hermann 1997; Hermann and Kegely 1998; Hegre et al. 2007; Desch 2008).⁹

A final and related literature is the work investigating the possibility of an “autocratic peace.” A direct off-shoot of the democratic peace, works in this body of research hypothesize that there may be a more general peace between states with similar regime types (e.g. Werner 2000b; Peceny et al. 2002; Bennett 2006). Importantly, these theories are not framed as being “about” ideology; rather, they suggest that institutional similarity can have a pacifying effect on international conflict either by facilitating the formation of in-groups versus out-groups (Letkzian and Souva 2009; Gartzke and Weisiger 2013) or because similar domestic political processes can lead institutionally-similar states to pursue similar foreign policies (Conrad and Souva 2011). However, there is not strong empirical evidence for a general institutional peace. The conclusion of much of this research pointed more to there being variation in the conflict propensities of different autocratic regimes, which later work by Weeks (2008; 2012) ascribes to the degree to which different autocratic institutions can constrain political leaders.

Overall then, one can find research that suggests ideology does or does not matter—or that perhaps the liberal ideology in particular matters, but not other ideological arrangements—depending on where one looks. There are two primary limitations of existing research that can help explain these conflicting findings. First, research on ideology outside of the work on the democratic peace is overwhelmingly qualitative. While historical case methods are extremely useful for grounding theories in real-world applications and for providing evidence

of the democratic peace, but gives precedence to the normative model.

⁹There is also a significant body of research investigating whether and the conditions under which interventions by democracies are more likely to result in democratization itself. See, for example, Peceny 1999; Pickering and Peceny 2006; Pickering and Kisangani 2006; Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2006; Enterline and Greig 2008; Downes and Montan 2013).

for theoretical mechanisms, they are more limited in their ability to detect systematic relationships. In any given case, it is difficult to say whether an association between two variables is likely to apply elsewhere or if it depends on other contextual nuances specific to the case. Further, even though Haas (2005) and Owen (2010) augment the generalizability of their claims by conducting impressive historical surveys covering both a large number of countries and vast time periods, documenting a high rate of conflict along ideological fault lines does not necessarily provide evidence of a systematic relationship. After all, we should expect a lot of conflicts between states with different ideologies because most states are ideologically different from one another. Further, because Haas (2005) and Owen (2010) cover such a vast historical period, they necessarily direct their attention to cases where conflict does occur. But this introduces problems associated with selection on the dependent variable: that is, researchers may assign causal weight to variables that are often present in cases where there is conflict and where there is not.

Second, like much of the literature on international conflict, these existing bodies of research largely do not distinguish between the types of disputes that states can have. I argue below that there are important reasons to distinguish between territorial disputes—where the fear leaders face is territorial conquest and annexation—and regime-related disputes—where the fear leaders face is foreign interference in their domestic politics. For some of the theories above, black-boxing these disputes makes sense, as they suggest that shared ideology and/or institutions have general pacifying effects on conflict. For instance, if democratic institutions make states better able to signal their resolve (e.g. Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001), then we would not expect joint democracy to reduce only territorial or only regime-related disputes. Likewise, if ideology matters because it is a natural division for drawing in-groups versus out-groups (e.g. Haas 2005; Hermann and Kegley 1995; Gartzke and Weissiger 2013), we might expect pairs of ideologically-disparate states to ascribe hostile intentions to one another for both territorial and regime-related conflicts.

Other arguments advanced in the literature above, however, should only apply to one type of dispute, so the conflicting findings may result from the fact that they are essentially studying different things. Realist theories, for instance, tend to implicitly or explicitly assume that states are motivated primarily by the fear of territorial conquest. This is apparent in theories like the security dilemma, where there is uncertainty over whether states are territorially expansionist (e.g. Jervis 1978; Kydd 1997; Glaser 2010). In fact, in *Origins of Alliances*, Walt implicitly conceives of “aggressive intentions” in terms of territorial conquest when using cases like perceptions of Germany’s expansionist designs prior to World War II to illustrate that it is intentions, not power itself, that matters.

Yet, much of the research that is suggestive of ideological effects appears to apply to regime-related disputes instead. The literature on the democratic crusade, for instance, should only apply to conflicts over other states’ political regimes, even though their empirical tests use any militarized disputes or interventions (e.g. Hermann and Kegley 1997; Hermann

and Kegley 1998; Hegre et al. 2007). In many ways, it is not surprising that Walt is more open to a role of ideology in his second book, *Revolutions and War*, where the conflicts he devotes his attention to generally involve attempts to overthrow new revolutionary regimes.¹⁰ Owen (2002; 2010) is explicit in both his theory and methods that his outcome of interest is the foreign promotion of domestic institutions. Yet, even though there are compelling reasons to think that these arguments may only apply to certain types of disputes and not to others, none of the existing research has systematically theorized or investigated whether this is the case.

3 Ideological Ties and Regime-Related Disputes

To preview my argument, I suggest that ideological ties between states strongly shape how leaders identify which countries may intervene adversely in their domestic politics. When countries share similar legitimating principles, there is less reason for them to fear adverse regime interference due to normative preferences or unrelated policy disputes. Instead, concerns about ideological contagion incentivize ideologically-similar states to prop each other up against domestic challenges and be more cautious in their use of subversion for other policy objectives. These arguments do not imply that ideological ties have a pacifying effect on all types of conflict, but rather those disputes involving subversion and other attempts to overthrow one another's regimes. Below, I first elaborate on the need to distinguish regime-related disputes, before explaining in more detail why ideological similarity should only reduce regime-related disputes as opposed to territorial ones.

Before moving on, it is important to define what I mean when using the term “ideology” and “regime-related disputes”. I use ideology to refer to the set of ideas that governments use to legitimate their rule domestically. These principles can help dictate how much authority a government should have over society, who in society is able to participate, and the ends toward which government action is designed to serve. Common ideologies, like liberalism, Marxism, and ethnonationalism, are used for these purposes. “By providing society with a unified political culture,” Heyward (2007) explains, “political ideas help promote order and stability” (3). In other words, I use ideology to refer to the political ideas that governments use to elicit voluntary compliance with its rule (Gaventa 1982). I do not use ideology to refer to theories of foreign policy, such as imperialism (Snyder 2013), ideologies of the offensive (Morgenthau 1948), or those ascribed to particular leaders, like Jeffersonianism or Wilsonianism (Mead 2002, 2017).

I define regime-related disputes as any conflict that results from efforts of states to try to

¹⁰In this work, Walt suggests that ideological differences may exacerbate spirals of suspicion in the aftermath of revolutions, but that “relations between the revolutionary states and the rest of the system will become increasingly ‘normal’ as the former becomes socialized into the system” (Walt 1996, 43). Walt also provides a number of other mechanisms linking revolution to war, such as revolutions creating new “windows of opportunity” by temporarily weakening the state, that are independent of ideological considerations.

change the leadership or institutions of other countries. Regime disputes therefore include both the use of subversion, as well as the efforts of states to retaliate for such interference (Gleditsch et al. 2008). Regime disputes can take many forms, since states can use a variety of methods to change to leadership of other countries. At the most extreme end, states sometimes launch full scale wars of regime change.¹¹ But states can also provide support to rebel groups in civil wars, encourage coups, and interfere in elections.¹² Importantly, regime-related disputes do not require that states change the institutions of other governments to be more like their own; otherwise, arguing that sharing ideological ties reduces the likelihood of regime-related disputes would be tautological.

Although there has been a significant amount of research on the different strategies of subversion that states may use, there is little sense across these disparate literatures that attempts to undermine foreign governments represent a broad class of regime-related conflicts that merit study in the same way as territorial disputes. In fact, to the extent that there is a common theme among the various literatures on subversion, it is that regime-related disputes are a product of existing and often untheorized foreign policy disputes, rather than a source of international conflict in their own right.¹³ Some argue, for example, that states use the provision of aid to rebel organizations as a bargaining chip for concessions on issues they care about (Bapat 2012; Findley et al. 2012), while others suggest it is a useful strategy for draining their rivals resources (Maoz and San-Akca 2012; San-Akca 2016). Still others argue that interference serves primarily to turn an unfriendly country into a friendly one (Findley and Teo 2006; Salehyan et al. 2011). The primary evidence for this view is that countries seem especially likely to interfere adversely in the regimes of their international rivals (Findley and Teo 2006; Salehyan et al. 2011; Maoz and San-Akca 2012; San-Akca 2016; Lee 2018).

While the recognition that subversion can be a strategy for pursuing other foreign policy disputes is certainly useful, the use of rivalry to predict subversion largely side-steps the question of why states conflict in the first place. Sometimes, attempts to undermine or remove an existing government stems from problems with the regime itself, rather than an

¹¹For selected works on wars of regime change, see Werner (1996), Enterline and Greig (2005); Lo et al. (2008); Reiter (2009); Coe (2012).

¹²For selected works intervention in civil war, see Lemke and Regan (2004); Findley and Teo (2006); Gent (2007); Koga (2011); Stojek and Chacha (2015); and Findley and Marineau (2015). For examples of work specifically on the provision of aid to rebel organizations, see Salehyan (2007); Salehyan et al. (2011); Bapat (2012); Carter (2012); Maoz and San Akca (2012); Carter (2015); and San Akca (2016). For research on foreign electoral interventions, see Levin (2016); Corstange and Marinov (2012); and Bubeck and Marinov (2017, 2019). Finally, for research on foreign-imposed regime change (which can entail a variety of methods, including covert support for coups), see Downes and Monten (2013); Berger et al (2013); and O'Rourke (2018).

¹³The most notable exception is the work on how ethnic ties shape decisions to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries. Here, the policy in dispute is frequently the treatment of ethnic kin, and regime change is seen as a viable way of ensuring these policies change. See Carment and James 1997; Saideman 1997; Austvoll 2005; and Koga 2011 for notable examples of this literature.

unrelated foreign policy dispute where the targeted state could make a concession. U.S. efforts to remove Frederico Tinoco from office in Costa Rica is only one example of such types of conflicts. More importantly, this view overlooks that states' fear of subversion—regardless of other foreign policy disputes—appears to be a powerful motivator of their foreign policy behavior. Even anecdotally, significant features of international politics appear to be motivated by states' desires to prevent external actors from threatening their ability to hold on to power at home. For instance, 36% of alliances formed between 1815 and 2008 include commitments by both partners not to intervene in one another's domestic politics.¹⁴ Similarly, the norm of Westphalian sovereignty arose in a direct response to the Thirty Years War, where one of the major sources of conflict was states intervening in the domestic affairs of others.¹⁵ Therefore, regardless of whether regime-related disputes stem from a preference for policy change or an underlying disagreement with the regime itself, it is useful to distinguish regime-related disputes as a distinct type of conflict since these disputes create a similar source of threats to states.

3.1 Potential for Ideological Activism

Why does sharing an ideology reduce the likelihood of these regime-related disputes? Perhaps most straightforwardly, ideologically-similar states have little incentive to try to change each other's regimes out of normative commitments to their ideology. After all, if a leader believes in the ideological principles he or she advances, that leader may believe that promoting these principles abroad is an inherently worthwhile pursuit. Some ideologies, like Marxism, include specific prescriptions for spreading its principles abroad. Moreover, while liberalism does not include any specific obligations for states to promote these values abroad, existing research suggests that democracies are likely to go to war against autocratic states as a way to transform them into liberal societies (Hook 2002; Smith 1994; Peceny 1997). If states already govern according to similar ideological principles however, normative commitments to the ideology would push leaders towards supporting each other's regimes.

