Incentives for Talking: Accepting Mediation in International and Civil Wars

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This paper examines the conditions under which warring parties will accept an outside party's offer to mediate. Specifically, we explore variation in the incentives for accepting third-party offers in interstate conflicts as compared to civil wars. We argue that since mediation in civil wars transfers legitimacy to the non-state actor and can generate a precedent of exceptions to the norm of sovereignty, the political cost associated with accepting international mediation will be substantially higher in civil wars compared to international conflicts. States should therefore only accept mediation in the most serious disputes, or when the costs of legitimizing an opponent are outweighed by the benefits of conflict resolution. Building on this theoretical reasoning, the paper analyzes the implications of differences in incentive structures between inter- and intrastate conflicts for offer and acceptance of mediation. We find an empirical discrepancy between interstate and civil wars in regard to demand-side (acceptance) of mediation, and to a somewhat lesser extent the supply-side (offer) of international mediation. In line with our argument, we find that the historical ties between the potential intermediary and at least one of the disputants play different roles in regard to acceptance of mediation in interstate compared to civil wars. This is important to take into consideration in the emerging debate on mediation bias.

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Why do belligerents and mediators decide to involve themselves in mediation efforts in some conflict situations but not in others? In the interstate war between Iran and Iraq, the disputing parties accepted Swedish opposition leader Olof Palme to facilitate authoritative communications between the parties at the onset of the conflict. Although there were high degrees of hostility and fear between the parties, the acceptance of mediation was not a question under dispute (see for instance, Eknes 1989; Bjereld 1995). This sharply contrasts with the Sri Lankan conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government, where the Sinhalese government did not accept foreign involvement in what it considered a domestic issue for 17 years. Sinhalese nationalist forces have severely criticized Norwegian mediation efforts for intrusion into the sovereignty of Sri Lanka (Höglund and Svensson 2009).

There is a growing field of extensive research exploring international mediation in armed conflicts. Previous quantitative research mostly focuses on mediation in interstate conflicts (Gartner and Bercovitch 2006; Bercovitch and Gartner 2006), on mediation in civil wars (see for instance Betts 1996; Beardsley 2005; Greig 2005b), or includes both types of conflicts (both internal and interstate) without distinguishing these two types (Bercovitch and Diehl 1997). Yet, little work has been done systematically assessing the difference between mediation in the domain of internal armed conflicts from mediation in interstate conflicts.

We seek to fill this lacuna. Overall, our contribution is the systematic comparison between mediation in inter- and intrastate conflicts, which has not been done in previous research. Our research question is, To what extent is mediation offered and accepted under different conditions in interstate versus intrastate conflicts? In particular, we consider two research questions related to the variation in mediation activities. First, we examine the variation in the supply of mediation, or when third parties offer to mediate. Are third parties equally likely to offer mediation in civil wars as in interstate wars? Second, we examine the demand for mediation, or when the disputants are open to working with a third party mediator. Are disputants in civil wars more or less willing to work with a third-party mediator than those in interstate wars?

We argue that international mediation in intrastate and interstate conflicts are substantially different. There are circumstances when third parties are more and less likely to offer mediation. The relationship between the third party and the disputants has a stronger impact on offers to mediate in civil than interstate conflicts since the acceptance of mediation also differs as rebels have incentives to invite mediation in order to gain recognition. These recognition costs provide governments a disincentive to accepting
mediation, meaning that governments in internal armed conflicts will only turn to mediation once they anticipate that they have little chance to settle the situation by themselves. Thus, mediation will be accepted in the most ‘difficult’ circumstances in internal armed conflicts, whereas we would not expect to see a similar empirical pattern in interstate conflicts.

In line with our theoretical argument, we find an empirical discrepancy between interstate and civil wars in regard to the demand-side (acceptance) and the supply-side (offer) of international mediation. We find the relationship between the third party and the disputants has a stronger impact on mediation offers in civil conflicts than interstate ones. The conflict management history, however, has a similar impact in both conflict situations. In terms of mediation acceptance, we find disputants in civil conflicts only accept mediation in the most costly conflicts. The same is not true of the disputants in international conflicts. Importantly, we also find that historical ties between the potential mediators and the parties in conflict have a very different effect on the likelihood of acceptance in civil wars compared to interstate conflicts: it decreases the likelihood of civil war participant’s acceptance but increases the likelihood of acceptance in an interstate conflict.

Considering mediation differences in interstate versus intrastate wars is important because more knowledge in this area will contribute to both theory and policy of mediation. If mediation occurs under certain circumstances, we must account for such systematic patterns before we have reliable estimates of the effect of mediation (Gartner and Melin 2008). The existence of such a selection effect is debated within the field, some suggesting that mediators commonly restrict themselves to relatively “easy” conflict situations (Greig 2005a; Beardsley 2005), or intervene under conditions where peaceful settlement is hard to achieve (Gartner et al. 2004; Bercovitch and Jackson 1997; Regan 2003; Svensson 2006). This study shows that the variation in terms of the nature of the conflict has important implications for the likelihood of conflict management. Knowing more about the patterns of intervention will also help the international community to tailor its diplomatic response to armed conflicts more effectively by identifying the situations where mediation tends to be neglected but still can play a crucial role.

