Fear of rejection: The puzzle of unaccepted mediation offers in international conflict

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Abstract
How do factors that influence mediation offers affect belligerent behavior? The circumstances that attract potential mediators are not the same as those that make mediation desirable to belligerents. Third parties offer mediation when the conflict is intense, generation of an agreement is likely and they have ties to the conflict. However, mediation is less acceptable to belligerents in these circumstances. This dynamic creates a dilemma; the characteristics that make third parties more forthcoming with mediation offers simultaneously make disputants more likely to reject mediation proposals. A better understanding of this strategic process can help scholars and policy-makers better determine how to supply mediation where it is needed most.

Keywords
Conflict resolution, expected utility, mediation

The rejection of offers to mediate international disputes presents a puzzle. Why would disputants reject third-party offers when many of the costs of mediation are borne by the mediator? Despite

† To our great sadness, Professor Jacob Bercovitch passed away during the preparation of this manuscript. We very much miss his leadership on the study of international dispute mediation, his valuable contributions as a coauthor and his wonderful friendship.

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the high likelihood of failure, dispute mediators contribute time and resources, and risk their reputation as peacemakers. Rejection of mediation offers can be costly to disputants in an international environment that strongly disapproves of violent conflict. The reality is that the occurrence of mediation may itself be an achievement, but the chances of further success are far from assured.

We examine why mediation occurs in some conflicts and not in others by asking how the factors that influence mediation offers affect belligerent behavior. We argue that the circumstances that make a conflict attractive to a potential mediator differ from those that make mediation attractive to belligerents. Third parties offer mediation when the conflict is intense, when generation of an agreement is likely and when they have ties to the conflict. Mediation is less acceptable, however, for belligerents under these conditions. Both mediators and disputants act strategically, but this strategic behavior leads them to react to similar factors differently. While existing research discusses mediation occurrence, we offer a more complete picture of those conflicts that go without mediation. Exploring rejected mediation offers creates an understanding of variation in conflict management behavior with important implications for how best to encourage mediation.

**Understanding international mediation**

Mediation is a method of international conflict management whereby a third party assists the disputing parties in negotiating their conflict. Mediation differs from other forms of conflict management in several important ways. First, unlike military intervention, which uses force to help one side win (Melin and Koch, 2010), or economic sanctions, which encourage peace through limiting financial interactions (Drury and Chan, 2000), mediation must be voluntarily acceptable to both disputants (Beardsley, 2011). Second, unlike binding arbitration, mediation does not require an advance commitment to accept an outcome (Gent and Shannon, 2010; Mitchell and Powell, 2011).

While we focus on the puzzle of mediation rejection, an informative body of research that addresses mediation occurrence more generally has developed. This scholarship helps us understand the types of conflicts that are likely to be mediated. For example, Greig (2005) examined the incidence of mediation in enduring rivalries, finding that mediation is likely when the costs of inaction are high and the likelihood of peace is low. Mediation is more likely in interstate, as compared with civil, wars (Melin and Svensson, 2009). Third parties avoid mediating intractable conflicts and account for previous mediation efforts and their outcomes (Rost and Greig, 2011). More generally, this literature finds that mediators act strategically and try to maximize the expected benefits and minimize the anticipated costs of mediation (Bercovitch and Gartner, 2006; Leng, 2000; Greig, 2005; Regan and Stam, 2000).

Some third parties are more likely to act as mediators. Biases and ties are likely to draw in third parties, increasing the likelihood that actors will become involved since they have interests at stake (Favretto, 2009; Maundi et al., 2006; Melin, 2011) and are seen as more committed to peacemaking (Crescenzi et al., 2011; Kydd, 2003). Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) show that a third party’s reputation as an effective mediator plays an important role in the number of mandates they receive.