For states that do not share of a common ideology, the threat of ideologically-motivated regime interference can be quite severe. Even if ideologically-disparate states are temporarily enjoying good relations, there's no guarantee that leaders would not support domestic challengers that they are ideologically-sympathetic to if the opportunity arose. For instance, consider U.S. relations with Panama's Manuel Noriega. The United States maintained close relations with him throughout the majority of the Cold War, providing millions in military aid and foreign assistance to prop up his regime against potential communist threats. But, as the Cold War came towards its close, U.S. ideological aversion for supporting repressive, authoritarian regimes began to outweigh its utility for propping him up. Indeed, once pro-democratic forces took to the streets in large number in 1988, the United States was quick

¹⁴This statistic can be calculated using the ATOP data set (Leeds et al. 2002).

¹⁵Owen (2010) documents at least 47 unique instances of states intervening to promote the primacy of Catholicism over Protestantism or vice versa between 1618 and 1648.

to reverse course on Noriega and backed calls by the National Civic Crusade to remove him from office. The United States even sent over 2,000 troops to Panama to help remove Noriega from power.

In fact, the fear of such ideological preferences can lead states with no inherent normative commitments to adopt regime-revisionist policies against states that are ideologically dissimilar. If leaders fear—correctly or incorrectly—that another state has ideologically revisionist-preferences, then it may be incentivized to overthrow that government. Here, regime change is a viable way to alter the disputed foreign policy, i.e. potential ideological activism, because the policy preference is linked to the nature of the regime itself. Changing the ideology of the targeted government would remove the source of the threat. In many ways, this logic mirrors that of the security dilemma (e.g. Jervis 1978; Kydd 1998; Glaser 2010), but the uncertainty is not over territorial revisionism but rather whether states are ideological zealots.¹⁶

3.2 Risks of Political Contagion

Another reason why ideological similarity is likely to reduce regime-related disputes stems from concerns about political contagion. Scholars have extensively documented that regime change in one country can encourage domestic mobilization against governments elsewhere—be it in the form of protests, civil conflict, or even military coups.¹⁷ Some scholars have noted that regime cascades often take on an ideological character (Haas 2005; Owen 2010). Even anecdotally, the “big four” episodes of regime contention—the republican uprisings of 1848, the 1989 post-communist revolutions, the 2003-2005 color revolutions, and the 2011 Arab Spring—are suggestive of the ideological nature of these events.

There are two primary reasons why political contagion is likely to occur along ideological lines. First, as Haas (2005) explains, “when people across states claim allegiance to the same set of ideological principles, the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of these beliefs will likely be affected by events that take place in different countries” (7). In other words, if foreign publics are willing to undertake costly mobilization against one ideology in pursuit

¹⁶In *Revolutions and War*, Walt (1996) makes a similar argument when he suggests that ideological differences in the aftermath of a revolution can exacerbate spirals of suspicion. Yet, Walt expects this effect of ideology to be fleeting. After a state has been socialized to the international system, it would naturally avoid pursuing ideologically-driven policy, so outside states would have little reason to fear ideologically revisionist preferences in the long run. It may certainly be true that the fear of ideologically-revisionist preferences may be the strongest in the aftermath of a domestic revolution, but as the US-Noriega example suggests, ideological activism and the fear of ideologically-driven policies does not appear to be reserved only for revolutions.

¹⁷For a useful review of the research on regime change cascades, see Hale (2013). For selected work on the diffusion of non-violent protests, see Givan et al. 2010; Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Gleditsch and Rivera 2017. For selected work on the contagion of civil conflicts, see Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Kathman 2010; Braithwaite 2010; Maves and Braithwaite 2013. For the diffusion of democracy, see Starr 1991; Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Elkins 2011; and Wejnert 2014.

of another, then domestic audiences may begin to question the legitimacy of these same ideals. Other scholars go even further to suggest that the mere existence of an alternative models of government—especially ones that appear to provide a better life for its citizens—can create demands for regime change at home (Kennan 1947; Huntington 1991; Werner and Lemke 1997; Werner 2000b; Owen 2010; Lada 2014). Second, ideological ties between states can make demonstration effects from mobilization abroad more likely by creating a common frame of reference for domestic audiences to interpret events abroad as being relevant to events at home (Hale 2013). When there is a common frame of reference for interpreting events abroad, foreign regime contention can encourage domestic mobilization at home either because citizens interpret it as a signal they are also likely to be successful (Kuran 1991; Weyland 2009; Chen and Suen 2016), because it creates a focal point for coordination (Schelling 1960), or because it can help unravel systems of preference falsification (Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994).

States that share ideological ties have strong incentives to prop each other up against domestic threats in order to prevent these regime change cascades from occurring. Without the optics of a successful challenge to an ideologically-similar regime, foreign audiences will have less reason to try to emulate these attempts at home. Further, visible efforts by states to suppress foreign uprisings may counteract any signal that their government is weak since it is willing and able to project power abroad (Weyland 2016). In fact, suppressing ideological challenges abroad may be even more effective than trying to preempt mobilization at home with repression. This is because governments are less able to target opposition members prior to mobilization and because repression may be particularly prone to backfire when audiences are already primed to mobilize (Rasler 1996; Hess and Martin 2006; Sullivan et. al. 2012; Chenoweth et al 2017; and Smithey and Kurtz 2018).

Concerns about political contagion can also discourage regime-related disputes among ideologically-similar states by making them less willing to use subversion to pursue their other foreign policy goals. Using subversion against ideologically-similar adversaries risks creating blowback against their own regimes. This is arguably the mistake that King Louis XVI made when supporting the American Revolution. After witnessing his stunning reversal of fortune, other European countries were reluctant to make the same mistake. For instance, even though Russia and Austria had long conflicted over influence in the German territories, Metternich refused to aid Polish rebels against Tsar Nicholas’s rule in 1831 precisely because he feared it would encourage republican revolutionary contagion. A similar dynamic appears to be in play today in the conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Even though both countries are willing to fight each other in a proxy war in Yemen in their competition for regional influence, neither are willing to cross the line and resort to subversion against one another.

In comparison, states that do not share ideological ties are not only free to use subversion to pursue their foreign policy interests; they may also be motivated by concerns about polit-

ical contagion to engage in regime-related disputes. Haas (2005) and Owen (2010) suggest that states are incentivized to reverse recent regime changes in countries that previously shared ideological ties as a way to combat potential demonstration effects. As Olson (1990) explains, what is important during these periods of regime contention is the expectations of elites and revolutionary agents. A regime failure in one country can generate cascades if elites think a similar fate awaits their own government, prompting their defection and consequently making their expectations self-fulfilling. At the same time, revolutionary agents are emboldened by these expectations. But reversing a recent regime change can keep these expectations from spiraling. Even if revolutionary agents interpret the downfall of a similar government as an indication that their own government can be overthrown, they may be dissuaded from pursuing this outcome if they expect that their efforts will be reversed by another country. In turn, these agents may be willing to accept more limited concessions, which elites can grant without defecting.

Fueling unrest in ideological competitors can also make these regimes less appealing models for domestic challengers to try to replicate at home. Some commentators have suggested that this dynamic was one of the motivations for Russia’s electoral interference in the 2016 U.S. elections (*BBC News* 2017). While there were many reasons for Russian leadership to prefer Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton to be elected, analysis of Russian propaganda—one of the primary means of interference—suggests that agents sought primarily to exploit political divisions within the U.S. Russian agents, for instance, bought political ads on Facebook that attacked both Clinton and Trump (Entous et al. 2017). Even after the election, operatives continued to create ads for political rallies attacking Trump (Shapiro 2017). By making the United States appear chaotic and dysfunctional, Putin stands to face fewer demands for liberal reforms at home (Diamond 2016).

Importantly, the above arguments do not predict that sharing an ideology would systematically reduce the likelihood of territorial disputes. The proposed mechanisms neither suggest that ideologically-similar states would be less likely to have conflicting preferences on non-regime related issues, nor do they predict more general pacifying effects. I do not suggest, for instance, that shared ideology facilitates effective communication that allows states to resolve their disputes peacefully or that states that share an ideology are less likely to ascribe hostile intentions to one another in general (Haas 2005). Indeed, the theory advanced suggests that ideological ties shape how leaders perceive regime threats from other countries and their willingness to resort to subversion more specifically.

Even if ideological similarity does not create specific preferences against territorial conflict with one another, we might still expect to observe lower rates of territorial conflict among states that share an ideology if ideological differences created new preferences for other’s territory. But this is not likely to be the case. Annexing another country’s territory is unlikely to be a common strategy for ideologically-dissimilar states to address concerns

about ideological revisionism or about political contagion. To remove the threat posed by ideological activism through territorial conquest, a leader must be prepared to annex the entirety of the revisionist state. Annexing only a small part of the target’s territory would be unlikely to hamper its ability to provide resources and safe havens to the intervening state’s domestic challengers. After all, existing research has shown that subversion can be a particularly useful weapon for the weak (Bapat 2012; Findley et al. 2012; Maoz and San-Akca 2012; San-Akca 2016). Annexing the entirety of another country is not only empirically rare (Fazal 2004, 2011). It is also likely to be much more costly than changing the leadership of the targeted state, for instance by encouraging a military coup or fueling domestic unrest more generally.¹⁸ Therefore, responding to ideological activism with regime-revision is much more likely than territorial-revisionism.

Territorial conquest is also unlikely to be a typical strategy for countering demonstration effects from the success of rival ideologies abroad. Unlike the problem of ideological activism, taking only a small part of an ideological competitor’s territory could—in theory—discourage potential demonstration effects by signaling the government’s relative strength or by shoring up nationalist sentiment within one’s own populace (e.g. Smith 1996; Gelpi 1997; Tir 2010; Haynes 2017). But such a strategy entails much more risk than removing the threat of contagion at its source or by fueling domestic unrest to make the regime a less appealing model to replicate. Not only is territorial conquest more likely to prompt international backlash (Zacher 2001; Werner 2000a; Melin & Grigorescu 2014), it is also not clear that states worried about their regime stability would enhance their security by incorporating a foreign, dissident population—one that has their own national sympathies and who may already be supportive of alternative ideological arrangements—under their authority (Herbst 2000; Saideman and Ayres 2008; Mylonas 2012; Shelef 2016; Schultz and Goemans 2019).¹⁹ Therefore, while there may be some circumstances where it makes sense for states to respond to fears of contagion with territorial aggression, we would not likely expect ideological-dissimilarity to have a systematic effect on territorial conflict as we would with regime-related disputes.

4 Testing the Argument

This study utilizes a variety of conflict-related data sets to conduct three primary sets of analyses as a test of the arguments given above. First, I examine third-party involvement in foreign civil wars, including both direct military intervention as well as the provision of military aid to warring participants. While states undoubtedly use a variety of means to

¹⁸See Lo et al. (2008), Downes & O’Rourke (2016), and O’Rourke (2018) for debate over whether FIRC improves foreign policy outcomes for the intervening state.

¹⁹In fact, while Russia’s annexation of Crimea was arguably motivated, in part, by Putin’s desire to prevent democratic demonstration effects from the Euromaiden protests, it may have only been possible since there was significant pro-Russian sentiment among Ukrainians in Crimea.

promote or prevent regime change in other countries outside of civil war, these data are the best way available to test whether pairs of ideologically-similar countries are more likely to prop each other up against domestic challengers and less likely to use subversion to target one another than pairs of ideologically dissimilar countries.