Two caveats are in order before we continue. The first concerns the issues of comparing results from two datasets. As the two datasets we employ are not collected using precisely the same definitions and methods, we can only tentatively compare mediation in civil and interstate wars. Faced with these limitations, our results represent an honest attempt to find the most comparable information available. The second issue is defining the activities that constitute civil and interstate wars, as this distinction is not always clear. Some civil conflicts were externalized through declarations and subsequent recognition of independence, while interstate wars often involve elements of internal conflict. Such overlap means that some cases
are included in both datasets, such as the breakup of Yugoslavia. While including such cases in both datasets is preferable to creating an arbitrary distinction, readers should take this into account when examining our comparisons. Our results should therefore be taken as indicative, rather than conclusive.

This study is outlined in the following manner. First, we review the existing literature on mediation. Next, we offer our theoretical argument about the variation in mediation occurrence in civil wars and interstate wars. We then present our choice and an overview of the two datasets we use to compare mediation in civil and interstate wars. Our empirical findings offer support for our hypotheses. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and directions for future research.

EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

As the occurrence of mediation has recently become a focus of much scholarly research, an understanding of the circumstances under which mediation occurs has begun to develop. Existing research, however, does not distinguish between mediation in civil wars and interstate wars. We therefore outline the findings on when mediation occurs in civil and interstate conflicts before discussing related work comparing peacekeeping in different conflicts.

Scholars of mediation have considered its occurrence in international conflicts. For example, Bercovitch and Diehl explore mediation in international military rivalries and find mediation is ten times more likely to occur in these cases than in less intense conflicts (1997). Greig finds that characteristics of the dispute and the disputants help explain when mediation between enduring rivalries is likely to occur (2005a). Bercovitch and Jackson find that mediation tends to be used in international disputes characterized by high complexity, high intensity, long duration, unequal and fractionated parties, and where the willingness of the parties to settle peacefully is in doubt (2001). Beardsley and Schmidt examine United Nations mediations efforts (2006). They find the UN is beholden to the interests of member states. Favretto finds that, in the case of superpowers, bias plays an important role in the decision to become involved (2005). A mediator’s credibility also impacts the decision to mediate, as have the strategic interests of the mediator (Terris and Maoz 2005). Finally, mediators account for their ability to transform the conflict before acting as a mediator (i.e., Bercovitch 2002; Touval and Zartman 2001).

Scholarship on mediation occurrence in civil wars is less prolific. Maundi, Zartman, Khadiagala and Nuamah (2006) explore the conditions for the initiation of mediation in civil wars, building on a theoretical framework of mediation selection. The study explores a set of African cases of
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armed conflicts and suggests that external actors are more likely to offer mediation in conflicts that are located within their sphere of interests. Moreover, the study suggests that rejection of mediation is more likely when the stakes in conflicts are high, and acceptance of mediation is more likely when the third party is expected to be able to facilitate a beneficial agreement (Maundi et al. 2006).

Greig and Regan (2008) explore the selection process in mediation in civil wars, why external actors offer mediation, and the conditions under which belligerents accept those offers. They find that mediation is commonly offered by third-party actors that have special historical or other links with a civil war state. Factors relating to the conflict, such as the extent to which the conflict is ethnic in character and the timing of the mediation offer, significantly affect the likelihood of acceptance of mediation offers.

Svensson (2007) also explores mediation selection in internal armed conflicts. The study suggests that since belligerents can tie their decision to accept mediation to the probability of reaching a settlement, and since mediators can take the likelihood of a settlement into consideration when they decide to launch a mediation initiative, the occurrence of mediation and settlement should be modeled as two separate, but interlinked, questions. The empirical analysis shows that uncertainty-enhancing factors decrease the likelihood of settlement, whereas such factors tend to increase the likelihood of mediation. Taken together, this reveals a pattern of mediation in the thorniest conflict situations.

While no studies examine the occurrence of mediation across inter- and intrastate wars, Fortna (2003) compares the effects of peacekeeping in these two cases. Conventional wisdom is that peacekeeping is less effective during civil wars because (1) civil wars pose a new challenge to the UN, whereas the international community has decades of experience with international conflict, and (2) in internal wars, combatants must live together afterwards and are not separated by a border. Conversely, this may mean that peacekeeping is more effective in civil wars since these conflicts are more prone to resume if left alone. She finds that peacekeeping actually has a larger impact on preventing the reoccurrence of civil wars, reducing the hazard of another international war by 30 percent and civil war by 70 percent.

MEDIATION OCCURRENCE ACROSS CONFLICT TYPES

Our point of departure is basic acceptability as the essence of mediation. Most definitions of mediation require that the parties voluntarily agree to involve a mediator (Mitchell 1993, 277). Mutual consent is therefore a key characteristic of mediation, and can help to distinguish such third-party efforts from military intervention, sanctions and other forms of third-party intervention that do not require acceptance by the parties. Therefore,
mediation occurs when parties in conflicts (states or non-state entities) accept third-party offers of mediation.