We build on this mediation incidence research theoretically, empirically and analytically. Theoretically, we develop arguments for when disputants reject the presence of a mediator, providing an understanding of the circumstances when mediation does not occur. The underlying causal mechanisms that lead to the rejection of mediation offers will differ from those that prompt mediation offers. Empirically, we examine the potential for state mediation in all violent disputes since the Second World War, helping to identify the roles that state relationships, the mediation environment and conflict characteristics play in mediation offers and rejections. Finally, analytically, we
directly address the selection effects. Factors motivating third parties and disputants to partake in mediation activities will affect the outcomes of their efforts, creating a “selection bias” (Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006; Svensson, 2006). “Selection bias is likely to be an important issue in the study of international mediation because it is reasonable to expect that, rather than selecting cases for mediation randomly, disputants and third-parties tie their decision to mediate to the chances for its success” (Greig, 2005: 249). While scholars have studied the question of “Who mediates?”—as a precursor to mediation success and an element of the selection process—they have not explicitly modeled the selection process they identified as critical. We offer that extension here.

For mediation to occur, three conditions must be met: (1) the disputants must agree to work with a mediator; (2) the disputants must find a mutually acceptable third party; and (3) the third party must be willing to become involved in the conflict (Beardsley, 2011: 18). Rarely are all of these conditions met. As a result, the mediation process exhibits variation at all stages. While particular actors may be more or less likely to offer mediation, the occurrence of mediation varies both absolutely (the number of mediators or mediation efforts per year) and relatively (the ratio of mediation or mediators to conflicts per year). Mediation is neither automatic (not every dispute is mediated), nor in constant supply (mediators are not always mediating). Mediation is the result of strategic choices by disputants and third parties that cause the allocation of mediators to be asymmetrical. Some conflicts attract more mediators than others (Svensson and Wallensteen, 2010), creating “under-provision of mediation even when the combatants desire it” (Beardsley, 2011: 50).

We assume that third parties anticipate costs and benefits prior to offering mediation, as do disputants when considering mediation offers (Mitchell, 1993). While we observe either Mediation or No-Mediation empirically, there are three different possible No-Mediation outcomes (see Figure 1). In Cell 1, there is neither mediation supply nor demand. Cell 2 represents instances that lack mediator supply, wherein the disputants might have been amenable to working with a third-party mediator had one been available. Cell 3 represents instances lacking mediation demand as one or both disputants were unwilling to work with a third party. The literature generally treats these different outcomes identically. While scholars have examined the request for, offer of and occurrence of mediation (Greig, 2005), we have little theoretical or empirical understanding of variation in disputants’ rejection of mediation offers. Ignoring the variation in conflicts that go without mediation risks generating an incomplete understanding of mediation decisions.

States, regional and international organizations, and individuals all mediate violent disputes (Aall, 2007; Chigas, 2007; Touval, 2003). We expect that mediation works differently across mediator types (Gartner, 2011). For example, belligerents are less likely to turn down mediation offers from an organization to which they aspire to gain membership (Svensson and Wallensteen, 2010). The current literature includes many studies of international organization/UN mediation (Hansen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disputants</th>
<th>Third party</th>
<th>No desire to mediate</th>
<th>Desire mediation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No desire</td>
<td>1. Neither mediation invitation nor offer</td>
<td>2. Mediation invitation only</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desire</td>
<td>3. Mediation offer only</td>
<td>4. Mediation</td>
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Figure 1. Disaggregating the occurrence and nonoccurrence of mediation.
et al., 2008; Shannon, 2009) and an increasing amount of research on regional governmental organization mediation (Gartner, 2011; Olson and Pearson, 2002; Wehr and Lederach, 1991), but few studies of state mediation (exceptions include Aydin, 2010; Melin, 2011; Rost and Greig, 2011). The comparative lack of analyses of state mediation is especially troubling because states are the most common type of mediator.