H1a: States are more likely to provide aid to a government experiencing civil war if they share ideological ties with the government than if they do not share ideological ties.

H1b: States are less likely to provide aid to rebel groups that target states with which they share ideological ties than those that do not share ideological ties.

Second, I analyze the occurrence of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between pairs of ideologically-similar countries compared to mixed dyads. This analysis is useful because regime conflicts manifest in more ways than the active interference in foreign civil wars. States can use their militaries to directly threaten the leadership of other countries, and further, as Gleditsch et al. (2008) show, conflicts can also proliferate as a result of states' retaliating for such interference. Moreover, by analyzing MIDs, we can test whether joint ideology has a general pacifying effect on international conflict by examining its effect on territorial disputes. While existing theories of ideology that emphasize in-group/out-group dynamics or lack of mutual understanding would predict ideological ties would reduce both policy/regime and territorial disputes (Haas 2005), the theory I advance suggests that we should only see an effect of ideological similarity on the occurrence of non-territorial disputes.

H2a: Ideologically-similar states are less likely to experience regime-related disputes than pairs of states that do not share a common ideology.

H2b: Ideologically-similar states are no more or less likely to experience territorial disputes than pairs of states that do not share a common ideology.

Finally, we also are interested in whether the threat of regime conflict drives larger patterns of hostilities between states. To answer this question, I turn to analyzing data from the peace scale, which attempts to measure the quality of relations between states (Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016). If relations between states improve significantly when regime conflicts become less likely, then we may be more confident that the threat of adverse interventions against a state's political leadership is an important driver of hostilities between states, rather than simply being a reflection of other foreign policy disputes.

H3: Ideologically-similar states are more likely to have higher scores on the peace scale than pairs of states that do not share a common ideology.

Below, I describe the data for this inquiry. To be able to compare more easily across each set of analysis, I keep important aspects of the model specifications – including control

variables, unit of analysis, etc.—constant wherever possible. All models – unless otherwise noted – are estimated on a subset of “nontrivial” dyads. Data on which dyad years have “non-trivial relations” comes from the Peace Scale (Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016). These dyads are slightly different from the “politically relevant” dyads that scholars typically use, but subsetting to nontrivial dyads addresses the same inference problems as subsetting to politically-relevant dyads. Dyads with non-trivial relations include contiguous states, dyads with a global power, dyads containing a regional power and other members of that region, dyads with colonial ties, and dyads where states are members of the same formal, regional international organization. In the appendix, I show that the results presented below do not depend on the use of “nontrivial” versus politically-relevant dyads.

In all models, I lag the independent variables so that the outcome variable at time t is predicted by the independent variables at time $t - 1$. Standard errors for all models are clustered at the dyad level. In the results presented below, I estimate the models using OLS regressions.²⁰

4.1 Measuring Ideological Ties Between States

The key explanatory variable is whether states share the same ideology. As discussed earlier, ideology refers to a “more or less coherent set of ideas that provide the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify, or overthrow the existing system of power” (Heyward 2007, 11). While this definition allows for any organized group to have a unique ideology, this study focuses on the ideologies of formal state governments. We can therefore narrow our conception of ideology as the set of legitimizing principles around which its political and economic institutions are organized. These principles help dictate how much “authority” a government has over a society, who in society is able to participate in the government, and the ends towards which the government action is designed to serve. Because ideology helps organize the relationships between the government and society, it can also help inform how to arrange a government’s institutions. As Denzau and North (1994) suggest, “ideologies and institutions [are] in co-evolutionary processes” (3).

Of course, governments can use a variety of different principles to organize their society and to legitimate their rule. Some of these principles are inherently unique to a given state. For instance, most modern governments rely on some degree of nationalism to legitimate their rule, but these nationalisms are not necessarily “shared” with other governments. French nationalism is inherently “French,” while English nationalism is “English.” Other principles and political ideologies, however, are shareable with other countries. Both France and the United Kingdom are liberal democracies, where their respective governments are legitimized, in part, by reference to the will of the people.²¹ This study is expressly interested in the

²⁰The appendix includes additional robustness checks using logistic regressions, which return similar results to those presented in the text.

²¹Importantly, I do not consider “shareable” principles as the same as “exportable” principles. Rather, I use

effect of sharing or not sharing these generalizable legitimating principles.

The intuition that political ideologies are sometimes tied to the institutional structures of a state's government helps inform my approach to identifying ideological ties between states. While it is not obvious how to code an exhaustive set of the legitimizing principles governments use for large-N analysis, scholars have created reliable cross-sectional and time-varying data on states' political institutions. Some of these institutional arrangements – in particular, monarchies, communist regimes, and liberal democracies – share common ideological underpinnings. Monarchies, for instance, share a common origin in absolutism, are often based in theories of divine right, and frequently act to protect traditional societal values. Communist regimes, by contrast, require a strong central state and justify political power through a commitment to advancing the interests of the working class. Finally, rule in liberal democracies is justified by reference to the will of the people, which in turn suggests a system of elected representatives. There is also a common belief that the role of government is meant to protect individual liberties.²²

Other institutional arrangements – such as, party systems, personalist dictatorships, and military regimes – are not inherently tied to shareable ideological underpinnings in the way that monarchies, communist regimes, and liberal democracies are. Institutionally, party systems are quite similar to each other, but their ideology depends crucially on the party that is in power. To illustrate how ideologically-diverse party regimes can be, consider the example of Iran after the 1979 Revolution, the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and Egypt under Nasser's leadership in the 1950s and early 1960s. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) consider each of these governments to be party regimes, but each has a different governing ideology. The Soviet Union was communist and Iran an Islamic state. Meanwhile, Nasser's ideology is best described as Arab Nationalism.²³

Similarly, leaders of personalist regimes chose among various political principles to justify their rule, and these principles are not directly tied to their political institutions. For instance, Muammar Qaddafi famously justified his rule based on an ideology he created himself – known as “Third International Theory,” which combined various principles from direct democracy, Islamic socialism, Arab nationalism, and African nationalism. Further, while many personalist dictators rely in some ways on a cult of personality to legitimate their rule, a cult of personality is not a “shareable” principle in the same way that nationalism is often

“shareable” to mean principles that states have in common. As discussed below, monarchies have shareable principles in absolutism, but monarchy – at least in the modern era – is not exportable since it requires historical dynastic claims.

²²Of course, there is considerable debate over how to achieve these ends. Libertarians, for instance, would suggest that individual liberty is best preserved by a limited government. But social democrats would suggest that a large government is needed to ensure the liberty of those against whom society has tended to discriminate.

²³Coincidentally, Arab nationalism is a good example of a case where nationalism can be shareable across different states because other states with Arab populations can use “Arab nationalism” to justify their rule in a way that “English” nationalism cannot be used to legitimate rule in France.

Regime Type	Data Source	Definition	Common Ideology
Liberal Democracies	VDEM V8	A country is considered to be a liberal democracy if it scores higher than 0.5 on V-Dem’s liberalism index. V-Dem’s liberalism index is not mainly based on the existence of competitive elections. It is based mainly on states’ protection of negative liberty and minority rights.	Yes – Rule justified through will of the people. Commitment to protecting individual liberty.
Marxist Regimes	Fearon (2018)	A regime is considered to be Marxist if the country’s constitution asserts they are based on socialist principles.	Yes – Rule justified by commitment to promoting the interests of workers.
Monarchies	Geddes et al. (2014)	This indicator captures authoritarian regimes where the head of state is of royal descent and inherits the position. Ceremonial positions are not included.	Yes – Roots in absolutism. Rule justified by divine right, tradition, and custom.
Party Regimes	Geddes et al. (2014)	Single-party regimes refer to govts where “access to political office and policy is dominated by one party, though other parties may legally exist and compete in elections” (Geddes 1999, 121).	No – Ideology determined by party in power, which varies across regimes.
Personalist Regimes	Geddes et al. (2014)	Personalist regimes refer to govts where “access to office and the fruits of office depend on the discretion of an individual leader” (Geddes 1999, 121).	No – Leaders can ascribe to different ideologies and justify their rule, in part, based on their particularistic qualities.
Military Regimes	Geddes et al. (2014)	Military regimes refer to govts where a group of military officers decides who will rule and exercises influence on policy.	No – Rule justified by reference to specific domestic circumstances that gave rise to the regime.

Table 1: Observable regime types, data sources, and shareable ideological principles

not “shareable” between states. In other words, a cult of personality innately relies on the unique characteristics of the individual leader.

Finally, military regimes justify their rule in large part by reference to the particular circumstances that they claim necessitated their governance—commonly in response to what they see as a domestic threat. As a result, military regimes are not necessarily similar to one another ideologically. Chile’s Pinochet, for instance, was staunchly anti-communist, while

the military regime that took power in Ethiopia in 1975 based itself on communist principles. Sisi's regime in Egypt today is anti-Islamist, whereas Pakistan's military governments have historically been sympathetic to Islamist values and groups. Again, like personalist dictatorships, there is some sense of a common pattern of justification among these regimes: in the case of military governments, this pattern is a technocratic view that the military is best suited for countering the domestic threat or failings of the previous regime. But because this justification is context-dependent, it is not necessarily shareable or generalizable to other countries' circumstances.

Table 1 summarizes the types of political regimes states have, the data sources used, and whether these regimes are tied to governing ideologies. By categorizing states political regimes' based on whether its institutions are directly tied to shareable legitimizing principles, we can develop a rough measure for identifying ideological ties between states. Pairs of monarchies, communist states, and liberal democracies each share a common ideological underpinning. However, pairs of non-Marxist party, military, and personalist regimes do not necessarily have shareable underpinnings. This is not to say that these party, military, and personalist regimes are "non-ideological." They often are: Nasser's regime, while it was a non-Marxist party regime, had a clear governing ideology that could be applied beyond Egypt's borders, and much conflict in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s was related to this fact. Rather, it means that sharing these institutions does not proxy for ideological ties in the same way as monarchies, communist regimes, and liberal democracies do.

This approach to identifying ideological ties between states, of course, does not come without limitations. In particular, monarchism, communism, and liberalism are not the only governing ideologies to which the theoretical arguments presented above apply. Legitimizing one's rule along secular versus religious principles (or according to different religious principles), for instance, can be a salient ideological cleavage that increases perceptions of regime threat and states' willingness to resort to subversion. In this sense, we might think that examining the effect of a small subset of generalizable legitimating principles biases against finding an effect of ideology. The base category of no common ideology likely includes states that do share other generalizable principles that the theory expects to reduce the risk of regime conflict. As a result, the conflict rates associated with the residual category are expected to be lower relative to a residual category that captured only states that did not share ideological principles, which makes it harder to identify any effect of ideology.²⁴

²⁴Notice that the test is not biased towards finding that ideology reduces conflict if the theory is incorrect (e.g. ideological similarity does not have an effect on conflict propensity, or instead, increases it). If there is no effect of ideological similarity, then having "misidentified" some pairs of countries as not having shared ideological principles when they do in reality would have no discernible effect on the conflict rates of the base category relative to those pairs of countries identified as sharing ideological principles. If shared ideology increases the rate of conflict, then "misidentifying" countries in the base category as not having shared ideological principles when they do in reality would make it more difficult to find that ideological similarity increase the risk of conflict, but it would not make it more likely to find an effect that these ties decrease the rate of conflict.