We argue that since mediation in civil wars transfers legitimacy to the non-state actor and can generate a precedent of exceptions to the norm of sovereignty, the political cost associated with accepting international mediation will be substantially higher in civil wars compared to international conflicts. It is primarily the government that suffers the costs of accepting external mediation. The acceptance of mediation signals a lack of capability on the government-side to manage the internal situation in its own territory. In this regard, mediation acceptance is a breach of the government’s sovereignty. As Touval suggests, “by definition mediation in communal conflicts constitutes an infringement of sovereignty, and interference in the internal affairs” (2000, 240). Moreover, international mediation can increase the legitimacy of the opposition-side, since it implies that the government will be talking to the non-state actors on equal footing. Mitchell (1993, 335) suggests that, political incumbents are usually resistant to outside conflict management in order to “avoid conferring any recognition or status on ‘rebel’ movements.” Since the government holds veto power over the decision to accept mediation—as suggested above, mediation requires mutual acceptance—it will not turn to mediation unless other alternative, less costly ways of managing the situation have been tried first and shown to be unfruitful. The logic about this is that (in contrast to interstate conflicts) governments suffer a cost (in terms of recognition) by accepting mediation, so they have incentives to find cheaper ways of dealing with the conflict first. States should therefore only accept mediation in the most serious disputes, or when the costs of legitimizing an opponent are outweighed by the benefits of conflict resolution.

One hypothesis generated from the argument above is that governments in internal armed conflicts will only turn to mediation once they anticipate that they have little chance to settle the situation by themselves. Thus, mediation will be accepted only in the most “difficult” internal armed conflicts, whereas we would not expect to see a similar empirical pattern in interstate conflicts.

The difference in incentive structures for mediation also has implications for the question of mediation bias. We know from previous research that biased mediators can be particularly effective as peacemakers (Touval 1975; Kydd 2003). Given that the belligerents overall would prefer effective peace brokers, we could therefore expect that mediators with ties to one or the other should generally be more likely to be accepted. Yet, this does not apply in a similar vein to civil wars. A key characteristic of civil wars are their asymmetric nature. Civil wars are asymmetric in material power as well as in terms of recognition (Zartman 1995), which we have laid out above. Biased mediators can compensate for this asymmetry in the negotiation process—either through protecting the weakening side or by enforcing
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compliance by the stronger side. Yet, since they have this capacity to compensate for one side, the other side will be reluctant to accept them (and lose their bargaining advantage). Hence, unlike in international wars, biased third-parties will be less likely to be accepted in civil wars. This implies that bias would decrease the likelihood of acceptance by the primary parties in civil war but increase the likelihood of acceptance in international conflicts.

Turning to the supply-side of the analysis, previous research suggests that potential mediators may have both defensive and offensive goals—both protecting and advancing its interests as well as sphere of influence—when offering to mediate (Touval and Zartman 2001, Touval 1994). The willingness to act is therefore dependent on a range of factors, such as economic, national, and cultural interest, as well as geographical proximity to the conflict area. The basic decisionmaking calculus suggests that the more interests at stake for the potential third party, the more likely that an actor is to offer to mediate (Greig and Regan 2008, Touval and Zartman 2001). In their supply-side of who mediates, Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) suggest that mediation offers are a function of mediation price, proximity, preferences, and power. Their explanatory model shows third parties with leverage, power, and influence have a greater ability to move the parties toward peaceful settlements than strictly neutral mediators. In another analysis of why some mediators choose to offer mediation, Crocker et al. (2003, 152) suggest that “mediator readiness” consists of three dimensions: 1) operational, relating to the administrative, the mandate and the leadership resources required; 2) strategic readiness, implying that the country or organization that the mediator represents has the political willingness and backing of the intervention; and 3) readiness in terms of a “cultural fit,” implying a close contact, ties, and previous access to the parties that enable a fruitful relationship-building.

This yields a set of testable empirical expectations relating the supply of international mediation. Overall, we expect that the stronger the relationship between the third party and the disputants, the more likely that third party will decide to offer mediation services. Moreover, we expect that third parties having a history of managing conflicts are more likely to offer mediation. We expect that mediation will be accepted in only the most difficult intrastate conflicts.

DATA, MEASUREMENT, AND METHODS

Testing the empirical implications of our argument requires data on civil and interstate conflicts, whether or not mediation was offered and accepted, and on the variables seen as important in the literature. This paper therefore employs two datasets, one including information on civil wars and the other
on interstate conflicts. Both datasets cover the 1946–1999 time period. The interstate data employed were adapted from Frazier and Dixon’s third-party intervention data, which code management activities in militarized interstate disputes (2006). The civil conflict data were adapted from a study by Greig and Regan (2008).

While these two datasets are not identical, we have tried to make them as comparable as possible. Since the Regan data use 200 deaths as a threshold, and the MID data include lower levels of conflict, we only include MIDs that reach level 3 or 4 (a show or use of force). Readers should take this discrepancy into account when evaluating our findings.