State mediators differ from other types of mediators in both the reason for offering mediation and the belligerent’s reason for acceptance or rejection. In contrast to states, international organizations are frequently tasked with peacemaking as a part of their charter (e.g. the African Union and Organization of American States; Gartner, 2013). Despite this, international organizations must overcome individualism and political struggles between members to build consensus before carrying out a mission (Abbott and Snidal, 1998). In contrast, state mediators are less able to demonstrate impartiality and more likely to have a stake in the conflict’s outcome. National interests and potential domestic ramifications of failed efforts mean states are more constrained than intergovernmental organizations and must be more strategic in choosing to intervene (Aydin, 2010). States may therefore have a lower baseline likelihood of acceptance as mediators than nonstate actors. Additionally, states have more policy instruments at their disposal than international organizations. This allows them to select one or more methods by which they can react to external conflict (including support of one side, see Melin and Koch, 2010; Siverson and Starr, 1991; Werner and Lemke, 1997).

Empirically, the operationalization of interests, ties and probability of success for nonstate third parties entails a vastly different set of variables than those of state actors. For example, the interests of potential mediators are frequently analyzed using trade ties (Kathman, 2010). Capturing the interests of international organizations using this metric without treating them simply as a sum of their parts proves challenging.

**Theory**

How do the factors that influence mediation offers affect belligerents’ behavior? Third-party mediators are dependent upon the belligerent’s acceptance of their offer to mediate. Sometimes third parties wish to be involved but are not wanted by the disputants. Rejection is likely, however, in any conflict environment where suspicion and mistrust abound (Svensson and Wallensteen, 2010). For example, when the conflict between the USA and Iraq escalated in February 1998, several states volunteered to act as mediators, but the disputants rejected these offers. At the last minute, when a confrontation seemed inevitable, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered his services, and his offer was accepted (Wedgwood, 1998: 725). The elective nature of mediation indicates that the offer itself is only a part of the process.

Disputants consider the costs and benefits of mediation and will agree to mediation if they expect it to generate a more favorable outcome for themselves compared with continued conflict (Wilkenfeld et al., 2003; Zartman and Touval, 1992). Disputants consider the costs of a conflict when deciding to work with a mediator (Greig and Regan, 2008; Melin, 2011). Mediation can be used to gain time or to avoid the choice between escalation and making concessions (Kleiboer, 1996). This was probably the reason why Iran and Iraq agreed to mediation in 1975 (Lieb, 1985). Mediation can also help policy-makers save face internationally and domestically when making concessions, as was probably the motivation behind Iran’s acceptance of Algerian mediation during the US hostage crisis (Sick, 1985). Agreeing to mediation can be costly for disputants in certain circumstances, as openness to mediation can send a signal of low resolve to one’s adversary. When the costs of involving a mediator outweigh the benefits of doing so, third parties will reject
mediation offers. Rejected offers may reflect either a rejection of mediation more generally or a rejection of the specific mediator. Mediation rejection occurs when one of the disputants deems mediation activities undesirable. Belligerents’ preferences for continued fighting over mediation depends on conflict factors. The intensity and potential for escalation that attract mediation offers have an inverse effect on acceptance offers. While the difficulty of resolving territorial disputes indicates these conflicts are the ones that “need” mediation, they involve disputants that are the most likely to turn it down. This rejection is due to the importance of signaling resolve and a willingness to continue fighting in territorial disputes (Huth, 1998). Wiegand (2011: 110) writes that, “because territorial disputes are the most salient type of interstate disputes and the most likely to escalate to war, it is logical that states involved in territorial disputes would be particularly concerned with signaling resolve to adversaries”. One way to signal resolve is to reject mediation.

These same high-stakes disputes are more likely to attract third-party mediation offers. Reputation building requires that mediators take on disputes seen as both important and hard to resolve. Bercovitch and Jackson (2001) find that mediation tends to occur in disputes that are complex, intense and long. Third parties are more likely to mediate conflicts that are less likely to be resolved bilaterally between the two disputing parties and will lead to deadly combat. Research shows that territorial disputes are especially likely to escalate (Huth, 2000) and lead to costly fighting (Wiegand, 2011). This potential for escalation and cost will probably increase both the visibility of the conflict and the probability that it attracts mediation offers (Allee and Huth, 2006; Chiozza and Choi, 2003; Hensel et al., 2008; Huth, 1996; Huth and Allee, 2002).