From the country-year data on states' political regimes, I use two measures for identifying ideological ties between states in the dyadic data. First, I created a collapsed indicator for shared ideology, which is coded as a "1" if both dyad members are liberal democracies, if both are Marxist regimes, or both are monarchies. I then created separate indicators for joint liberal, joint Marxism, and joint monarchy in order to test whether any result on the collapsed indicator is driven exclusively by one kind of regime. For example, we'd want to be confident that the result is not driven mostly by the behavior of liberal democracies, which theories of the democratic peace predict will be more pacific towards one another. I similarly create separate indicators for joint non-Marxist party regimes, joint non-Marxist military regimes, and joint non-Marxist personalist regimes. This will allow me to test whether there is an effect of simply sharing political institutions, even if those institutions are not directly tied to generalizable legitimating principles.

4.2 Data on Foreign Involvement in Civil War, Interstate Conflict, and Political Rivalries

There are three sets of dependent variables used in this study, capturing information on states' involvement in foreign civil wars, participation in militarized disputes, and quality of political relations. I discuss the data and operationalization of each of the dependent variables in turn.

4.2.1 Data on Foreign Involvement in Civil Wars

The argument presented above predicts that countries that legitimate their rule in similar ways will be more likely to prop each other up against domestic threats, while ideologically dissimilar states will be more likely to try to undermine one another's regimes. There are undoubtedly many ways that states pursue these goals – both in reaction to domestic challengers that have mobilized, as well as to ward off would-be opponents from organizing in the first place. The difficulty of measuring states' efforts to deter domestic challengers from arising is that it is hard to know when policies, like the provision of foreign aid, are aimed at leadership maintenance or if they have other purposes. As a result, looking directly at patterns of hostile and supportive interventions during foreign civil wars provide the cleanest test of the arguments above, even though involvement in civil wars is not the only way conflicts over states' regimes manifest.

In this study, I use data from Cunningham et al.'s (2009) Non-State Actor data set to measure third-party involvement in civil conflict. There are two advantages of using the Non-State Actor (NSA) data, compared to other measures of third-party involvement in civil conflicts. First, while many data sets only track military interventions involving the provision of military troops, the NSA data also codes lower-level interventions, including the provision of military aid. Second, it includes information on both the support provided to rebel organizations and to governments engaged in civil war, where as many data sets that

track lower-level support focus more narrowly on aid provided to rebel organizations. In the appendix, I also use San-Acka’s Non-State Armed Group (NAG) data on rebel support to illustrate the robustness of the results.

The NSA data collects information for all civil conflict dyads between a government and non-state actor identified in the UCDP Armed Conflict data set. Cunningham et al. (2009) codes whether rebel groups or government forces were supported by foreign governments, in addition to coding the type of support. I restrict my analysis to support that is coded as either troop provision or military aid.

The unit of analysis for this inquiry is the potential target-supporter dyad. To be considered a potential target-supporter dyad, the target country must be experiencing a civil conflict according to the UCDP Armed Conflict Data Set. Potential supporters are identified by the set of states with non-trivial relations to the target – that is, domestic conflicts that resulted in at least 25 battle-related deaths in the given year. I multiply the dependent variables by 100, so the effect estimates are in percentage points. Since foreign involvement in civil conflicts is a relatively rare event, multiply the DV by 100 allows us to avoid small coefficients that make it difficult to compare substantive effects across variables due to rounding.

4.2.2 Militarized Interstate Dispute Data

While the above argument makes predictions about states’ patterns of interventions to support or undermine governments during periods of civil unrest, at a fundamental level, we are interested in whether ideological cleavages between states increase the incidence of international conflict and particularly whether the increase is due to the occurrence of regime disputes. To test these intuitions, I turn to analyzing the occurrence of MIDs between states. I use the dyadic data from the COW Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) 3.0 Data Set (Maoz et al. 2018).

In the MIDs data, militarized disputes are “united historical cases of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state” (Jones et al. 1996, pg. 163). MIDs therefore capture varying levels of hostilities between states, ranging from the threat of force to the occurrence of war. Following convention in the literature, I restrict my analysis to MID onsets between the original members of the disputes.

The dependent variable for this study is the dyadic MID onset, which is coded as a 0 if there was no outbreak between a pair of country in a given year and 100 if there was. Again, I multiply a simple indicator by 100 in order to help us avoid small coefficients that can make it difficult to compare substantive effects across variables due to rounding.

The MIDs data also collects information on whether states had revisionist goals in the

disputes. In some MIDs, neither states is coded as being revisionist, while in other cases, both states are considered revisionist. For MIDs involving revisionist states, they further code whether states were territory, regime, or policy revisionist. Here, the variable indicating regime revisionism “identifies the desire by the revisionist state to change the government of another state” (Jones et al. 1996, 178).

While this categorization of MIDs appears to be well-suited for testing the claim that ideological cleavages increases the likelihood of regime conflicts, my own case research of a subset of the MIDs suggests that the codings for regime versus policy MIDs are not particularly reliable. For example, consider MID #2741 between the United States and Panama. This MID captures the U.S. deployment of over 2,000 troops to Panama in 1988 following Manuel Noriega seizing control of the government, with Ronald Regan declaring that the move was to demonstrate support for the former President and the National Civic Crusade that was seeking to remove Noriega from office. Although this looks as if it should be a clear cut case of a “regime conflict,” the MIDs data considers the United States to be policy revisionist instead. There are many other MIDs that are considered to be “policy” MIDs, even though the issue that states are fighting over appears to be their support for domestic opposition. For these reasons, I collapse policy-revisionist MIDs and regime-revisionist MIDs into one category in this analysis and distinguish these MIDs from territorial MIDs.²⁵ In the appendix, I report findings from analyzing the cases a random sample of MIDs for the issue in dispute.

4.2.3 Political Rivalry Data

I use the peace scale data from Goertz, Diehl, and Balas (2016) to measure the overall relations between quality of states. The peace scale is coded on a five-point scale, ranging from “severe rivalry” to “security community.” Lower scores on this scale indicate more hostile relations. To place pairs of states on this scale, the authors combine information on militarized conflicts, whether there are major issue disputes, the quality of diplomatic relations, and existing formalized agreements on issues like trade, travel, etc. The five-point coding can be described as follows:

- Severe Rivalry (0.0) – Relationships with the expectation of future conflict, where states have clear conflicting interests and the threat of military force largely shapes interactions (e.g. India-Pakistan, US-USSR).
- Lesser Rivalry (0.25) – Relationships with fewer instances of military confrontations, but states are still hostile and distrustful of one another (e.g. US-Russia post 1991).

²⁵Note that a MID is considered to be a territorial MID if either dyad member is coded as being territorially revisionist. Similarly, a MID is considered to be a policy/regime MID if either is coded as being policy or regime revisionist. Thus, these codings are not mutually exclusive. A single MID can be both a territory and policy/regime MID.

- Negative Peace (0.50) – Most dyads of countries fall into this category, where “states are neither friends nor enemies per se” (Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016, pg. 37).
- Warm Peace (0.75)– States with high levels of cooperation between them and an expectation that any dispute that does arise will be resolved peacefully (e.g. US-United Kingdom).
- Security Community (1.0) – States with institutionalized peace and in many cases, institutionalized foreign policy integration (e.g. EU members).

I also multiply these values by 100, in order to avoid difficulty interpreting small coefficients.

4.3 Control Variables

I include the following control variables, following standard model specifications found in the international conflict literature: Geographic Contiguity, Major Power Status, and Dyadic Capabilities. Broadly, these variables capture variation in the opportunity or ability of a dyad to experience foreign interventions or international conflict.

Contiguity comes from the Correlates of War (COW) and is a simple indicator for whether dyad partners share a land border or are separated by less than 150 miles of war. *Major* is coded as a “1” if at least one state in the dyad is one of the five post-WWII major powers during the Cold War. Following COW, I also code dyads containing Germany and Japan after 1991 as major power dyads. Data on military capabilities comes from the COW National Capabilities data set. *CINC High* refers to the natural log of the CINC score of the stronger state in the dyad. *CINC Low* is the natural log of the CINC score of the weaker state in the dyad.

I make two modifications to these control variables in the analysis of foreign involvement in civil wars in order to take advantage of the data’s directional features. First, instead of controlling for an indicator of whether either state in the dyad is a major power, I specifically control for whether the potential supporter is a major power (*Major Supporter*). Second, I control for supporter capability ratio, which is the natural log of the ratio of the potential supporters’ CINC score to that of the target state (*S. CINC Ratio*).

To control for temporal trends in the data, I rely on year fixed effects. In the analyses examining MID onset and the development of political rivalries, I also include dyad fixed effects. Using dyad fixed effects means that models are estimating the effects of the explanatory variables using within dyad variation, which helps control for unobserved heterogeneity in conflict-propensity specific to a pair of countries. Including dyad fixed effects makes statistical tests for an association with ideology very “hard,” as states’ ideology does not vary over time and the outcome variables of interest are rare events (Beck and Katz 2001).

I avoid using dyad fixed effects in models examining third-party involvement in civil war to avoid estimating off of outlier cases. While using dyad fixed effects in the analyses of MID onset and the peace scale data causes models to estimate the effect of shared ideology off of any non-trivial dyad that becomes ideologically similar (or becomes ideologically-dissimilar) at some point in the sample, the use of unit fixed effects is even more restrictive when analyzing civil war since dyads only enter the sample if the target country is experiencing a civil conflict in a given year. Therefore, a within dyad approach would only estimate the effect of ideological change in three rare types of dyads: (1) dyads where the target country experiences multiple civil wars between 1945 and 2010, but the ideology of the target state changes between these wars; (2) dyads where the target country experiences multiple civil wars between 1945 and 2010, but the ideology of potential supporter states change between these wars; and (3) dyads where over the course of one civil war in the target country, the ideology of the potential supporter state changes.

Finally, in the analysis addressing alternative explanations, I additionally control for common measures of shared interests—a dyad’s alliance status and UNGA Voting distance. *Alliance* is a simple indicator of whether members of the dyad share a defense pact, neutrality pact, or entente based on the COW Alliance data set. From Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017), *UNGA Distance* is the absolute value of the difference between dyad members’ ideal points, which are calculated from their states’ voting records in the UN General Assembly.

5 Results

Below, I present the main results of this paper, which examines the relationship between ideological similarity and three sets of conflict-related outcomes. I then address several alternative explanations and present other model specifications to illustrate the robustness of these results. Overall, the analysis below suggests that ideological similarity does reduce hostilities between states, specifically through its effect on reducing the likelihood of regime-related disputes.

5.1 Main Results

Figure 1 displays the estimated coefficients and 90% confidence intervals from several OLS regressions, estimating the effect of shared ideology on three sets of dependent variables. The first panel displays the analyses examining the provision of government-side versus rebel-side support during civil war, the second panel displays the analyses examining policy/regime MID onsets versus territorial MID onsets, and the third panel displays the analysis using the peace scale data. For each model, the figure only displays the results for the primary variable of interest, but full regression tables associated with these tests (and those reported later in the paper) can be found in the appendix.