Outcome Variables and Model Specification

Since third-party offers to mediate are not independent of their expectations that the disputants will accept, we estimate a censored probit model to account for this selection process. Using a censored probit model specification allows us to model the variables that explain both third-party mediation offers and acceptances, which enables us to control for the possibility that third parties might be most willing to offer mediation when they expect it will be accepted.

For each year in which a conflict is ongoing, we construct a dyad between each disputant and a potential mediator. Of the authors that examine conflict manager identity, few have generated a population of potential intermediaries and therefore cannot speak to the effects of third-party characteristics or its relationship to the disputants without selecting on the dependent variable (for exceptions to this, see Greig and Regan 2008; Frazier 2006). Examining who manages conflicts therefore necessitates establishing a population of potential managers. Analyzing all actors in the international system as possible intermediaries yields a staggering number of observations, making both analysis and collecting accurate information across so many cases extremely difficult. Case selection involves determining which countries have a theoretical chance of managing a conflict. We define potential intermediaries as actors that meet at least one of the following criteria according to the Politically Relevant Dyads data (Maoz 1996):

- **Major or regional powers**, which have both the resources and the responsibility to manage conflicts;
- **Geographically contiguous states**, which regularly interact with the disputants and will be disproportionately affected by a neighboring conflict; and
- **Reputational managers**, which have exhibited both the willingness and opportunity for conflict management by acting in previous disputes.

While many of these states are captured with the preceding criteria, including reputational conflict managers expands the definition to include medium powers that would have otherwise been excluded.
The above criteria offer a method of determining which cases to analyze based on theoretical arguments about likely mediators (Beardsley 2005; Frazier and Dixon 2006; Greig 2005). The process that determines if actors are in the sample is related to the process that determines if they manage the conflict, exerting both direct effects on the dependent variable and indirect ones on the chance of being selected. Such correlation between case selection and the dependent variable is common (King et al. 1994). While most of the potential mediators never mediate, over-sampling is necessary to avoid case exclusion (which occurs if actors excluded from the sample manage a conflict), possibly resulting in measurement error and selection bias (Clark and Regan 2003).

As we are interested in the factors that influence outside states to offer mediation and the disputants to accept such offers, the unit of analysis in both datasets is the disputant third-party year. Looking at each potential mediator annually prevents us from excluding cases of multiple offers to mediate. The first stage of the model predicts offer, or if the potential mediator offers to mediate. The second stage predicts accept, or whether or not mediation occurs. Since not all cases are independent of one another, we cluster by dispute.

By using a model for simultaneous equations, censored probit, a parameter is produced $\Delta$ ($\rho\beta$), which estimates this correlation between the standard errors (Greene 2003). Thus, $\Delta$ provides us with an indication of whether there is an omitted variable bias in the analysis. Selection models have been utilized by previous work on strategic behaviour in conflict resolution processes, for instance, in the study of conflict termination (Lemke and Regan 2004), conflict duration (Thyne 2006), mediation request and offer (Greig and Regan 2008), occurrence of mediation and type of mediation (Beardsley 2006), as well as peacekeeping and mediation (Greig and Diehl 2005). The significance of $\Delta$ indicates that the two “stages” are related in the conflict resolution process. A caveat should be put forward before conclusions can be drawn. An examination of the error terms is not a definitive test of the argument that there is a selection effect in mediation processes. In fact, there are many other factors (besides third-party motivations) that are potentially captured in the error term, such as related measurement errors, which could be driving the results (Lemke and Reed 2001, 460).

Explanatory Variables

In the first stage of our model, we are interested in whether a third party offers to mediate a conflict. We expect to find that measures of the strength of the relationship between the third party and the disputants and the management history will impact a third party’s decision to offer mediation services. To account for the role of relationships between the third party and the disputants, we examine the presence of a formal defense alliance,
trade ties, distance, and historic colonial ties. These measures account for the political and economic interests that a third party likely considers in deciding to offer their services as a mediator. We expect that the stronger these relationships are, the more likely the third party is to offer mediation. We also expect these factors will have a stronger impact on mediator involvement in civil wars than interstate wars, since involvement is more costly in these cases. We anticipate third parties with historic ties to the state, trade interests at stake, alliance ties to a disputant and geographic proximity to the conflict are more likely to offer mediation, especially in cases of civil conflict. We also expect that a third party with a history of conflict management has an increased likelihood of offering mediation, as has been shown in previous research (Bercovitch and Houston 2000). As with the relationship characteristics, we expect management history to exhibit stronger effects on civil than interstate wars. Thus, parties with a history of management have already suffered recognition costs, making offers less costly and more likely. We therefore examine the role of previous interventions and the nature of these interventions. All management history variables are coded using the Frazier and Dixon data (2006) and the Regan, Frank, and Aydin data (2009). We employ the following explanatory variables in our model of mediation offers:

**Historic** is a dummy variable measuring the presence of colonial ties between the potential intermediary and at least one of the disputants. Information on a state’s colonial history is based on the Correlates of War data. There are colonial ties between the potential mediation and a disputant in 892 of the civil wars cases and 573 of the interstate conflict (both of which account for under 1% of the cases).