Hypothesis 1. Territorial disputes are more likely to lead to mediation offers and rejection. An ongoing war attracts mediation offers while also increasing the likelihood of their rejection. States are most interested in mediating disputes that have escalated to violence and involve casualties since these conflicts are most likely to gain international attention. Research shows that high-cost conflicts increase mediation occurrence (Beardsley, 2010). Positive reputation gains from stopping a war exceed those of resolving a more peaceful conflict. However, wars are the result of mutual optimism: the sides have conflicting estimates of their bargaining power and an inability to agree on a peaceful reconciliation (Blainey, 1988; Slantchev and Tarar, 2010). Belligerents that have decided to fight a war clearly demonstrate a lack of interest in pursuing peaceful means of conflict resolution. Disputants are also unlikely to see the need for a mediator as long as conflict costs and estimates of the likelihood of success remain unclear (Regan and Aydin, 2006). All of these factors indicate that disputes that escalate to war involve a particular pair of disputants who are unlikely to voluntarily accept a cooperative and peaceful process of reconciliation.

Hypothesis 2. Violent disputes are more likely to lead to mediation offers and rejection.

Mediator rejection occurs when one of the disputants deems the mediator unacceptable. There are instances where the states in a conflict may be open to third-party mediation but are not willing to work with the actor that has offered mediation. Trust is necessary for third parties to be deemed acceptable as mediators. Trust is “a belief that the other side is trustworthy, that is, willing to reciprocate cooperation, and mistrust is a belief that the other side is untrustworthy, or prefers to exploit one’s cooperation” (Kydd, 2005: 3). Disputants will only work with and share strategic information with third parties they consider trustworthy. Dyadic relationships help to reassure disputants that a third party can be trusted.
Ties between the third party and disputants may also reflect the strategic interests of the third party that may be at stake, thereby increasing the benefits of involvement. Actors are more likely to offer to mediate when there are third-party interests (Greig and Regan, 2008) and an expectation of future interactions with disputants (Rauchhaus, 2006). Ties play an important role in the occurrence of civil war mediation (Favretto, 2009) and international conflict management (Melin, 2011).

Hypothesis 3. Third party–disputant ties increase mediation offers and acceptances.

This hypothesis may seem counter-intuitive. Theoretically, network dynamics suggest that those states with closer ties to disputants are more likely to support one or the other with arms, funding, sanctuary and support. This bias would greatly limit their appeal to the disputant whose efforts they oppose (Rauchhaus, 2006; Terris and Maoz, 2005), making them less likely to be seen as a mediator and more likely as an ally or enemy. Thus, ties cut both ways: connectivity simultaneously increases the probability of a mediation offer (given the higher levels of strategic interests in the dispute) and increases the probability of being seen as biased (increasing the chances of rejection of the mediation offer). We explore these competing effects directly by examining the influence of different types of connections on mediation offers and rejections.

Belligerents, especially those involved in highly visible conflicts, often have multiple mediation offers. It is therefore important to account for the conflict management options that disputants face when deciding to accept a mediation offer. This is especially vital since disputants have been shown to forum shop, looking for the most favorable method of peaceful resolution before agreeing (Wiegand and Powell, 2001). Conflicting actors want to obtain the best deal possible for themselves in mediation (Terris and Maoz, 2005). Disputes thus potentially create mediation markets where disputants can choose among competing offers. Belligerents who prefer peacemaking to conflict might reject one offer of mediation for another. We anticipate that evidence of other mediation options makes mediation offers more likely to be rejected.

Hypothesis 4. The presence of mediation alternatives increases the likelihood of mediation rejection.

Finally, third parties will take into account the likely outcome of their efforts before offering to mediate. Research shows that mediators assess their ability to transform a conflict prior to becoming involved and only make offers if they believe that their efforts will be effective (Touval and Zartman, 1996). Mediators take the likelihood of success into account and avoid intractable conflicts that are likely to persist, as actors are more sensitive to risks in these cases (Bercovitch and Gartner, 2006; Rost and Greig, 2011). Mediators anticipate that dyads previously engaged in disputes are less likely to reach a settlement. Therefore, we expect these dyads to be less likely to receive mediation offers.