The shaded areas in Figure 1 represent the predicted direction of the effect of shared ideology for each outcome. Specifically, if the arguments presented above are correct, then we would expect to see the following patterns. First, ideological similarity should increase the likelihood of government-side interventions in foreign civil conflicts and decrease the likelihood of rebel-side support. This means that the coefficients on shared ideology should be positive for the model labeled “Gov’t-Side Support” in the first panel and negative for the model labeled “Rebel-Side Support.” Second, the theory suggests that shared ideology should not have a general pacifying effect on international conflict; rather, it should reduce the likelihood of regime-related disputes in particular. This means that the coefficient for shared ideology should be negative in the model labeled “Pol/Reg Onset” in the second panel. By contrast, we would expect a null result on shared ideology in the model examining territorial MID onsets, labeled “Terr Onset” in Figure 1. Since the theory predicts a null result, no area is shaded to represent the predicted effect. Finally, the theory expects that ideologically-similar states should have overall more cooperative relationships than pairs of states that do not legitimate their rule according to similar principles. Therefore, the estimated effect of shared ideology should be positive in the model labeled “Peace Scale” in the third panel, as higher scores indicate more cooperative or friendly relationships.

The results in Figure 1 are consistent with these theoretical predictions. Starting with the first panel, we can see that shared ideology is positively correlated with government-side aid in foreign civil conflicts. In other words, when a government is experiencing significant challenges to its hold on to power at home, foreign states are more likely to provide troops and other forms of military aid to prop up that government if they share ideological ties than they are if these governments did not legitimate their rule according to similar principles. The estimated effect on share ideology is not only statistically significant; it is also substantively meaningful. The average probability of a potential supporting providing aid to a government experiencing civil unrest is 5.15%, and shared ideology is estimated to increase the likelihood of government-side aid by 6.20%. This effect, therefore, represents a 120% increase over the baseline probability of government-side aid. As predicted then, ideologically-similar states appear to be significantly more likely to prop one another up against domestic challengers than pairs of ideologically-dissimilar states.

The model examining rebel-side aid during civil conflicts in Figure 1 is also consistent with the theoretical prediction, with the estimated coefficient on shared ideology being negative and statistically significant. Shared ideology is estimated to reduce the likelihood of rebel-side aid by 5.87%, where the average probability of rebel aid is 8.67%. Thus, the estimated effect represents a 68% decrease over the average probability of rebel aid in the sample population. Thus, ideologically-similar states appear less likely to aid rebel groups against one another, consistent with the theoretical predictions.

Turning away from involvement in foreign civil conflicts, the models in the second panel of Figure 1 examine the likelihood of MID onset between states. As a reminder, the theory

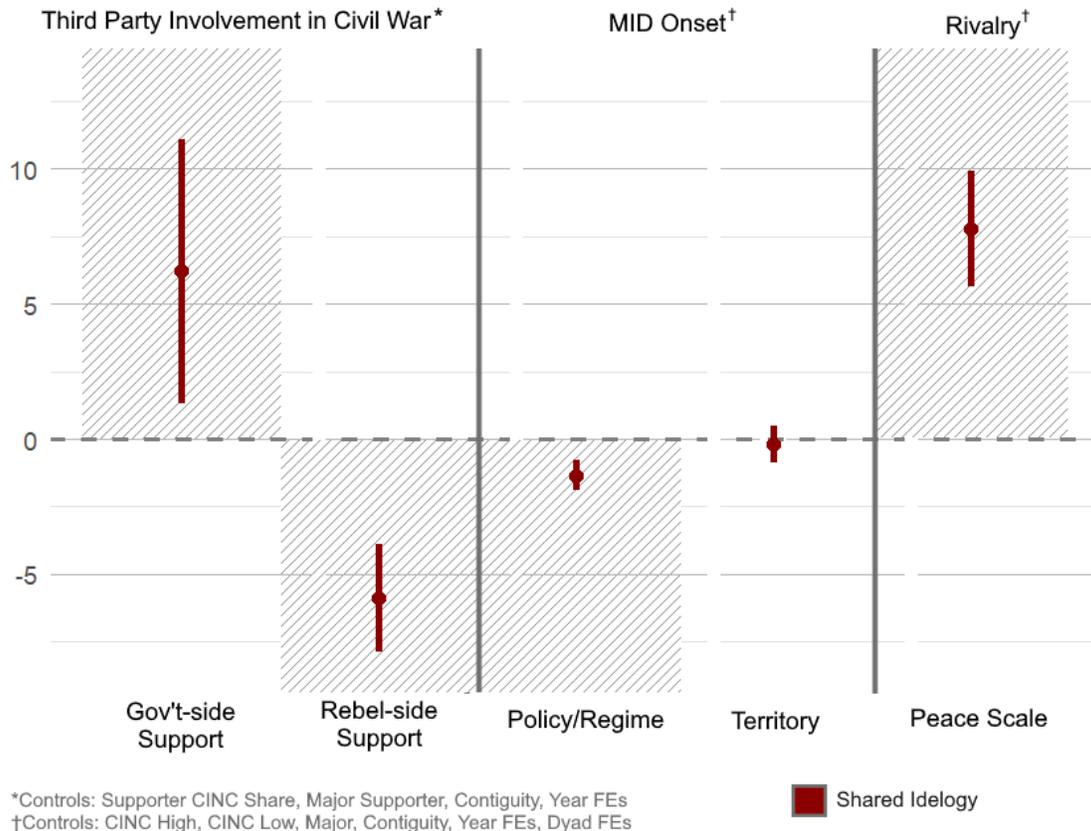


Figure 1: **Estimated Coefficients on Shared Ideology from OLS Regressions of Foreign Intervention, MID Onset, and Rivalry, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for shared ideology for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.1 for full regression tables.

I advance suggests that shared ideology reduces international conflict specifically through reducing the likelihood of regime-related disputes – not that shared ideology has a general pacifying effect. If this is correct, then we would expect ideology to have no discernible effect on the likelihood of territorial disputes, but a negative effect on policy/regime disputes. Model 7 confirms that Shared Ideology is negatively and significantly correlated with policy/regime dispute onset. Notice that this model is estimated with dyad fixed effects, meaning that the effect is estimated off of dyads that experience shifts from sharing an ideology to not sharing an ideology (or vice versa). Shared Ideology is estimated to reduce the likelihood of policy/regime disputes by 1.34%. For perspective, the average probability of a policy/regime MID in the sample is 1.44%, which means that Shared Ideology reduces the relative risk of these disputes by 93%.

The results, however, suggest that Shared Ideology does not significantly reduce the

likelihood of territorial disputes. The estimated coefficient on Shared Ideology for the model examining territorial MID onset is 0.18. While the average probability of a territorial MID is rare (0.7%), the estimated effect is not statistically distinguishable from zero, with the standard error on the coefficient being much larger than the estimated effect. The analysis of MID onsets yield strong support for the theory, suggesting that ideological ties between states do not have a general pacifying effect on international conflict and instead specifically reduce the likelihood of policy/regime disputes.

Finally, do pairs of states that legitimate their rule according to similar principles have less hostile relations overall?²⁶ The final model in the third panel of Figure 1 addresses this question by examining a dyad's score on the peace scale (where higher values represent more cooperative relationships). Like the models examining MID onsets, the peace scale model reported in Figure 1 is estimated using within-dyad variation. The estimated effect is both positive and significant, suggesting that states that share an ideology do have more cooperative relations overall. To give a sense of the substantive effects, the coefficient on models without dyad fixed effects (reported in the appendix) is about the size of the shift in one score from one peace scale category to another (from rivalry to lesser rivalry, or from negative peace to warm peace, and so on). Again, the estimated effect of Shared Ideology is positive and significant at the 0.01 level.

Overall then, this analysis yields strong support for the theoretical predictions. First, pairs of ideologically-similar states are more likely to prop each other up against domestic threats and less likely to use subversion against one another. Second, shared ideology reduces the likelihood of policy/regime disputes, but has little to no effect on the occurrence of territorial MIDs. Third, pairs of states that legitimate their rule according to different principles have overall less hostile relations with one another than pairs of states that do not share common ideological principles.

5.2 Alternative Explanations

The evidence so far suggests that shared ideology does reduce hostilities between states, specifically by making regime-related disputes less likely. However, these results could plausibly arise for reasons unrelated to shared ideology. To strengthen confidence in these results, I address several alternative explanations that in principle might explain some or all of the observed associations: the democratic peace, institutional affinity, US-USSR competition during the Cold War, and shared interests more broadly.

²⁶It is worth reiterating that the peace scale is coded off of a variety of indicators, including the presence or absence of war plans, the existence of militarized disputes, the degree of communication between states, and the state of diplomatic relations. While the peace scale does not explicitly incorporate information on states' ideological ties in their measures, there is a possibility that coders are subconsciously using ideological ties in their judgements of these other sub-components.

5.2.1 A Democratic or Institutional Peace?

Since the results above rely on a collapsed indicator for joint liberal, joint Marxist, and joint monarchy dyads, we might be concerned that the behavior of democratic states are driving these results. In particular, existing scholarship has already documented a robust empirical relationship illustrating the democracies are less likely to experience conflict with other democracies – although there is debate over whether this relationship is a result of institutional constraints (e.g. Lake 1992; Fearon 1994; Bueno de Mequita et al. 1999; Schultz 2001; Reiter and Stam 2002) or the ideological aspects of liberalism (e.g. Doyle 1986; Maoz & Russett 1993; Owen 1994; Risse-Kappen 1995). Importantly, existing research does not make distinct predictions regarding policy/regime disputes as compared to territorial disputes, and the theory I advance in many ways provides an alternative mechanism linking joint democracy to peace. My argument, however, does not only apply to pairs of democratic states, so to have more confidence in the theory, we’d want to see that pairs of monarchies and pairs of Marxist states display the same behavior as pairs of liberal democracies.

Moreover, if pairs of liberal democracies, Marxist regimes, and monarchies do all display similar patterns of behavior, we may wonder if the results are driven by an ideological or institutional affinity. While existing work documents little evidence of an “autocratic peace” similar to the democratic peace, several works hypothesize that institutional similarity can have a pacifying effect on international conflict – particularly through facilitating the formation of in-groups versus out-groups (Letkzian & Souva 2009; Gartzke & Weisiger 2013). Again, it is not obvious that in-group/out-group dynamics would likely predict heterogenous effects of institutional similarity on policy/regime disputes as opposed to territorial ones. However, if the results are capturing the effects of institutional similarity, then we would expect pairs of non-Marxist party regimes, personalist regimes, and military dictatorships to display comparable behavior to pairs of democracies, Marxist regimes, and monarchies.

To investigate both possibilities, I replicate the analysis above using separate indicators for Joint Liberalism, Joint Marxism, Joint Monarchy, Joint Non-Marxist Party, Joint Personalist, and Joint Military dyads. Figure 2 displays the estimated coefficients and confidence intervals from these analyses for the first three types of dyads (i.e. those that I argue share common ideological underpinnings) while Figure 3 displays the estimated coefficients and confidence intervals for the latter three dyad types (i.e. those that are institutionally-similar, but do not necessarily share common ideological underpinnings).²⁷ In both figures, I again shade the regions representing the expected effect of shared ideology. For figure 3, this means that the regions that are shaded represent what the results should look like if those presented above are being driven by an institutional affinity, as opposed to an ideological one.

The first thing to notice about Figure 2 is that the estimated effects on Joint Liberalism, Joint Marxism, and Joint Monarchy are all in the predicted directions for each set of analyses,

²⁷Full regression tables for these figures are included in the appendix.