**Trade Interests.** We create a dummy variable based on Barbieri’s international trade data (Barbieri 1996). The variable is coded one if State A or B (a disputant) imports from State C (the third party) or State C imports from State A or B and zero otherwise. Since many of the values are missing, we fill in these cases with a zero, assuming most missing cases are due to a lack of trading activity. Potential mediators have trade interests in 17,059 (or 26.5%) of interstate wars and 11,107 (or 5.94%) of intrastate wars.

**Alliance.** We employ the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions data (Leeds et al. 2002). The variable is coded one if the third party has a defensive alliance with a disputant and zero otherwise. Potential mediators have a defense pact with at least one disputant in 8,686 (or 13.5%) of interstate wars and 1,181 (or 4.4%) of civil wars.

**Distance** is the logged distance between the third party and disputant. Since we employ direct contiguity as a mechanism for sample selection, we use the Gleditsch and Ward measure of distance between capitals as a measure for the explanatory variable (Gleditsch and Ward 2001). The logged measure ranges from zero to 9.4 in both datasets.
Previous Acceptance is coded one if the disputants accepted mediation in the previous year and zero otherwise. Mediation has previously been accepted in 857 (or 1.3%) of interstate conflicts and 20,630 (or 11.2%) of civil conflicts.

Number Acceptances is the total number of previous mediations that have occurred in a conflict to date. The range for this variable is zero to four.

Previous Military Intervention is coded one if the third party has intervened militarily in the conflict and zero otherwise. Military interventions previously took place in only four interstate conflicts but in 1,201 civil conflicts.

Previous Economic Intervention is coded one if the third party has intervened economically in the conflict and zero otherwise. Economic interventions previously occurred in 1,919 (or 3%) of interstate conflicts and 420 (or less than .2%) of civil conflicts.6

Other mediation controls for whether or not there is another mediation effort ongoing during the year that the third party may offer mediation. While other mediation efforts may preclude a state from becoming involved, a multistate effort is less costly and enables the potential mediator to have an input on the outcome. We therefore expect other mediation efforts to increase the probability of mediation offers. 831 (or 1.3%) of interstate conflicts and 17,158 (or 9.3%) of civil conflicts have other ongoing mediation efforts.

Negotiate controls for the presence of direct negotiations between the disputants. As with the presence of other mediation efforts, direct talks may either make third-party mediation unnecessary or decrease the costs of mediation. We therefore expect that negotiations will increase the probability of mediation offers. Direct negotiations are much more common in interstate conflicts than civil ones, as is in line with our theoretical argument about recognition costs. 18,392 (or 28.5%) of interstate conflicts experience direct negotiations, while only 2,065 (or 1.1%) of civil conflicts involve negotiations.

The second stage of our model predicts the acceptance of mediation. We expect to find that the relationship between the third party and the disputants and the characteristics of the dispute influence mediation acceptance, both of which should have a stronger impact on mediation acceptance in civil wars than interstate ones. To examine the role of dispute characteristics, we include the length of the dispute and whether or not it is an ethnic or territorial dispute. These conflicts are the “difficult” cases, in which third-party mediation should be necessary. Ethnic conflicts are highly intractable, and territorial conflicts are the most likely to lead to military conflict (Vasquez 1993; Hensel 1996). Such heightened danger of the likely dispute severity should make them more amenable to mediation since they are more likely to disrupt state interactions (Greig and Regan 2008; Frazier
We also consider other characteristics of the third party that might entice the disputants to accept their services, namely the characteristics that signal an effective mediator. Major powers have increased leverage to influence the disputants at the negotiating table. States with a history of successfully managing conflicts and those that have managed disputes between the disputants before are also more likely to be deemed acceptable mediators. This model includes, in addition to several of the above variables, the following explanatory variables:

**Duration** measures the number of days the conflict has been ongoing, as longer disputes offer a greater opportunity for third-party management. The range is from zero to 52. We also examine duration squared to account for curvilinear effects.

**Ethnic** is a dummy variable coding if the dispute is primarily over issues of ethnicity. This is the case in 2,294 (or 3.5%) interstate conflicts and 99,601 (or 54.5%) of civil conflicts.

**Territory** is a dummy variable measuring if the dispute is over territorial issues. 5,512 (or 8.5%) of interstate conflicts and 81,676 (or 44.6%) of civil conflicts are primarily over territorial issues.

**Reputation** is a dummy variable for previous successful mediation efforts by the third party. 4,415 (or 2.4%) of civil conflicts and 36 (or .06%) of interstate conflicts involve previously successful mediators.

**Major Power** is coded one if the third party is a regional or major power and zero otherwise according to the Political Relevant Dyads data (Maoz 1996). The potential mediator is a major power in 46,575 (or 72%) of interstate conflicts and 6,540 (or 3.5%) of civil conflicts.