Hypothesis 5. A history of conflict between the disputants decreases the likelihood of mediation offers.

When a third party perceives that they can help to generate an agreement, it is then that they are the most likely to offer their services. This expectation seems to be in contradiction to findings that mediated disputes are less likely to result in peace. However, this argument only claims that disputants will pay the costs of mediation for the more intractable disputes that are harder to resolve (Bercovitch and Gartner, 2006; Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006). These studies only analyze the observed strategic interaction of mediation once it is offered, accepted and acted upon. In contrast,
our expectation speaks strictly to the likelihood that a mediator will offer their services, and that this will happen only if a mediator perceives that an agreement is possible.

Rejecting offers to mediate is a way for disputants to signal their resolve to fight and optimism about their chances for success. We therefore expect to observe rejected offers more often in intensely violent and territorial-based disputes. Disputants in these conditions are less open to third-party mediation, regardless of the offering party; they are rejecting mediation rather than the mediator. In other circumstances, third parties may not appear trustworthy to the disputants owing to their relationship to one of the disputants, or other offers may be more appealing, in which case the disputants are rejecting the mediator rather than mediation. We therefore expect mediation offers to be more likely to be rejected in violent conflicts over territory, when the disputants have reason not to trust the offering state, and when other offers are present. However, we expect similar circumstances to simultaneously increase the likelihood that states will offer to mediate. We test our expectations in the following section.

Research design

We employed a dataset of post-Second World War third-party conflict mediation efforts that includes all *Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes* (Maoz, 2005). For every year in which a conflict is ongoing, we constructed an observation of each disputant and a potential mediator. We defined a population of potential mediators based on theoretical arguments about likely mediators. To be included, potential mediators must be at least one of the following (according to the *Politically Relevant Dyads* data; Maoz, 1996): (1) a major or regional power with both the resources and the responsibility to manage conflicts; (2) a geographically contiguous state, regularly interacting with the disputants and disproportionately affected by a neighboring conflict; or (3) a “reputational manager”, having exhibited both the willingness and opportunity for mediation in previous disputes. It is important to note that, since we used these variables in our data selection process, they are not included in the analyses. Examination of all violent disputes since the Second World War resulted in over 64,000 observations, allowing us to expand beyond the 35 enduring rivalries previously studied (Greig, 2005; Greig and Diehl, 2006). This empirical expansion also has theoretical importance, as “[e]nduring rivalries are unique phenomena” (Greig, 2005: 265), making it critical that we enlarge the empirical domain to capture other conflict dynamics.

Selection effects

States that offer to mediate and are accepted for mediation are not randomly selected. Selection effects result when systematic factors reduce the population of potential observations. We identified and controlled for two types of selection. First, it is likely that third parties take into account the probability that the disputants will accept mediation before offering their services (Greig and Regan, 2008; Melin and Svensson, 2009). On the one hand, we know that this knowledge is not perfect, as we observe disputants refusing mediation offers. On the other hand, we are unlikely to identify the variables that completely reflect such knowledge. As a result of these *Entry Effects*, only select mediation offers are observable.

Second, the cases requiring outside involvement are those that disputants are unable to resolve on their own. Third parties therefore become involved in conflicts that are difficult to manage and unlikely to lead to peace (Bercovitch and Gartner, 2006; Greig, 2005). As a result of these *Dispute Effects*, mediation is more likely to be observed among highly intractable conflicts.
We addressed *Entry* and *Dispute* selection effects in three ways: (1) theoretically, by specifying factors that we think affect mediator offers; (2) empirically, by identifying a pool of available mediators; and (3) methodologically, by employing a censored Probit estimation procedure that takes into account dispute characteristics (an alternative method could involve matching; see Gilligan and Sergenti, 2008). The censored Probit method allowed us to simultaneously model the selection variables that explain mediation offers and acceptances (Nooruddin, 2002). Scholars employ selection models to study conflict termination (Lemke and Regan, 2004), mediation (Greig and Regan, 2008; Melin and Svensson, 2009) and peacekeeping (Greig and Diehl, 2005). Specifically, the method has been used to address selection in the type of mediation study conducted here (Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006; Savun, 2008).

**Mediation offers**

The unit of analysis is the disputant–third party–year. This unit of analysis enabled us to explore the factors that influence outside states to offer mediation and disputants to accept it. Annual examination of each potential mediator prevented us from excluding cases of multiple offers to mediate, and allowed for annual variation in the explanatory variables. The first stage of the model predicts whether or not the potential third party makes an offer to mediate (*Offer* = 1, 0 otherwise). There are 101 state mediation offers. The second stage predicts whether or not the disputants reject or accept the offer (*Reject* = 1, 0 otherwise; 34% are rejected). We cluster the models by dispute, since not all cases are independent of one another. Information on mediation offers and acceptances is from the *Third Party Intervention* data (Frazier and Dixon, 2006) and the *International Conflict Management* data (Bercovitch, 1999).

To measure third parties’ expectations that the benefits of their efforts will outweigh the costs of involvement, we examine the role of the dispute environment and the ties between disputants and potential mediators. Mediators account for the likelihood of success and want to avoid intractable conflicts (Bercovitch and Gartner, 2006; Rost and Greig, 2011). Mediators anticipate that dyads previously engaged in disputes are less likely to reach a settlement. Therefore, we expect these dyads to be less likely to receive mediation offers. We created the variable *Previous Dispute*, and it is coded 1 if the disputants have previously engaged in a militarized interstate dispute (83%), and 0 otherwise.

Given the costs of mediation, mediators want to work on salient disputes whose resolution is meaningful. We captured important disputes by looking at conflicts involving current and future potential loss of life. First, we employed the variable *War* (1 if currently coded as a war (6%), 0 otherwise). Second, using the *Third Party Intervention* and *International Conflict Management* data we coded for the territorial nature of the issue (*Territorial Conflict* is 1 if applicable (9%), 0 otherwise), since territorial disputes have long been shown to be the most deadly (Huth, 1996).

We hypothesize that a third party is more likely to mediate if it has cooperative ties to the disputants. To account for these relationships, we examined the presence of historic, alliance and regime ties (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita, 1979). Colonial powers may be more likely to manage conflicts in their former colonies (Bercovitch and Schneider, 2000), and such links increase the probability of mediation offers in civil wars (Greig and Regan, 2008; Melin and Svensson, 2009). The variable *Historic Ties* is coded 1 if at least one of the disputants was a former colony of the potential intermediary (0.9%; 0 otherwise; The Correlates of War 2 Project, n.d.). Alliances increase third-party efforts to resolve international conflicts (Melin, 2011). We measured the presence of a defensive *Alliance Ties* between the third party and at least one disputant (*Alliance Ties* = 1 (5%); 0 otherwise) using the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions data (Leeds et al., 2002). *Regime*
Ties shared by the third party and at least one disputant suggest ideological ties. Evidence shows that a strong democratic community increases the probability of third-party mediation and its success (Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2008). Regime Ties is coded 1 if the third party and one/both disputant(s) are mature democracies, 0 otherwise; democracy requires a Polity IV score of ≥6 (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002).

**Explanatory variables for mediation rejections**

We expect that mediation behavior and the nature of the dispute influence the focus of our analysis: mediation offer rejection. First, we examined Other Mediation. We anticipate that ongoing mediation identifies the availability of conflict management alternatives, and as a result, increases the chances of Rejection. In the face of competing mediation offers, rejection is not necessarily a repudiation of peacemaking; rather, it may be an effort to attract more prominent mediators.