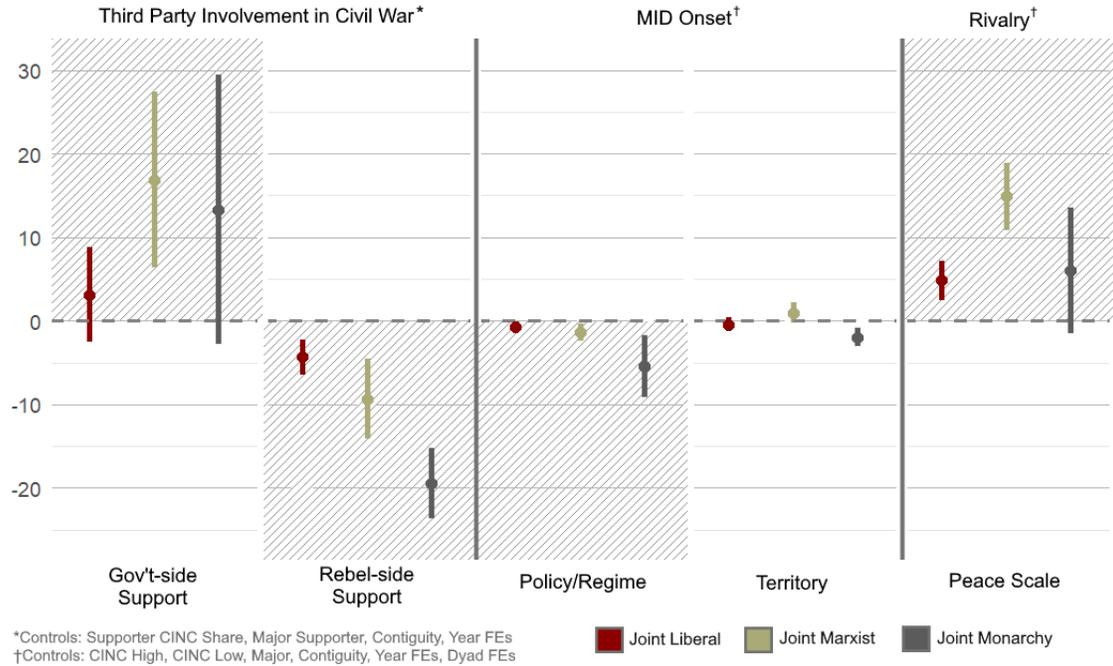


Figure 2: **Estimated Coefficients for Separate Ideological Dyad Indicators from OLS models, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for shared ideology for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.2 for full regression tables.

and these estimates often reach standard levels of statistical significance. In other words, each type of dyad with shared ideological underpinnings behave in a manner consistent with the theoretical predictions: they appear more likely to prop each other up against domestic threats, less likely to resort to subversion against one another, less likely to experience policy/regime disputes, and are overall more cooperative.

The models where the separate indicators do not all reach standard levels of significance, further, are likely limited by power in the statistical tests, which may explain why the combined indicator for shared ideology reaches standard levels of significance in the analyses presented in Figure 1 above. The analyses on intervention in foreign civil conflicts, for instance, is constrained by the fact that liberal democracies, Marxist regimes, and monarchies rarely experience civil conflict.²⁸ Moreover, the analyses of MID onset and the peace scale still include dyad fixed effects. Because there is comparably little temporal variation in these outcomes and ideological shifts are rare, we would expect the standard errors on the individual indicators to grow larger in these analyses. But even with these restrictive tests,

²⁸Only about a third of the sample dyads, for example, was the country experiencing civil unrest a liberal democracy, Marxist, or Monarchical state.

the only estimate that does not reach standard levels of statistical significance is the one on Joint Monarchy in the peace scale analysis.²⁹

Another feature of the analysis in Figure 2 that suggests the behavior of liberal democracies is not exclusively driving the results presented above is that the estimated effects of Joint Liberalism are often much smaller than the estimated coefficients on Joint Marxism and Joint Monarchy. For example, consider the results on policy/regime MID onset in the second panel of Figure 2. When a dyad becomes jointly liberal, the model estimates that there is a 0.72% reduction in the probability of a policy/regime disputes compared to when both states in the dyad were not liberal. This represents a 50% reduction in the relative risk of a policy/regime MID onset compared to the average rate of onset in the sample population. While substantively meaningful, compare this effect to the estimated effects on Joint Marxism and Joint Monarchy. The model estimates Joint Marxism and Joint Monarchy to reduce the risk of policy/regime MID onsets by 1.35% and 5.44%, respectively – effects much larger than that of Joint Liberal. In fact, the magnitude of the coefficients for Joint Liberalism is smaller than those for Joint Marxism and Joint Monarchy across all models reported in Figure 2. These results therefore suggest that the behavior of democratic states towards one another are not driving the evidence presented in the previous section.

Figure 3 provides evidence against a more general institutional peace. If joint liberal, joint Marxist, and joint monarchy dyads were more cooperative due to an institutional affinity as opposed to an ideological one, then we would expect joint non-Marxist party, personalist, and Military regimes to behave similarly. In other words, we would expect the estimated coefficients for these dyads to fall consistently within the shaded regions of Figure 3, but this is not the case. With few exceptions, the estimated coefficients on these institutional dyads do not reach standard levels of statistical significance, meaning that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that these dyads behave similarly to institutionally mixed dyad (the omitted category).

More importantly, the estimated coefficients on these institutional dyads often point in the opposite direction than the coefficients on the shared ideological dyads. For instance, the estimated coefficients on Joint Non-Marxist Party, Joint Personalist, and Joint Military—while not statistically significant—are all positive in the analysis of policy/regime MID onsets, suggesting these dyads are more conflict-prone with one another. Similarly, Joint Non-Marxist Party Dyads are significantly less likely to prop each other up against domestic challengers. Overall then, there is not much evidence that institutional similarity reduces the likelihood of regime-related disputes or fosters cooperation between states more broadly.

²⁹In the appendix, I also include a models examining a dyad’s score on the peace scale without dyad-fixed effects, and the coefficient on joint monarchy is positive and significant.

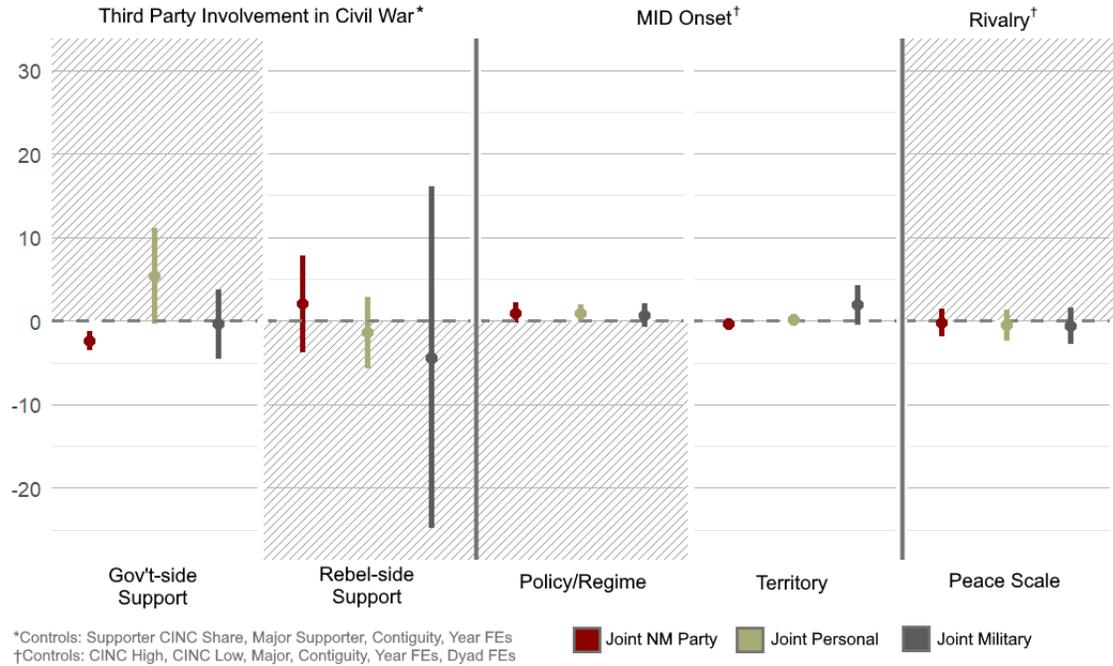


Figure 3: **Estimated Coefficients for Separate Institutional Dyad Indicators from OLS Models, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for shared ideology for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.2 for full regression tables.

5.2.2 US-USSR Cold War Competition?

Are these results just illustrating a realist story about US-USSR competition during the Cold War? If so, what are these results teaching us that’s new about international conflict?

Before moving to additional tests to examine if the results are primarily due to U.S.-Soviet Cold War competition, it is important to address what realist theories predict about regime disputes. In many ways, realist – or at least structural realist – theories say very little about why states fight over the regimes of other countries. For instance, it is puzzling why states would care about the leadership and institutions of other countries from a strict structural realist position: because states interests are given from the distribution of power and other system-level features, states’ foreign policies should not depend upon who is in power or the types of institutions the state has. As a result, intervening in the regime of another state should do little to extract a more favorable foreign policy position from that state.

Of course, the historical record demonstrates that states frequently intervene in the domestic politics of other countries, suggesting that states do have some significant preferences

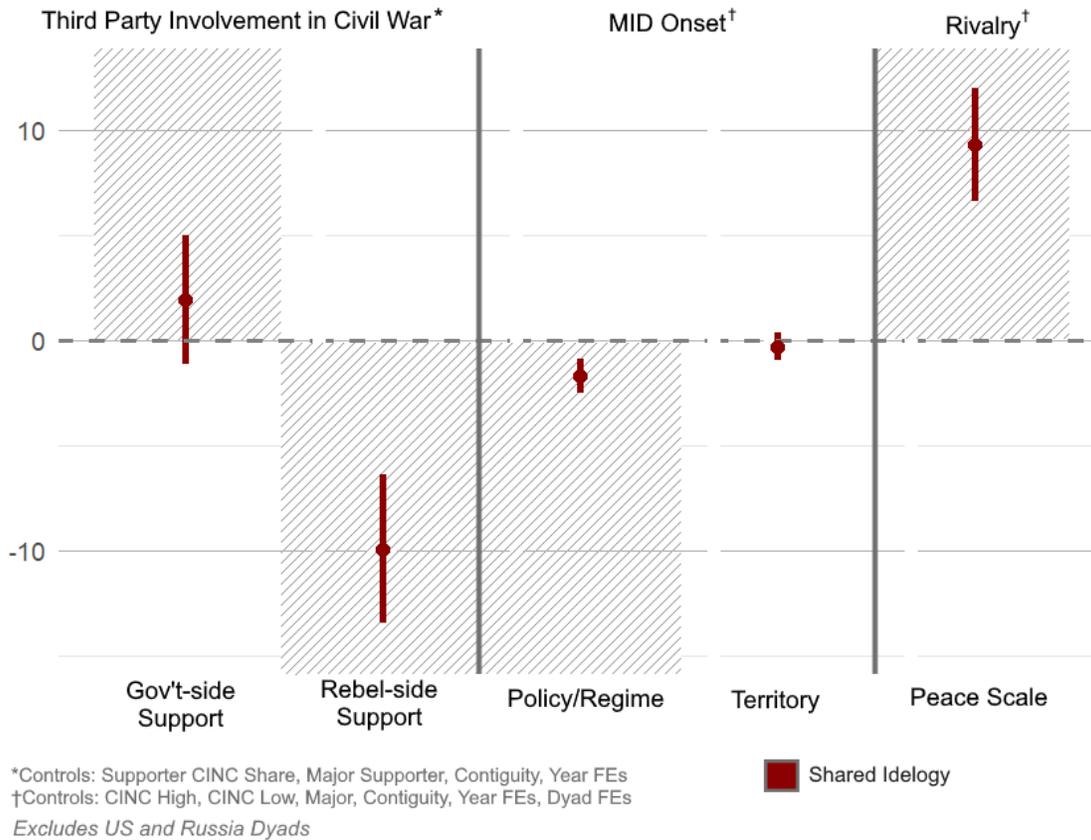


Figure 4: **Estimated Coefficients for Shared Ideology from OLS Models, Nontrivial Dyads (excluding US and Russia) 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for shared ideology for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.3 for full regression tables.

over the regimes of foreign governments. So, what else might a less strict realist interpretation predict? If we grant that changing the regimes of other countries is a tool for extracting policy concessions from target countries (another alternative explanation I address in the next section), structural realist accounts still do not clearly predict that the U.S. and the Soviet Union would frequently engage in regime disputes to promote liberalism or communism. Waltz (1979), for example, argues that a bipolar system is the most stable, in part, because changes in the alignment of smaller states do little to upset the balance of power. For Waltz and many other realists, U.S. interventions in countries like Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism, then, were unusual deviations that went against the prescriptions of a realist foreign policy.