**Other Acceptance** is coded one if the disputants accepted mediation from the offering mediator in the previous year and zero otherwise. 132 (or less than .01%) of civil conflicts and 112 (or .2%) of interstate conflicts were mediated the previous year by the potential mediator.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, we discuss the results of the study, starting with descriptive statistics and then examining the empirical bearing of the propositions discussed above. Table 1 displays the frequency of mediation offers, as well

| TABLE 1 Mediation Offers and Acceptances across Civil and Interstate Conflict |
|------------------|------------------|
| **Civil Wars (153)** | **MIDs (2274)** |
| 22 (or 14.4%) of conflicts receive mediation offers | 38 (or 3.2%) of conflicts receive mediation offers |
| 201 total offers to mediate | 101 total offers to mediate |
| 172 (or 85.5%) of offers are accepted | 67 (or 66.3%) of offers are accepted |
as the extent to which these offers are accepted (in other words, the occurrence of mediation) in interstate and civil wars. It shows that mediation offers are more likely in civil wars than in interstate conflicts. 14% of the civil wars have received an offer of mediation, whereas only 1% of the interstate cases have experienced mediation offers. This can be a reflection of an increased willingness of third parties over time to offer mediation, particularly in the post-Cold War era. It has also been observed by previous research that the frequency of third-party efforts have increased (Mack 2002), and that civil wars are more common than interstate conflicts now than before (Wallensteen 2007).7

The “rejection rate” is also different between the two types of conflicts: offers in civil wars tend to be accepted at a higher frequency (86%) than interstate conflicts (66%). Greig and Regan (2008, 776) note that the high acceptance of mediation offers by belligerents is an indication that “offers are thoroughly considered before being made and that there is an expectation of acceptance implicit in the offer.” Yet, this seems not to be applicable to interstate conflicts. They too have a high degree of acceptance of offers, but at a substantially lower level than civil wars. Mediation acceptance is costly in civil wars—it implies a recognition cost—and this should be taken into account. Third-party actors are rational actors that can anticipate the reactions of the government to accept or reject mediation offers. Since international mediation confers legitimacy to the non-state group, third parties can hurt the relationships with the government if they offer mediation that is then rejected. Therefore, offers of mediation are more selective in civil wars in the sense that mediators tend to offer mediation where they are more likely to be accepted. Mediation in international conflicts is driven by a different logic: the cost of offering mediation that is not accepted is relatively low, since the offer by itself does not imply recognition costs. Therefore, third-party states can offer mediation more freely, with the result that more of those offers are rejected.

Moving on to the statistical analysis, we can see interesting variation in the supply of mediation between intrastate and interstate conflicts in Table 2. The relationship between the third party and the disputants has a much stronger impact on offers of mediation in civil wars than in interstate conflicts. Historical ties—indicating a colonial past—between the mediator and the belligerents increase the likelihood that mediation will be offered in civil wars but decrease the likelihood that such offers will be accepted. Former colonial powers will be willing to mediate when a conflict breaks out within a former colony, but not when the former colony is in militarized dispute with another country. Historic colonial ties do not create a feeling of responsibility when an interstate conflict breaks out.

Similarly, an alliance between a third-party actor and a state does not affect the likelihood of mediation being offered in interstate conflicts. This indicates that the defensive motivations, discussed by Touval and Zartman
### TABLE 2 Mediation Offers and Acceptances in Civil and Interstate Conflicts, 1946–1999†

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†Clustered by dispute. Robust standard error in parentheses; significance tests are one tailed, *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
Incentives for Talking

(2001), have little explanatory power over the offer of mediation. If anything, the relationship is negative, but this coefficient is far from significant. In contrast, alliances have a positive and significant effect on the likelihood that mediation will be offered in civil wars. The finding on civil conflicts is in line with previous research showing that a third party is more likely to become a conflict manager if it is allied with one or both of the disputants since the commitments of alliances change the incentives for intervention (Favretto 2005; Fearon 1997; Morrow 1994). It is likely that this reflects the relationship previously discussed in terms of historical ties.

The same is true of trade interests, which increase the probability of a mediation offer in civil conflicts but do not have a significant effect on interstate conflicts. Existing studies show trade increases the probability of mediation (Crescenzi et al. 2005) but has no impact on U.S. interventions (Regan 2000).

Generally, it seems that bias plays a stronger role in offers to mediate civil conflicts than in interstate ones. Whereas the relationship between the third party and the disputants has a strong impact on mediation offers in civil conflict, it has little impact on mediation offers in interstate conflicts. Hence, biased third parties that offer to mediate seem to be a phenomenon more applicable to civil wars than interstate conflicts. A possible explanation for this can be that biased third parties are more willing to step in to counterbalance one side in the kind of asymmetrical situations that characterize civil wars (Svensson 2006). This finding has implications for management outcomes, as research shows biased third parties are more likely to resolve conflicts than unbiased ones in both civil wars (Savun 2005) and interstate conflicts (Favretto 2009).

Several of the causal factors behind mediation offers in civil wars apply to interstate conflicts as well. For example, the geographical closeness to the conflict is increasing the likelihood of mediation offers in both civil wars and interstate conflicts. Likewise, previous acceptances also increase the likelihood of mediation offers in both civil wars as well as interstate conflicts. There is also evidence of a path-dependence in regard to mediation: mediation is more likely to occur if previous mediation has occurred, by another third party or by the same mediator. The picture that emerges is that conflict management history has an important impact on mediation offers regardless of the type of conflict. A history of third-party involvement, in terms of mediation and other management methods, increases the probability that a third party offers mediation services in both civil and interstate conflicts.