We used War, Power Difference and Territorial Conflict to capture our hypothesized effects of dispute characteristics and account for the presence of mutual optimism. We anticipate that those disputants who are actively engaged in violent conflict are less likely to want to make peace. We expect that fights over territory, seen by many as the most salient dispute issue, are less likely to lead to voluntary peacemaking. Extensive research suggests that, the greater the power differences between disputants, the higher the likelihood of mediation offer rejection (Bercovitch and Houston, 1993; Melin and Svensson, 2009). Large power asymmetries provide the strong state with confidence in battlefield victory, making it less likely to seek compromise (Beardsley et al., 2006). Each disputant state has a power capacity measured by its Composite Index of National Capability score (Bennett and Stam, 2004), which creates an index of measures such as population, steel production and military capability. We subtracted the Index scores of the two disputants to create the variable Power Difference, which has a mean of 0.09, a standard deviation of 0.07 and ranges from near 0 to 0.36.

To test the role of ties between the third party and disputants, we examined the presence of historic, alliance and regime ties (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita, 1979). The above variables are summarized in Table 1. The results of our analysis are discussed below.

**Results and discussion**

We begin with a standard Probit analysis of actors rejecting mediation (results not shown). As we expected, disputants are more likely to reject mediation when they anticipate success. Greater differences in power increase the likelihood of mediation rejection. All measures of ties—alliance, historic and regime—have no effect on the likelihood of the disputants rejecting a mediation offer, suggesting that perhaps disputants are rejecting the involvement of any third party and not just the offering third party. Jointly modeling mediation offers and rejections provides further support for this theory, and combining these processes to capture the selection effects that mediation offers have on rejections yields much stronger and more robust results.

Results from a censored Probit analysis, clustered by dispute, are shown in Table 2. As the table shows, mediators are more likely to offer their services when a conflict is intense, but under these conditions, disputants are also less willing to accept offers. War and Territorial Conflict both increase the likelihood of mediation offers, but when accounting for selection effects, also increase the probability disputants reject mediation. A dispute over salient objectives signals that disputants are less likely to seek peace voluntarily. Previous disputes, which signal to third parties the difficulty of resolving the conflict, decrease mediation offers. Overall, these conflict factors show that
third parties account for not only the visibility of the conflict but also the probability of resolving it, and that disputants are unlikely to be open to mediation under these circumstances. This tendency reveals a new pattern concerning disputant willingness to work with third parties. While Greig (2005) shows that so-called “triage” factors increase both mediation offers and occurrence, we find that these factors also contain information about disputants’ openness to mediation. Disputants are less willing to work with the international community while simultaneously absorbing high costs and casualties, as mediation rejection signals an adversary’s resolve and mutual optimism.

As we hypothesized, Power Difference increases the likelihood of mediation rejection. At first, the positive relationship of power differences might seem counter-intuitive, as one might think that large power differences should make it clear that the stronger state will win and the weaker one will lose, making a peaceful alternative more desired. The problem with this line of thinking is that the weaker state chose to fight recognizing the clear advantage of the stronger state (Sullivan, 2007). As a result, when factors such as dispute characteristics and cooperative behavior are taken into account, power no longer has a systematic influence, a result consistent with Sullivan’s findings that major powers lose almost 40% of all wars with minor powers (Sullivan, 2007: 498).

Other Mediation is not correlated with Rejection. This offers a first signal that disputants are not shopping for the “right” mediator. That disputants are no more or less likely to agree to mediation based upon the presence of other mediators offers evidence that disputants reject mediation based on conflict characteristics and not mediation and relationship characteristics. Taking the mediation environment and conflict intensity into account, relationships play a minor role in mediation decisions. Cooperative relationships, such as Historic Ties, Regime Ties and Alliance Ties, do not play a part in third-party calculations. When tested as explanations for disputants’ rejections of mediation (results not shown), relationship ties were not significant predictors of disputant choices. The lack of correlation offers further evidence that disputants reject mediation offers because they are not open to mediation, rather than because they disapprove of the mediator. This result challenges findings on the importance of trust in mediation occurrence (Kydd, 2003, 2005; Touval, 1975).