The point of this discussion is not to re-litigate where realist theories are unable to explain various aspects of state behavior. Rather, it is to illustrate that many of the historical facts

about U.S. and Soviet behavior during the Cold War that we take as given or obvious are more puzzling than we often admit. Indeed, one purpose of this study is to take more seriously the reasons why the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in so many regime-related disputes. Nonetheless, the theory I advance does not exclusively apply to U.S. and Soviet behavior, so it is important to examine whether the results apply more broadly.

I take two approaches to investigate this possibility. Most directly, I replicate the analyses reported in Figure 1, dropping any dyad containing the United States or Russia. The estimated coefficients and confidence intervals on Shared Ideology from these regressions are reported in Figure 4. These results are very similar to the main findings presented in Figure 1. The estimated coefficients are all in the predicted direction, are substantively meaningful, and in most cases, statistically significant. The major difference between the results presented in Figure 4 and those presented in Figure 1 is that the coefficient on Shared Ideology for government-side aid loses statistical significance. Thus, these results suggest that the estimated effects of shared ideology are not driven primarily by the behavior of the United States and Soviet during the Cold War.

The second approach I use to investigate the extent to which Cold War competition explains the results on ideology is to restrict the analysis to contiguous dyads. By excluding non-contiguous dyads, I drop instances of US and Soviet involvement (as well as involvement by other major powers) in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, which means we can be more confident that the results are not driven by major power competition to promote or prevent the spread of communism around the world. I report these regressions, as well as the full regression tables for the analysis excluding the United States and Russia, in the appendix. The results restricting to contiguous dyads are nearly identical to those excluding US and Russian dyads reported above. Overall then, the results remain consistent with the theoretical predictions, suggesting again that the results cannot be written off as the solely the result of Cold War competition and major power efforts to promote or prevent the spread of communism.

5.2.3 Shared Interests?

A final, but related alternative explanation is that shared ideology is proxying for some type of shared foreign policy interests that are not related to the effects of shared ideology hypothesized in Section 3 above. And further, it is these shared interests that are causing the observed behavior by joint ideological dyads. In other words, the apparent relationship between shared ideology and international conflict is spurious. This “shared interest” argument is a prominent critique of the democratic peace (eg. Gowa 1993; Gartzke 2000), and it usually relies on arguments about the structure of the Cold War (addressed above) to explain why regime type and interests happen to be correlated. Outside of arguments about Cold War competition, however, it is not obvious why ideology would proxy for unrelated foreign policy interests. To be a compelling alternative explanation, one would need to provide a

clear argument for why pairs of liberal democracies, pairs of Marxist regimes, and pairs of Monarchies would all have similar foreign policy interests that is unrelated to these states sharing ideological ties with one another.

Indeed, the theory I advance suggests that ideology informs a state’s interests in the political regimes of other countries, offering two possible mechanisms – the possibility of normative preferences or concerns about political contagion – that predict states have foreign policy interests in success of similar ideologies and failure of alternative ones. My argument therefore suggests that common measures of shared interests (like alliances or UNGA voting distance) are likely the consequence of having a shared ideology, rather than being spuriously correlated. Further, since it is not possible to separate out ideology-related interests from other material interests in these measures, controlling for them would introduce post-treatment bias into the regression analysis (Angrist and Pishke 1998).³⁰

Nevertheless, I estimate additional sets of analyses controlling for common measures of shared interests. Figure 5 displays the estimated coefficients and confidence intervals for Shared Ideology when controlling for the distance between dyad member’s ideal points in the UN General Assembly. The results are again very similar to the main results reported in Figure 1. Shared Ideology is positively correlated with the provision of government-side aid during civil conflicts and negatively correlated with the provision of aid to rebel groups. Further, joint ideological dyads appear to have fewer policy/regime disputes than dyads where states do not legitimate their rule according to similar principles, but there is no effect of shared ideology on territorial dispute onset. Finally, shared ideological dyads appear to have overall more cooperative relations. All effects are statistically significant.

I also include full regression tables for models that control for shared interests by including an alliance indicator instead of UN ideal point distance in the appendix. Both sets of analyses yield similar results, although Shared Ideology loses statistical significance when examining the provision of government-side support in foreign civil wars. All in all, these analyses suggests that the estimated effects of Shared Ideology are not a result of spurious correlations with shared foreign policy interests.

It is important to stress that my argument about the impact of shared ideology *is* a “shared foreign policy interests” argument. The main hypotheses is that shared ideology is an important source of the content of the by-itself empty reference to “shared foreign policy interests.” There of course may be other sources of common or divergent policy interests – I find that UN distance generally increases the risk of regime-related disputes in the models discussed above, so these measures may be picking up some idiosyncratic or systematic aspects that are separate from shared ideology. See Appendix A.4 for full regression tables for these models, as well as ones that include controls for Alliance to measure shared foreign policy interests.

³⁰This is especially problematic for UNGA voting, since votes in the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly take place in November and December and thus likely after many recorded dyadic ideological shifts.

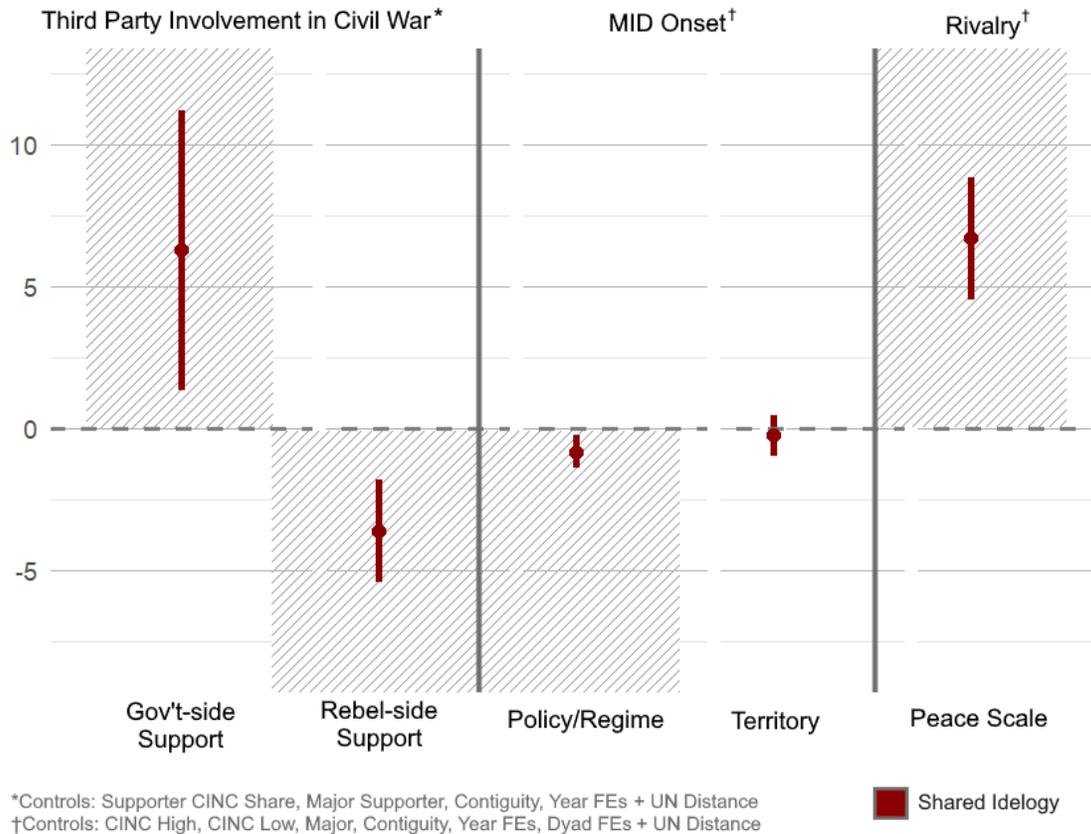


Figure 5: **Estimated Coefficients for Shared Ideology from OLS Models controlling for UN Distance, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for shared ideology for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.4 for full regression tables.

To further clarify the role of conflicting foreign foreign policy preferences and ideological ties in encouraging regime-related disputes, I estimate the effect of these measures of foreign policy interests on subsets of dyads that share ideological ties versus dyads that do not necessarily share ideological ties. In particular, the theory suggests that concerns about political contagion can also discourage regime-related disputes among ideologically-similar states by making these governments less willing to use subversion to pursue their other foreign policy goals. Therefore, while we would expect conflicting foreign policy preferences to be a good predictor of regime-related disputes among states without common ideological underpinnings, we would expect these measures to have less explanatory power in dyads where states share ideological ties with one another. That is, the effect of other, indirectly measured foreign policy disagreements should be conditional on whether two states share ideology.

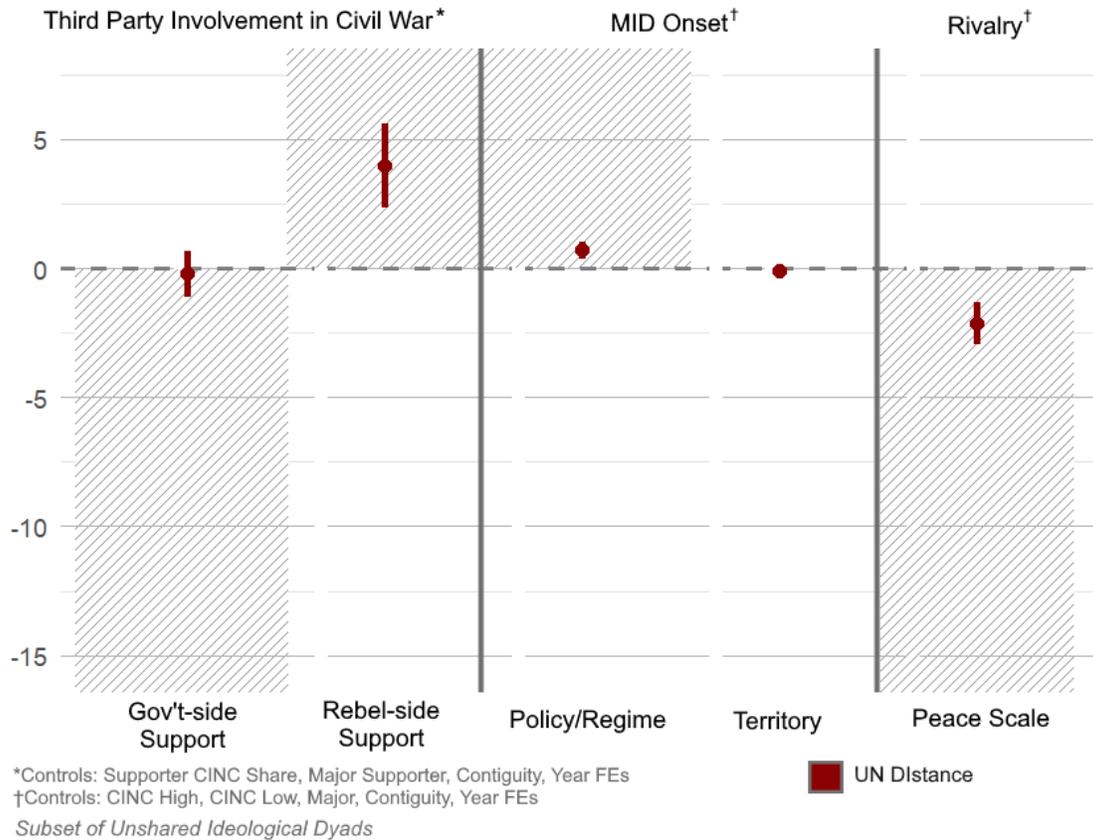


Figure 6: **Estimated Coefficients for UN Distance from OLS Regressions using subset of Unshared Ideological Dyads, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for UN Distance for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.5 for full regression tables.

Figure 6 displays the estimated coefficients on UN Distance for the various outcome variables when examining dyads that are not known to share common legitimating principles (e.g. institutionally-mixed dyads or pairs of non-Marxist party, personalist, and military regimes).³¹ Figure 7 display the estimated coefficients for dyads that do share common ideological underpinnings.³² Unlike other analyses presented earlier in the paper, none of the reported models in Figures 6 and 7 include dyad fixed effects. The purpose of dropping dyad fixed effects from these regressions is to make the analyses more generous toward detecting an effect of conflicting foreign policy preferences in either of the two subsets.

³¹As a shorthand, I refer to these dyads as “Unshared Ideological dyads,” although – as explained above – this subset does likely contain some dyads that share other kinds of ideological ties.

³²In the appendix, I replicate these analyses using Alliance as the measure of shared versus conflicting foreign policy interests, and the results are largely the same.

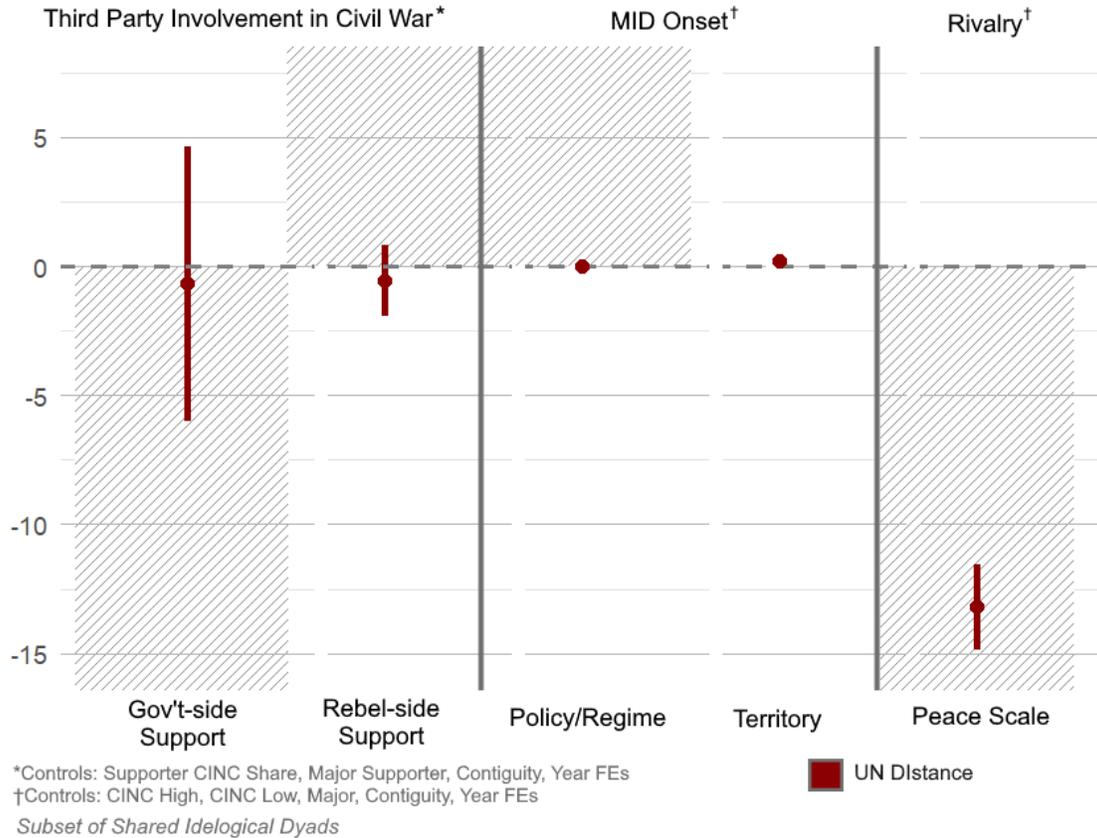


Figure 7: **Estimated Coefficients for UN Distance from OLS Regressions using subset of Shared Ideological Dyads, Nontrivial Dyads 1946-2010.** Shaded areas represent predict direction of effect for UN Distance for each outcome. Error bars show the 90% confidence intervals, and p-values are two-tailed. For analyses of civil war intervention and MID onset, estimates show the predicted change in the outcome’s probability if states share ideological ties. See appendix A.5 for full regression tables..

Starting with Figure 6, UN Distance appears to be an overall good predictor of regime-related conflicts for dyads that do not necessarily share ideological ties with one another. In particular, as the distance between dyad member’s UNGA ideal points increases, the likelihood of government-side aid decreases, the likelihood of rebel-side aid increases, and the likelihood of policy/regime MIDs increases. Similarly, dyads with more distant UNGA ideal points are overall more hostile towards one another than those with more closer ideal points. These results—excluding that on the provision of government-side support in civil conflicts—reach standard levels of significance. Thus, conflicting foreign policy preferences appear to be consistently correlated with regime-related conflicts between governments that do not necessarily legitimate their rule using similar principles.

However, this is not true among dyads with common ideological underpinnings. Figure 7 illustrates that there are only weak correlations between UN Distance and the outcomes

related to regime disputes.³³ Increasing the distance between states' UNGA ideal points does not significantly affect the likelihood of these states' propping each other up against domestic challengers, providing aid to rebel groups that target one another, or experiencing a policy/regime MID. In substantive terms, moving from the minimum observed UN Distance among dyads that experience a policy/regime MID onset to the maximum observed distance only increases the risk of a policy/regime MID by about two-hundredths of a percentage points.³⁴ Importantly, UN Distance is negative and significantly correlated with a dyad's score on the peace scale. This suggests that there are still important hostilities between states that share ideological ties but have significantly different foreign policy preferences. Taken with the null results on third-party involvement in civil conflicts and policy/regime MID onset, this finding suggests that these states are just not likely to resort to subversion to pursue these foreign policy disputes – consistent with the theoretical predictions.

6 Conclusion

The past few years have witnessed the return of major power rivalries as a defining threat to international cooperation and stability. Russia, for instance, has intervened in several elections across Europe and the United States, and in doing so, has exacerbated existing political divides in democratic societies. While China has not undertaken similar efforts against liberal regimes, they are helping shore up autocratic countries across the globe through the sharing of information control technologies. Existing research says surprisingly little about why states conflict so frequently over the leadership and institutions of other countries. Even the studies that have examined states' use of subversion have overwhelmingly treated regime disputes as a product of other foreign policy disagreements, rather than a source of international conflict in their own right.

This study sought to address this gap by developing a new theory linking ideological cleavages between states to the occurrence of regime conflicts. First, some states may have ideological preferences for changing the leadership and institutions of other countries to be more like their own, and as a result, ideologically-dissimilar states are more likely to be suspicious of each other's intentions. Second, ideologically-dissimilar states may end up in regime-related conflicts by using subversion to prevent political contagion. Ideologically-similar countries, by contrast, face pressure to prop each other up against domestic threats, and they are less willing to use subversion to pursue other foreign policy goals.

To test this argument, I conducted three primary sets of analysis – examining foreign

³³Replicating this analysis with logit regressions returns some statistically significant coefficients on UN Distance and Alliance, but the substantive effect sizes are not meaningful. See pages 19-20 of the appendix for more.

³⁴Moving from the minimum observed UN distance in shared ideological dyads that provide government aid to the maximum observed UN distance decreases the likelihood of aid by about 4 percentage points, but the standard error on the estimated coefficient is very large.

involvement in civil wars, the occurrence of militarized conflicts, and the development of political rivalries. The results of these tests are largely consistent with the presented arguments. Pairs of ideologically-similar countries are less likely to intervene against one another in civil conflicts and are instead more likely to come to each others' aid. Moreover, governments that legitimate their rule according to different principles are more likely to conflict with one another, and these ideological cleavages only increase the risk of policy and regime disputes. In other words, ideological divisions do not have an effect on territorial disputes, suggesting that there is not a general pacifying effect of shared principles as other theories of ideological similarity predict (Haas (2005)). Finally, there is evidence that ideological cleavages between states have an overall negative effect on the quality of political relations. States that do not share common ideological underpinnings are more hostile towards one another than pairs of ideologically-similar states.

In all, this work makes three contributions to the study of international conflict. First, it opens up the black box of conflicting preferences and illustrates the shortcomings of pooling together different types of disputes states can have. Just as recent scholarship on territorial disputes has illustrated the promise of taking the issues states are fighting over seriously, this research highlights the case for studying the sources of conflicting preferences in regime-related disputes. Second, this project advances our understanding of the relationship between ideology and conflict by clarifying that ideology matters because it is the basis of regime legitimacy and by providing new quantitative evidence of systematic ideological effects beyond those stemming from liberalism. Finally, this research suggests a different way of thinking about external threats in the international system. In particular, it directs our attention to thinking more seriously about how states and other international developments can threaten leaders' abilities to hold on to power at home.

There are several possible avenues for future research. For instance, the results here suggest that ideological cleavages between states are an important predictor of regime conflicts, and future research could delve deeper into testing the conditions under which the suggested mechanisms are likely to operate. Moreover, while this study examined the binding power of shared ideology, it is plausible that sharing a common ideological threat can induce many of the same effects. Countries that face similar ideological threats may also be more likely to prop each other up against domestic challenges, and they also may be more reluctant to resort to subversion for pursuing their other foreign policy disputes. More broadly, this research illustrates the promise of studying regime disputes as a unique type of international conflict.

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