Turning now to mediation acceptance, the characteristics of the conflict have a much stronger impact on the acceptance of mediation in civil conflict than in interstate cases. Duration increases the likelihood of mediation acceptances in civil wars, which echoes the previous finding by Greig and Regan (2008). Interestingly, the acceptance of mediation offers occur
predominately in the middle phases of conflict, indicating that mediation is accepted where it is most difficult to settle the conflict. Yet, this relationship of conflict duration is not replicated in interstate conflicts. The finding that conflict duration does not have an effect on the likelihood of mediation occurrence in interstate conflicts stands in contrast to earlier findings by Greig (2005), who, examining interstate conflicts, finds that duration increases the likelihood of mediation. Does this finding indicate that mediation occurs in the most or least difficult cases? Previous research is not in consensus on this matter. On the one hand, Mason and Fett (1996), studying civil wars, find that mediation is more likely to occur in later phases of conflict. In other words, the duration of conflict increases the likelihood of negotiated settlement. In the study by Mason, Fett, and Weingarten (Mason et al. 1999), it is also reported that there is a curvilinear relationship: the square term of conflict duration is negatively associated with negotiated settlement. This is an indication that mediation is most likely to occur in the easiest conflict situation: those situations where negotiated settlements are also most likely to be reached. On the other hand, Zartman (2001) suggests that conflicts are ripe for resolution in the early or later phases of conflicts. There is also empirical support for this notion of timing. Regan and Stam (2000), exploring the effect of mediation—and examining all types of conflicts, both civil wars and interstate conflicts—find that mediation is most likely to be successful in the beginning and in the later phases of conflicts. This is precisely the timing when mediation is least likely to occur. Hence, mediation in civil wars occurs when it has the least probability of being successful.

Interestingly, mediators with historical ties are more likely to be accepted in interstate conflicts but less likely to be accepted in civil wars. Greig and Regan (2008) suggest that the reluctance of belligerents in civil wars to accept parties with historical ties is related to the actors’ sensitivity to bias. Yet, in interstate conflicts, this issue of bias seems to be of less concern for the primary parties. In this sense, the primary parties are choosing someone as mediator who can deliver one side, rather than being concerned about partiality. Disputants in both civil and interstate conflicts, however, are more likely to accept a mediator with a reputation as a successful manager.

The acceptance of mediation in civil wars is driven by factors relating to the internal dynamics of conflicts—primarily their duration and the character of the conflict (ethnic), which has also been found by Greig and Regan (2008). Yet, these explanatory factors are less applicable to interstate conflicts. Since the acceptance of mediation is costly in civil wars, the primary parties are inclined to accept mediation only in the most difficult circumstances. By contrast, belligerents are less selective in terms of accepting mediation under particular conditions in interstate conflicts.
CONCLUSION

There is a notion in previous research that mediation is substantially different in the intrastate compared to the interstate setting. Hitherto, such conventional thinking has gone untested. In this study, we provide a first indicative test of the difference between offers and acceptance of international mediation in civil wars compared to interstate conflicts. Our analysis suggests both systematic similarities and differences between the two types of conflicts in terms of both mediation offers and the acceptance of such offers.

Mediation is not a fungible good. That a state offers to mediate in one conflict does not preclude it from offering to mediate another conflict. There are certain circumstances, however, where third parties are more or less likely to offer assistance in resolving a conflict. The relationship between the third party and the disputants has a much stronger impact on mediation offers in civil conflict than in interstate ones. By contrast, there is a similarity in regard to conflict management history between offers in interstate and intrastate conflicts: if a third party has engaged in previous conflict managements efforts the chance increases that offers of mediation will be provided, in both civil wars as well as interstate conflicts. Moreover, the circumstances when the disputants will accept mediation offers differ. In civil conflicts, accepting outside assistance in resolving a conflict involves recognition costs, and the disputants are therefore only willing to involve a third party in the most dire cases. In contrast, interstate disputants are generally more willing to involve outside mediators and the specific characteristics of the conflict have little impact on this decision.

Whereas the rebels' and governments' acceptance of mediation is primarily driven by factors within the civil war itself, as suggested by Greig and Regan (2008), these types of explanatory variables cannot explain the acceptance of mediation in interstate conflicts. Admittedly, there could be factors other than those explored here that explain the acceptance of mediation. A part of the explanation, however, can be found in the difference in costs of accepting mediation. Since mediation is arguably costly to accept for governments involved in fighting a non-state armed group, they should be more selective in their acceptance of mediation. This study offers some empirical support for such an argument, but more needs to be done to test it rigorously.

One potentially fruitful avenue for further research is to distinguish who is accepting and rejecting mediation offers from third parties. In civil wars, the two sides are commonly very different from each other. If the argument is right—that is, if the acceptance of mediation is costly in civil wars—then we should expect to see significant differences in terms of government acceptance relative to acceptance by the rebel group.