Overall, we find robust support for the inverse effects that conditions have on mediation offers and their acceptance. Third parties appear to be more forthcoming with mediation offers when the conflict is intense; however, disputants are less willing to work with a third party when in a territorial conflict or when the dispute has escalated to a war. Similarly, while third parties view the

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Alliance Ties</em></td>
<td>0.134924</td>
<td>0.341645</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
presence of other mediators as an opportunity to burden-share or as a sign of compliant belligerents, other mediators give the disputants alternatives and make rejection more likely.

In addition, we find substantial evidence that, when disputants reject mediation offers, they do so because they are not open to the mediation process at all and not because they do not approve of the mediator. This finding supports the arguments of the “ripeness” literature, which argues mediation occurs when the disputants sense a conflict stalemate and see the improbability of winning (Zartman, 2000). In such cases, mediation is acceptable since it offers a viable alternative to continued conflict. It seems that disputants are not as concerned with finding an acceptable and trustworthy mediator.

There is strong evidence that selection exerts powerful statistical effects ($\rho$ is significant, confirming the need for a censored approach), suggesting that unobserved factors, such as dispute intensity, military stalemate and the inability of the belligerents to negotiate bilaterally, probably affect both mediation offers and rejections. More importantly, controlling for selection reveals the influence of key factors on mediation rejection, such as the presence of armed conflict, the nature of the dispute and the presence of ongoing mediation. Neglecting to control for selection effects leads to incorrect inferences about the mediation process. Modeling selection directly leads to drastic variation between our findings and those presented by other scholars (e.g. Greig (2005), who found that conditions jointly increase mediation offers and acceptance but did not employ a selection approach).

**Conclusion**

Mediation is a voluntary process. As a result, the occurrence of mediation is a symbol of success. It signals openness to options beyond conflict. Indeed, often a back-and-forth takes place before mediation can even begin. The act of accepting a mediator might be seen as a concession, requiring

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**Table 2. Censored Probit model of mediation offers and rejections 1946–1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediation characteristics</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Mediation</strong></td>
<td>$-0.0247$ (0.1581)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Conflict</td>
<td>0.6335*** (0.1470)</td>
<td>0.5210*** (0.1325)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>0.5537*** (0.1723)</td>
<td>0.6404*** (0.1636)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Dispute</td>
<td></td>
<td>$-0.3292$*** (0.1032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Difference</td>
<td>1.4870* (0.8848)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Ties</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3555 (0.3268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime Ties</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1359 (0.1432)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Ties</td>
<td></td>
<td>$-0.1301$ (0.1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>$-3.4987$*** (0.1417)</td>
<td>$-2.8717$*** (0.0891)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\rho$</td>
<td>2.2786** (0.9302)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total observations</td>
<td>64,377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncensored observations</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>$-756.3251$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. 
discussion regarding what the mediator is allowed to do, what resources the mediator will have and who will mediate. Disputants and mediators both deal with mediation strategically, but their strategic behavior pulls them in opposing directions. Although severe conflicts signal possible gains in reputation for mediators, they also reflect that belligerents are less likely to work for peace. Thus, the very characteristics that make third parties more forthcoming with offers of mediation are also those that make disputants more likely to reject them.

Our research offers important insights into the complexities of the mediation environment. While the empirical literature focuses on mediation offers and occurrence, our findings suggest that this process is more dynamic. Observing the absence of dispute mediation suggests critical implications. It might mean that no third party offered to mediate or that an offer was made and rejected. Examination of these separate, but related, choices helps us to generate an improved theoretical and practical understanding of mediation. The challenge for third parties, who undoubtedly would prefer to resolve conflicts before they become costly, is to convey to disputants the potential for high costs should the conflict continue. By clarifying the likely costs of conflict, a third party can help belligerents see the advantages of a mediator. Such information will probably increase the acceptability of mediation. These implications will not only generate circumstances under which disputants bring in a third-party mediator, but will probably also affect the outcomes of such mediation efforts. Mediation represents a complex, strategic process that integrates the preferences and interests of warring parties and potential peacemakers. This study contributes to our understanding of how this complicated and important mechanism works.

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References