Additionally, this study lumps together mediation into a single category, with the purpose of examining whether mediation occurs under different
conditions in civil wars from interstate conflicts. The selection process, however, could be different depending on the type of mediator. In other words, there is also a possibility of a selection between types of mediators. For instance, the UN may choose to intervene in the most difficult conflicts, whereas countries have the luxury of choice. While this study focuses on state-led mediation efforts, whether mediators differentiate themselves according to where they go needs to be examined in greater detail. There is a notion in previous research that states are more restrictive than organizations when choosing in which conflicts to be involved (Touval 1994; Frei 1976; Bercovitch and Jackson 1997). It would also be interesting to find if “weak” mediation is likely to be employed in international conflicts more than civil ones, as our theoretical argument would suggest (Beardsley, this issue).

The incentives for talking vary substantially between interstate and civil conflict settings. The Sri Lanka case illustrates that mediation in civil wars has to tackle an additional complexity that does not occur in a similar way in interstate conflicts: the recognition costs implied in third-party mediation. From the onset of the civil war in 1983 up to the year 2000, the government refused to engage in mediated talks with the Tamil Tigers, because of fear of legitimizing the non-state entity. Even during the mediation, the questions of status, parity and recognition stood in the forefront. The LTTE took the decision to walk away from the negotiation table when they were not invited to one of the preparatory meetings, held in Washington in 2004. The fact that the UNP-government under Ranil Wickremasinghe took the bold step to negotiate and reach a cease-fire with the LTTE through Norwegian mediators led ultimately to that government being ousted partly because the opposition used Sinhala nationalistic rhetoric. Understanding more about the difference in political costs associated with talking with the enemy between the different conflict situations is, as this case and the overall empirical picture painted above shows, of utmost importance.

NOTES

1. The Yugoslavian case accounts for 622 of the cases (or .03%) in the civil war data and 1191 (or 1.8%) of the interstate conflict cases. As a robustness check, we run both models without this case and generate similar results.

2. One implication of this would be that those that nevertheless accept partial mediators send a costly signal of conciliatory intent (Svensson 2007).

3. While our analysis focuses on the role of states in mediation, international organizations also play an important role in conflict management (Shannon 2009). We omit IOs because interests and bias likely work differently in international organizations than in states. The exclusion of these actors has implications for the generalizability of our results, which cannot speak to the role that the relationships among actors play when non-state actors are involved. Additionally, as conflict management and resolution is frequently part of international organizations’ mandates, state actors might be less likely to offer mediation services since they see this as the role of international organizations. State actors therefore have a lower baseline likelihood of offering mediation than non-state actors.
Incentives for Talking

4. We should note that the ties between the third party and the rebel group are not captured in our model, as there is no data that accurately captures this relationship. We are only able to capture the ties that a third party has with the government and not with the rebel group. We can therefore only speak to how the relationship between the third party and the government impacts the decision to offer and accept mediation.

5. We also test for the impact of trade using Gleditsch’s (2002) data, which codes the proportion of a state’s total imports and exports traded with a state. The results were similar.

6. Both Previous Military Intervention and Previous Economic Intervention, which rarely occur, are very rare, drop out in the interstate models. We run both models without these variables and generate similar results.

7. This holds true when we examine the two datasets employed in this study more closely. While the number of interstate conflicts holds constant across time, the number of civil conflicts increases over time. Similarly, offers to mediate have increased over time.

8. Since we do not have information on the relationships with both parties in civil war cases, we focus our analysis on third-party ties to the dispute. For example, we measure if the third party has an alliance with at least one of the disputants. This admittedly limits our ability to discuss bias in intrastate conflict, as the side a third party is biased toward has important implications (Gent 2008; Svensson 2007). Since more information is available on the relative relationship in interstate wars, we ran an analysis of if the third party has an alliance with only one or both disputants as a robustness check. We found that the third party is less likely to offer mediation if they have an alliance with only one disputant (although the variable is not statistically significant). The third party is also less likely to offer mediation if they have a trading relationship with one disputant (which is also statistically insignificant). This supports our conclusion that bias does not have a strong role in interstate conflict mediation.

9. We also examined the empirical bearing of the variables that are used in the supply-side analysis (on the offer of mediation) to the demand-side (the acceptance of mediation). We tested each of them in the accepted model—it was not possible to do them all at once since the equations have to be different for it to converge—but none of them were significant.

10. To ensure the low occurrence of mediation offers in interstate wars is not just the result of examining MIDs, we also examined rates of offers for different MID hostility levels. There were no offers to mediate the 968 blockades, 4 offers (all of which were accepted) to mediate occupations of territory, 3 offers (2 of which were accepted) in seizures, 23 offers (16 of which were accepted) to mediate attacks, 41 offers (26 of which were accepted) in clashes, no offers in declarations of war, and 30 offers (19 of which were accepted) in interstate wars. See Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer (2004) for information on the actions entailed in each category.

REFERENCES


———. 2009. “Intervention without Leverage: The Political Determinants of Weak Mediation.” *International Interactions* 35:


