MJUR

Diversionary Theory of War: Levels of Domestic Conflict and External Use of Force

Sylvie (Huahua) Zhong
Carleton College

Abstract

Arguing that state leaders often resort to external use of force in order to distract domestic attention away from internal conflicts, the diversionary theory of war has received particular attention from political scientists. However, despite its intuitive appeals, empirical quantitative studies on the diversionary theory have not yet yielded any consistent findings. As diversionary literature fails to agree on the existence of a systemic relationship between a state's internal conflicts and external use of force, this puzzle might be better solved if scholars could pay more attention to the operationalization of the "internal conflicts" that are suggested to impel a state to resort to external force. Focusing on the separate impacts of two levels of internal conflicts—domestic mass violence and moderate societal unrest—this preliminary research is aimed at examining the conditions under which the internal-external conflict relation would be valid. Using data from The International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Project, it finds that only the presence of domestic mass violence is positively related to the state's propensity for using external force. State leaders would address domestic problems through the diversionary use of force when perceiving a grave internal threat to their political survival.

Introduction

Seeking to explain the behaviors of states in the international realm, theories that link domestic politics and the state leader's incentives to foreign affairs have flowered in the past few decades. Nowadays, it is already widely accepted that international politics is "linkage politics"; foreign policy choices made by the political elites, who are concerned with their own political survival back home, are not only affected by international factors but also domestic factors (e.g., Nye et al. 2012; Bueno De Mesquita 2005; Fearon 1998). Among existing theories on the linkage between domestic and foreign affairs, the diversionary theory of war has received particular attention from political scientists. It argues

that state leaders often resort to external use of force in order to distract domestic attention from internal conflicts and thus consolidate their own power (e.g., Jung 2014; Sirin 2011). This hypothesis of an internal-external conflict relation, which serves as the basis for the interpretation of numerous historical cases, facilitates people's understanding of the question: why do states go to war with each other?

However, despite its intuitive appeal and apparent support from many historical case studies, empirical quantitative studies on the diversionary theory have not yet yielded any consistent findings. While several studies produce encouraging results that support the explanatory power of the theory (Sirin 2011; Davies 2002; Gelpi 1997), some scholars argue that the diversionary use of force is a rare phenomenon (Chiozza and Goemans 2004; Haas 1968). As Hazelwood (1975) suggests, "in no other instance do the arguments present in international relations theory and the results recorded through systematic empirical analysis diverge so widely as in the domestic conflict-foreign conflict studies" (216). The failure of scholars to agree on the existence of a systemic relationship between internal and external conflicts poses a serious challenge to the validity of the diversionary theory of war.

This puzzle could be better solved if more attention were paid to the lack of consensus on a specific operationalization of the "internal conflict" that is suggested to impel a state to use external force. Quantitative studies on the diversionary theory mainly focus on two forms of internal conflict— domestic mass violence and moderate societal unrest—yet scholars do not always distinguish between them. In fact, for the sake of analytical convenience, some studies select only one level of domestic conflict and generalize about the internal-external conflict relationship (e.g., Tir 2010; Kanant 2011; Haynes 2016; Haynes 2017). Although many have also suggested that these two levels of domestic conflict cannot be treated as interchangeable factors, there is no agreement over which one is directly associated with a state's use of belligerent foreign policies. Some state that only the presence of domestic mass violence can invoke an urgent need for the states to resort to the diversionary use of force (Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). In contrast, some scholars argue that the "internal conflict" should be defined as domestic societal unrest (e.g., Gelpi 1997). Different operationalizations of the independent variable in quantitative studies may lead to diverse test results.

Given the lack of consensus from previous literature, this study looks more closely at the potential explanatory factor for a state's engagement in the diversionary use of force by examining the impacts of domestic mass violence and domestic societal unrest, respectively. It finds that different levels of domestic conflict within a state generate distinct foreign policy initiatives. More specifically, it addresses the puzzle regarding the diversionary theory of war by suggesting that only with domestic mass violence that imposes a significant threat to the viability of the regime could this hypothesis be valid. In order to enhance the validity and generalizability of its findings, this study employs several prominent alternative explanations for a state's external use of force as control variables and

investigates their interaction effects on the internal-external conflict relationship. It also extends the temporal and spatial dimensions of data used by previous studies by examining the behaviors of 1052 international crisis actors (covering 144 states) spanning the period 1918–2015.

Literature Review

The central argument supporting the diversionary theory that hypothesizes a linkage between domestic problems and a state's external use of force is generated from earlier sociological literature on social group dynamics, which suggests that conflicts with an out-group increase the cohesion and political centralization of the in-group (Simmel 1898; Coser 1956). Arguing that "continued conflict is a condition of survival for struggling groups," Coser (1956, 104–106) states that groups may search for enemies with the deliberate purpose of maintaining internal cohesion. Based on this in-group/out-group hypothesis, scholars of international relations seek to link the argument about the behavior of unstructured groups to the behavior of state leaders. An important assumption to this linkage is the principal-agent model, which suggests that state leaders are agents motivated by a desire to remain in office and that each leader serves a selectorate (the principal) determining whether to retain the leader or not (Miller 1995, 763; Richards et al., 1993, 506). Therefore, when facing internal conflicts, political elites of a state have strong incentives to resort to belligerent foreign policies and seek external enemies in order to distract their selectorate from domestic problems, improve internal cohesion, and thus consolidate their own authority.

This hypothesis has enjoyed acceptance by many political scientists, and there is abundant literature examining the validity of the theory with diverse approaches. However, a gap still exists between quantitative empirical research and historical case studies. A large number of case studies do suggest that decisions for war are frequently influenced by the domestic political interests of state leaders facing internal challenges to their political authority (e.g., Levy 1989; Adamson 2001; Schubert et al. 2002; Levy and Vakili 2014). For example, many have interpreted the invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentina in terms of the government's attempts to reestablish unity and the regime's legitimacy within the society when facing large-scale civil unrest (Levy and Vakili 2014, 118–120). Nevertheless, quantitative studies have not yet yielded consistent results regarding the validity of the diversionary theory. Several quantitative studies produce very encouraging results by finding that domestic strife increases the likelihood of diversionary external conflicts (e.g., Gelpi 1997; Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). Yet, there are also scholars who suggest that the presence of internal conflict rarely influences leaders to initiate foreign conflicts (e.g., Haas 1968; Meernik and Waterman 1996; Chiozza and Goemans 2004). The lack of consensus among scholars using different approaches raises a question of whether the diversionary hypothesis is merely a case-specific phenomenon or a generalizable relationship

between internal and external conflicts.

Several scholars have addressed the inability of quantitative studies to yield consistent findings by investigating various factors and their impacts on the validity of the diversionary hypothesis. For example, Tir (2010) argues that the leader anticipates that the population may react to territorial issues in ways more consistent with diversionary expectations. Thus, the existence of domestic problems should specifically be associated with the initiation of a territorial conflict. Haynes (2016, 2017) suggests that diversionary conflicts are also conditioned on the state's ethnic structure and the capabilities of the targets. That is to say, ethnically fragmented states are significantly more prone to initiating diversionary conflicts, and the domestic-foreign conflict relationship tends to exist when the target is a powerful state. However, these studies have neglected the distinct causal effects of different levels of domestic conflict. As suggested earlier, in order to specify the conditions under which the diversionary hypothesis would be valid, more attention should be paid to the operationalization of the independent variable. According to Hazelwood (1975, 216, also cited in Gelpi 1997; Davies 2002), the form of domestic-foreign conflict relationship is conditioned by the nature of the domestic conflict itself. Nonetheless, these studies assume that different levels of internal conflict are interchangeable. Measuring "domestic conflict" merely as incidents of riot, strike, and public demonstration, they neglected domestic mass violence and its impact on the leaders' diversionary behaviors. This assumption may bias the results and undermine the generalizability of their findings. Although there are also studies which make distinctions among levels of domestic conflict and expect different causal effects, scholars still disagree with each other on which one would lead to a diversionary conflict (e.g., Gelpi 1997; Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). A blurred operationalization of the independent variable (i.e., internal conflict) in examining the diversionary theory may confound the statistical results. Therefore, it is necessary to look more closely at the two levels of domestic conflict and examine their impacts respectively.

Generally speaking, quantitative diversionary studies debate the significance of two levels of domestic conflict in explaining a state's foreign policy choices: domestic mass violence and moderate societal unrest. Some scholars such as Davies (2002) and Sirin (2011) suggest that only a grave internal threat, against which the political leaders expect that their chances of survival will be small, could influence the decision makers to resort to belligerent foreign policies. This is because, usually when facing serious internal conflicts like revolutions or open civil war, the leaders believe that they no longer have the capabilities to turn to other solutions in the domestic realm—namely, suppressing the mass unrest or granting the demands of the rebels (Davies 2002, 675; Sirin 2011, 306). By threatening the survival of the government, domestic mass violence invokes a very urgent need on the part of decision makers, who will desperately turn to external conflicts in order to increase internal cohesion and retain power, to regain social order. In contrast, for other moderate forms of internal conflict, the diversionary

tactic is not the only strategy that would be used by state leaders; they may still choose to target the domestic problems instead (Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). That is to say, domestic societal unrest, which does not impose a direct challenge to the viability of the regime, would not necessarily compel diversionary incentives. In this case, there are no significant associations between domestic and external conflicts.

There is also an opposing argument that the relationship between the seriousness of domestic problems and the probability of the decision makers to resort to external use of force is not linear but curvilinear; beyond the "threshold of unrest," political elites will no longer opt for the diversionary use of force (Hazelwood 1975; Levy 1989; Gelpi 1997; Morgan and Anderson 1999). First, as suggested by Gelpi (1997, 262), when the domestic disturbances are great, the dissenting groups may no longer consider the state to be an in-group. In this case, diversion is not a viable strategy for the leaders to maintain their hold on power, and they have to turn to domestic repression instead. In addition, when a government faces a high-level domestic conflict such as an open civil war, diversionary conflict can be counterproductive (Levy 1989; Morgan and Anderson 1999, 801). The internal conflict, which significantly increases the state's vulnerability, will make it very likely to be defeated in an external conflict, and this could make the leaders lose office and even make the regime break down (Morgan and Anderson 1999; Chiozza and Goemans 2004). That is to say, after the "threshold" has been crossed, conflicts with an out-group have a high risk of accelerating the degeneration of the in-group. Therefore, political leaders will be less inclined to resort to the diversionary use of force when facing serious domestic mass violence. According to the "curvilinear model," they are only willing to use the diversionary tactic for moderate domestic societal unrest, such as protest demonstrations or riots.

Despite the divergence in arguments, the above literature has generally suggested that different levels of domestic conflict may generate distinct foreign policy incentives for the leaders. Due to the complexity of the linkages between domestic and foreign politics, when studying the effects of different levels of domestic conflict, other confounding variables are worth taking into account. There are many factors which could also potentially influence the state's propensity for using external violence. For example, as suggested by the Democratic Peace Theory, due to higher audience costs and more institutionalized constraints imposed by the political structure, democracies seldom go to war with each other (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Gelpi 2001). Although the theory is focused on democratic dyads, it also implies that democratic states are supposed to use external force less frequently in general.

More importantly, the state's regime type has received particular attention from previous diversionary literature mainly due to its potential interaction effects. Although scholars still cannot achieve consensus over how the political system of a state would influence the associations between domestic

conflicts and external violence, they are generally suggesting that this internal-external conflict relationship differs across regime types. Focusing on domestic constraints and availability of alternative solutions, some scholars believe that democratic leaders have more incentives for the diversionary use of force when facing internal problems (Andreski 1980; Gelpi 1997; Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). They argue that, because democratic leaders are impeded by electoral recall and legal/constitutional restraints to use force domestically, usually they will find it more difficult to use force to suppress domestic unrest (Gelpi 1997, 260–261; Davies 2002, 689). In contrast, authoritarian leaders face substantially fewer constraints in opting for domestic repression, so they do not necessarily have to resort to the diversionary tactic (Andreski, 1980). However, there are scholars who disagree by arguing that democratic leaders are in fact less likely to use this strategy because they anticipate higher domestic political costs for the external use of force (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992, 155). Compared with them, authoritarian leaders who expect to incur fewer political costs when resorting to external violence usually have more incentives to solve domestic problems through the diversionary use of war (Miller 1995). Although no agreement has been achieved yet, we can see that the internal-external conflict relationship is potentially contingent on the regime type of the state.

In addition to domestic political systems, in undertaking the analysis of diversionary incentives, several external factors should also be taken into consideration. These are prominent alternative explanations for a state's external use of violence as well. First, the gap between the intervener and foreign target state's power capabilities, which affects the former's probability of initiating foreign military conflicts, is the most commonly used control variable in diversionary literature (e.g. Tir 2010; Sirin 2011; Haynes 2016). The larger the power advantage a state possesses over its potential adversary, the more likely it is to use force in international crises (Prins 2005, 344). This is because the stronger power, compared with its weaker adversary, has a larger amount of available resources and thus could use external violence at a much lower cost (Pearson 1974; Gelpi 1997, 262). In addition, variations in a state's foreign policy choices could also be explained by the conflict setting when a state is involved in an international crisis. According to Goertz and Diehl (1993, 148), nearly 75 percent of militarized disputes and 53 percent of interstate wars since 1816 occurred within some form of rivalry context (i.e., protracted conflict). Because they exhibit long periods of deep hostility and often multiple militarized conflicts, in interstate crises rival states have a considerably higher propensity for taking military actions compared with non-rival ones (Prins 2005). Finally, the last two alternative explanatory factors for a state's initiation of foreign military actions are related to the intensity of the international crisis situation. Many scholars have found that states react to an international crisis with the level of action that matches the intensity of the foreign trigger; violence in the crisis trigger is a very strong predictor of whether the crisis actor will respond violently or not (Hewitt and Wilkenfeld 1999, 314).

Similarly, the degree to which a crisis actor perceives a high or low threat to its viability from an international crisis also makes a difference (Brecher et al. 2017). Empirically speaking, a grave external threat to the viability of the state as perceived by the state leaders usually significantly increases the prevalence of violence in the government's foreign crisis management technique (Hewitt and Wilkenfeld 1999; Trumbore and Boyer 2000).

Noticeably, the last control factor—the gravity of external threat perceived by the leaders—may affect the causal relationship between internal and external conflicts as well. The general assumption of this paper, which suggests a linkage between domestic and foreign conflicts, raises a question of whether the impacts of domestic factors could be truly independent from the influences of international factors. The model of "two level games" propounded by Simon and Starr, in line with the "linkage politics" assumption, argues that governments play in domestic and international arenas simultaneously; sometimes decision makers must cope with internal and external threats at the same time (Starr 1994; Simon and Starr 1996). In this case, since the state needs to use its resources to address the problems in both domestic and international realms, there are possible tradeoffs between the leader's policy choices in response to the internal and external threats (Simon and Starr 1996, 273). That is to say, the particular decision-making process of state leaders when facing internal conflicts may well be contingent on their reactions to external threats. The literature does not provide a specific prediction for the way in which these two types of threats would interact with each other in affecting a state's choices to use external violence, but based on the general idea of the "two level games" model, we have good reasons to expect potential interaction effects between domestic conflicts and the gravity of external threat as perceived by the leaders.

Research Design

Data

Units of analysis of this study are countries involved in international crises. It employs actor level data from the latest version of the *International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Project (Version 12)*, which documents 1052 international crisis actors (covering 144 states) from 1918 to 2015 and gives a detailed description of all foreign policy crises experienced by these crisis actors due to their involvement in the international crisis (Brecher et al. 2017). The *ICB* dataset has several advantages. First, previous quantitative studies on the diversionary theory of war have focused on either limited states (e.g., Meernik and Waterman 1996; Morgan and Anderson 1999) or relatively shorter time periods (e.g., Gelpi 1997; Davies, 2002; Tir 2010; Sirin 2011). The *ICB* dataset, which was updated in August 2017, provides data on the domestic conflicts and international crisis behaviors of states within a broader range and longer time span. It thus enhances the generalizability of this study's findings. Second, it collects variables at both state actor level and

international system level, which makes it convenient for us to control for the effects of external factors while examining the impacts of internal problems on states' foreign policy choices. Third, regarding the two levels of domestic conflict, the *ICB Project* records "whether there was an increased level of domestic mass violence/societal unrest *preceding* the international crisis" (Brecher et al. 2017, 48). This time-serial nature of the data enables us to differentiate the model results of this study from a reciprocal relationship between domestic and foreign conflicts (i.e., the internalization of external conflicts).

Here in this study, since intra-war crises have already included mutual military actions, I exclude all the international crisis actors that are involved in intra-war crises from the dataset in order to avoid confounding the results (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000). I also remove all the cases that have missing or undesired values for my variables of interest, which will be discussed later. There is a total of 725 cases included in the statistical analysis process.

Hypotheses

Based on the opposing arguments regarding the impacts of domestic mass violence and societal unrest on a state's propensity for using external force, my main hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1A: A state is more likely to use external force in an international crisis with an increased level of domestic mass violence.

Hypothesis 1B: A state is less likely to use external force in an international crisis with an increased level of domestic mass violence.

Hypothesis 2: A state is more likely to use external force in an international crisis with an increased level of domestic societal unrest.

Variables

Dependent Variable—External Use of Force:

The dependent variable in this research is whether the state uses external force or not. The *ICB*'s "major response" variable identifies the specific action taken by the state once its decision makers perceive the external threat that triggers the international crisis. This variable is a categorical variable with nine levels, ranging from "no response-inaction" to "violent military act." Since the focus of this paper is the use of force, I transform the variable into a dichotomous measure by recoding the levels that involve violent military action (categories 8–9) as "yes" and "no" otherwise (categories 1–7).

Independent Variable 1—Domestic Mass Violence

One of the two independent variables in this research is whether there was an increase in the level of domestic mass violence *preceding* the crisis. The *ICB*'s "mass violence" variable assesses the level of mass violence present within the society of the crisis actor as evidenced by insurrections, civil war, and

revolution. This categorical variable includes four levels. It uses a code of "1" if there was a significant increase during relevant period *preceding* the crisis, a code of "2" if there was a normal level, a code of "3" if there was a significant decrease, and a code of "4" if the crisis actor was a newly independent state. Here again, I collapse the variable into a dichotomous dummy variable, with "yes" if there was a significant increase (category 1) and "no" otherwise (category 2–3). I exclude cases of the fourth category (newly independent state) from the analysis since such cases do not provide information on the level of internal problems.

Independent Variable 2—Domestic Societal Unrest

The other independent variable included in the research is whether there was an increase in the level of domestic societal unrest *preceding* the crisis. The *ICB*'s "societal unrest" variable assesses the level of societal unrest in the crisis actor as evidenced by assassinations, terrorism, general strikes, and demonstrations. This is also a four-level categorical variable with the same coding method as "mass violence." Thus, I treat it the same way as the first independent variable.

Control Variable 1—Democracy

In this research, one of the factors that is going to be controlled for is the regime type of the crisis actor. The "regime" variable of the *ICB Project* distinguishes between authoritarian and democratic regimes at the time of the crisis. The criteria it uses for identifying democratic regimes are competitive elections, pluralist representation in the legislature, competitive parties, and a free press. This is a categorical variable with five levels. I transform it into a dichotomous variable, with "yes" if the crisis actor is a democracy (category 1) and "no" if it is not (categories 2–5).

Control Variable 2—Power Discrepancy

The *ICB Project* assigns a power score for each crisis actor and its principal adversary on the basis of the total of six separate scores measuring size of population, gross national product (GNP), territorial size, alliance capability, military expenditure, and nuclear capability, at the onset of the crisis. It then compares the power of a crisis actor—immediately prior to its major response—with that of its principal adversary to create a final score for the "power discrepancy" variable. This is a numeric variable ranging from -179 to +179. Positive values indicate a power discrepancy that is to the advantage of the crisis actor and vice versa.

Control Variable 3—Foreign Trigger

The *ICB Project*'s "trigger" variable describes the precipitating cause of a foreign policy crisis, which includes the specific act, event, or situational change that leads decision-makers to perceive a time pressure for response and

heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities. It is a categorical variable with nine levels. I first remove cases whose values for this variable are "internal verbal or physical challenge to regime or elite" (category 6) because this does not provide information on the intensity of the external trigger. Since I am only interested in the *presence of violence* in the foreign crisis trigger, I collapse it into a two-level variable. The trigger is coded as "violence" if it includes violent act (categories 8–9) and "no violence" if it does not (categories 1–5 and 7).

Control Variable 4—External Threat

The *ICB Project* identifies the type of most serious threat during the international crisis as perceived by the principal decision makers of the crisis actor. This is also a categorical variable which includes eight levels. Here, I am mainly interested in the *gravity of perceived external threats*. Thus, I transform the variable and re-code three levels as "yes" (category 2, 3, 6). The first one is "threat to existence (of the nation in general)." The second one is "political threat" (threat of overthrow of regime, replacement of elite, etc.), which imposes a direct challenge to the leader's political survival. In addition, I also include "territorial threat." For several reasons, territorial concerns have often been suggested by many as central to states' interests in international relations, and territory is one of the high stakes issues for which governments are prepared to fight (Starr 1994, 489). The other five levels are re-coded as "no."

Control Variable 5—Protracted Conflict

The *ICB Project* also identifies the conflict setting of the international crisis for the crisis actor. The values included in the "conflict setting" variable are "non-protracted conflict," "protracted conflict," and "long-war protracted conflict." I re-code the first category as "no" and then merge the other two categories as "yes." This is again a dichotomous variable.

Models

Because the dependent variable is a categorical variable with two meaningful levels, I am going to use binary logistic regression models to test my hypotheses. As suggested earlier, the internal-external relationship could also be potentially affected by regime types and gravity of external threats. Thus, in addition to examining the explanatory power of my two independent variables through taking all the control variables into account, I will also add interaction terms to my model in order to explore the potential interaction effects of these two variables. The second level of the dependent variable is "yes," so the logit functions generated from the models are going to measure the estimated log odds of "external use of force." Statistical significance level for this study is set to 5%.

Statistical Analysis

Base Model

To begin, I fit a base model (*Model 1*) which only includes the two independent variables and the dependent variable. The baseline levels for the independent variables are "no." *Table 1* shows the model coefficients and Wald Z-test results for this model. After controlling for domestic societal unrest, there is a significant positive impact of an increased level of domestic mass violence on the state's probability of using external force (P=0.03). However, there is no evidence for a statistically significant relationship between an increased level of societal unrest and the state's likelihood of using external force when controlling for the effect of domestic mass violence (P=0.91). That is to say, without controlling for other potential confounding factors, only domestic mass violence would contribute to a state's external use of force.

Adding Control Variables

To further explore the causal relationship, I then move on to test the significance of the confounding variables in explaining variations in the dependent variable. *Model 2* includes all the five potential control factors as suggested in the research design section. As shown in *Table 1*, for power advantage enjoyed by the crisis actor, prevalence of violence in the foreign crisis trigger, and presence of a grave external threat perceived by the leaders, we have strong evidence that there are positive effects on the state's probability of using external force (P=8.42e-07; P < 2e-16; P=0.008). The variable Protracted Conflict is also borderline significant at a 5% significance level (P=0.07). In contrast, there is no evidence for a significant relationship between regime type of the crisis actor and the dependent variable (P=0.94).

To confirm what has been found by the first two models, I created a new model (*Model 3*) which includes all the independent variables and control variables. According to *Table 1*, after controlling for all the confounding variables, increased domestic mass violence still has a significant positive impact on the state's probability of using external force (P=0.02), and the influence of domestic societal unrest remains non-significant (P=0.72). Further, corresponding to the results from *Model 2*, here all the control factors except for Democracy (P=0.82) could also explain variations in the dependent variable after taking the independent variables into account (P=4.6e-07; P< 2e-16; P=0.04; P=0.08).[1]

In addition, as suggested in the literature review section, there could also be potential interaction effects for regime type, as well as presence of a grave external threat, in explaining variations in the state's external use of force. Based on *Model 3*, I add four new interaction terms to examine the interaction effects

---

1.   Strictly speaking, Protracted Conflict is not statistically significant at a 5% level. However, since it still shows a certain trend toward significance (P=0.08) and many studies have emphasized the crucial role that this variable plays in interstate military conflicts, I decided to consider it as a significant factor and keep it in the final model.

between the two independent variables and the two control variables separately (*Model 4*). Disappointingly, neither of the four interaction terms is statistically significant (P=0.26, 0.63, 0.86, 0.41). We do not have sufficient evidence that either regime type or gravity of external threats would significantly influence the relationship between a state's internal conflicts and its propensity for using external violence.

Final Model and Post Estimation

In the end, I arrive at the best fit model, which includes five explanatory factors: Domestic Mass Violence, Power Discrepancy, Foreign Trigger, External Threat, and Protracted Conflict (*Model 5*). As shown in *Table 1*, despite several changes in the magnitudes of model coefficients, the significance and directions of impact of these five variables remain generally consistent with the results from the models before. A check of Cook's Distance for *Model 5* also shows that no case would be overly influential to the predictions of this model; thus, no case needs to be removed.

According to the final model, only *Hypothesis 1* is supported by the statistical analysis results. After taking the other four control variables into account, an increased level of domestic mass violence would significantly increase the state's propensity for using external violence (P=0.008). Other factors including power advantage, violence in the crisis trigger, grave external threats, and rivalry status also have positive impacts on the dependent variable (P=2.36e-07; P< 2e-16; P=0.03; P=0.08).

Table 2 shows the predicted probabilities for the final model. In order to figure out how domestic mass violence influences the state's probabilities of using external violence, the control variables are held constant at different values. In a scenario where 1) the state has a power advantage of 5.73 over its principal adversary in the international crisis, 2) the foreign trigger includes violent acts, 3) the political leaders perceive a grave external threat, and 4) there is a setting of protracted conflict, a significant increase in the level of domestic mass violence would increase the state's probability of initiating external violence from 65% to 78%. Changing the values of control variables would not influence the positive impact of domestic mass violence. When power discrepancy is set to 0 and the other three categorical variables are set to "no," a significant increase in the independent variable would increase the predicted probabilities from 12% to 21%.

Table 1: Results for Model 1 to Model 5

	Dependent variable:				
	`External Use of Force`				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
`Mass Violence`_yes	0.542**		0.631**	0.677	0.672***
	(0.249)		(0.281)	(0.530)	(0.253)
`Societal Unrest`_yes	-0.022		0.077	0.299	
	(0.193)		(0.217)	(0.374)	
Democracy_yes		0.014	0.044	0.003	
		(0.190)	(0.191)	(0.229)	
`Power Discrepancy`		0.018***	0.019***	0.019***	0.019***
		(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
`Foreign Trigger`_violence		1.801***	1.830***	1.844***	1.821***
		(0.177)	(0.179)	(0.180)	(0.177)
`External Threat`_yes		0.485***	0.391**	0.521**	0.390**
		(0.183)	(0.188)	(0.226)	(0.182)
`Mass Violence`_yes:Democracy_yes				0.688	
				(0.613)	
`Mass Violence`_yes:`External Threat`_yes				-0.291	
				(0.603)	
`Societal Unrest`_yes:Democracy_yes				-0.083	
				(0.466)	
`Societal Unrest`_yes:`External Threat`_yes				-0.366	
				(0.441)	
`Protracted Conflict`_yes		0.311*	0.305*	0.296*	0.305*
		(0.174)	(0.175)	(0.177)	(0.175)
Constant	-0.627***	-1.962***	-2.056***	-2.099***	-2.017***
	(0.093)	(0.220)	(0.230)	(0.249)	(0.198)
Observations	725	725	725	725	725
Log Likelihood	-472.571	-401.385	-397.808	-396.305	-397.892
Akaike Inf. Crit.	951.141	814.770	811.615	816.609	807.784
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

• Regression data were collected from the *ICB Project (version 12)* and were analyzed by the author.

Table 2: Predicted Probabilities for Model 5

(A significant increase in the level of) Domestic Mass Violence	Power Discrepancy	Foreign Trigger	External Threat	Protracted Conflict	Probabilities of Using External Violence
No	5.73 (mean)	Violence	Yes	Yes	65%
Yes	5.73 (mean)	Violence	Yes	Yes	78%
No	0 (median)	No Violence	No	No	12%
Yes	0 (median)	No Violence	No	No	21%

• Regression data were collected from the *ICB Project (version 12)* and were analyzed by the author

Discussion

Domestic Mass Violence vs. Societal Unrest

The findings above support *Hypothesis 1A* but reject *Hypothesis 1B* and *Hypothesis 2*. After taking into account other control factors, a state is more likely to resort to external force when there was an increased level of domestic mass violence preceding the international crisis. In contrast, there is no significant association between domestic societal unrest and the state's choice of initiating foreign conflicts. The results suggest that domestic societal unrest and mass violence will lead to distinct foreign policy incentives. Thus, for studies on the linkages between domestic and foreign politics, different levels of internal conflict cannot be treated as the same factor.

More importantly, one potential implication of the study results is that state leaders are generally risk-acceptant instead of risk-averse when facing serious internal problems threatening their political survival. As previously suggested, existing studies have generally yielded two competing arguments regarding the distinct impacts of the two independent variables. In finding that only high-level domestic violence could effectively explain a state's belligerent behavior in the international realm, this study supports the argument that usually a grave internal threat would invoke a desperate need for the state leaders to regain social order through initiating foreign conflicts (Davies 2002; Sirin 2011). Meanwhile, it rejects the "curvilinear model" that argues that beyond the "threshold of unrest" a state would be less inclined to use the diversionary tactic (Blainey 1973; Levy 1989; Gelpi 1997). This does not necessarily mean the argument that "the presence of domestic mass violence would make the state very likely to be defeated in foreign conflicts" is wrong (Levy 1989, 272–273). When facing serious internal challenges, beleaguered and vulnerable governments tend to adopt a "fortress

mentality" and are particularly inclined to take risks for the purpose of domestic crisis management (Mayer 1969, 295). That is to say, even if initiating a foreign conflict in this case may lead to even more serious outcomes, when the leaders perceive that their political viability is very much in danger, they still prefer to gamble by taking drastic measures. On the contrary, the insignificance of domestic societal unrest in the models suggests that state leaders would not necessarily rely on the diversionary use of force when the internal problems cannot impose a serious challenge to their political survival. As mentioned before, there are other internal crisis management techniques available as well within the domestic realm, including granting demands of the demonstrators and violently repressing the oppositions (Davies 2002, 675; Sirin 2011, 306). For domestic societal unrest, the state leaders may still sometimes avoid resorting to external violence by devoting political or military resources to their internal targets. The risk-acceptant mentality disappears as the internal threat remains at a low level.

Interactions

As suggested in the literature review section, there are two control variables that have potential interaction effects with the independent variables. First, previous studies on the diversionary theory of war have generally agreed that the internal-external conflict relationship differs across regime types. Yet, in this research, statistical results show no interactions between regime types and the two independent variables, which suggests that domestic political structures neither strengthen nor mitigate the leaders' diversionary incentives. However, the lack of support for this interaction effect could also be due to the limitation of this study which incorporated "regime type" as a dichotomous variable. Some scholars such as Pickering and Kisangani (2005; 2010) argue that regime type has been conceptualized too narrowly in the diversionary literature. For example, for autocratic states, the propensity to divert and to benefit domestically from the external use of force varies significantly across regimes with different sizes of winning coalitions (Pickering and Kisangani 2010). This is also true for democratic or autocratic regimes at different stages of national building (Pickering and Kisangani 2005, 23; 2010, 490). The *ICB Project* does not provide information on these factors, but it is possible that a study that has a more detailed conceptualization and operationalization of the "regime type" variable could be better at detecting the impacts of political structures on the internal-external conflict relationship.

Another potential interaction effect in this study is based on the "two level games" model which suggests that sometimes a state needs to deal with internal and external threat simultaneously. Because a state has limited available resources which lead to possible tradeoffs between its policy choices, the leaders' decision to use the diversionary tactic might also be influenced by the presence of external threat, but here the study finds no interactions between the gravity of external threats and the independent variables either, which seems to suggest that

a state's reactions to internal and external threats are independent from each other. Nevertheless, this could also result from the limitations of this research, which did not take into account the effect of power status on the potential interactions. In the "two level games" model of governments' security management decisions, the internal and external threats faced by the regime are only two out of the four components of the state leader's "common logic of decision" (Simon and Starr 1996; Starr 1994). According to Simon and Starr (1996, 273–275), the state's external defense capabilities as well as domestic strength also make a difference; in both realms, the leaders measure risks and threats against the state's capabilities when making decisions. It could still be true that there is an interaction effect between the presence of internal and external threat. Yet, since in most of the cases stronger powers have larger amount of resources at their demand, powerful states would generally face fewer constraints in making decisions when they have to cope with domestic and foreign problems simultaneously. That is to say, the degree to which external threats could influence the internal-external conflict relationship may as well be contingent on the states' power status. Instead of a two-way interaction relationship as examined in this study, future research could include a triple interaction term for internal conflict, gravity of external threat, and power status of the crisis actor in its models.

Selection Effects

The findings of this study are also limited by selection bias. The *ICB Project* dataset includes "all the foreign policy crises experienced by states due to their involvement in international crises" (Brecher et al. 2017). Instead of examining the diversionary onset of force itself, I am looking at the diversionary behavior of states within a context of existing external threats. Thus, the research results are not exactly equivalent to the description of internal-external conflict relations as suggested by the diversionary theory of war. Fortunately, the general effect of selection effects is to dampen the coefficients toward zero (Achen 1986). States would be more likely to adopt belligerent foreign policies when involved in international crises. That is to say, here in this study, since the variability of the dependent variable from the biased sample is already constrained by the context of existing external threats, it is actually harder to generate any significant results from the narrow variations. Therefore, the effects of domestic mass violence would be even stronger if the selection bias were corrected. Although these selection effects may have an influence on the model coefficients in the analysis, they do not imply that the study results are wrong or biased but only that they are limited to a description of the crisis escalation process (Gelpi 1997, 270).

Alternative Mechanisms

Another limitation of this study is that the empirical results as shown above could also be explained by alternative causal mechanisms. This is exactly the problem as pointed out by Levy (1989, 273); operational models of domestic-

foreign conflict linkages are often not congruent with the hypothesized theoretical relationships supposedly being tested. The detected relationship between domestic mass violence and a state's propensity for using external force may not be equivalent to the diversionary theory of war itself which hypothesized a one-way externalization of internal conflicts. There are generally two alternative causal mechanisms which could also account for the observed relationship: 1) The internalization of external conflicts, in which independently generated external conflict leads to the emergence of domestic unrest (Tilly 1975, 74; Miller and Elgun 2011, 197), and 2) Conflicts within state A generate internal weaknesses that tempt state B to initiate an external conflict, and the threat from B in turn makes state A respond with external force. This is another form of externalization of internal conflicts (Levy 1989, 269). The first alternative does not impose a challenge to this study. As introduced above, the *ICB Project* records the extent of domestic mass violence and domestic societal unrest preceding the international crisis. The dataset's inclusion of time lags in its operationalization of the two domestic conflict variables enables us to differentiate the model results from a reciprocal relationship between domestic and foreign conflicts.

However, the possibility suggested by the second causal mechanism cannot be excluded. Some scholars have come up with empirical evidence that internal problems could attract foreign conflicts. For example, Maoz (1989, 204) finds that regime changes, when the process is characterized by domestic mass violence over a short interval, increase the subsequent likelihood of foreign countries to put pressure on the state by violent means. Similarly, Blainey's (1973) study also shows that internal conflicts lead to international war by creating opportunities for attacks from the outside. That is to say, there is an endogeneity problem; instead of an exogenous factor resulting from the diversionary use of force, foreign conflicts may also be a factor endogenous to the decision-making process of the government to use external violence when facing internal conflicts. The observed relationship between domestic mass violence and a state's external use of force might not still be a sufficient support for what was theorized by the diversionary theory of war.

Conclusion & Future Avenues

In summary, the main finding of this preliminary research is that, among the two levels of domestic conflict, only the presence of domestic mass violence is positively related to a state's propensity for using external force. With different levels of internal conflict associated with distinct foreign policy incentives, the hypothesis of internal-external conflict relationship would be valid only when the internal problem is serious enough to impose a significant threat to the survival of the regime. It implies that state leaders are generally risk-acceptant in this case. This research also shows that other external factors—namely, power discrepancy, prevalence of violence in the crisis trigger, gravity of external threat, and conflict setting of the international crisis—could also significantly affect a state's foreign

policy choices. The government's decision to initiate external violence is a product of all these domestic and international level factors.

       This paper has attempted to fill a gap in previous diversionary studies. Extant literature, which has paid insufficient attention to the operationalization of the independent variable, fails to achieve consensus on the definition of "internal conflict" in the diversionary theory of war and thus on the validity of its hypothesis. Using a more extensive dataset and taking into account several prominent control factors with implied impacts on the internal-external conflict relationship, this study examines the linkages between distinct levels of internal conflict and a state's diversionary behavior. It specifies the mechanism through which the state's leader responds to various domestic conflicts. It also suggests several future avenues of research. First, since only a grave internal threat to their political survival would induce state leaders to address domestic problems through the diversionary use of force, future studies could further examine variations in a state's foreign policy choices by focusing on domestic factors that are closely related to the regime's viability. Second, as addressed earlier, the failure of this preliminary research to yield any significant results regarding the interaction terms may be due to the limitations of its research design. Thus, this study could be improved based on the suggestions given above in order better to examine the interaction effects for regime types, as well as the gravity of external threats. Finally, although the endogeneity problem is usually difficult to solve, future research could try to pay more attention to the causal relationship between domestic conflicts and external crisis triggers in order to explore which causal mechanisms as discussed above could better explain the observed relationship in this study.

References

Achen, Christopher H. 1986. *The Statistical Analysis of Quasi-Experiments*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Adamson, Fiona B. 2001. "Democratization and the Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus Crisis." *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (2): 277–303. 10.2307/798062.

Andreski, Stanislav. 1980. "On the Peaceful Disposition of Military Dictatorships." *The Journal of Strategic Studies 3* (3): 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398008437052.

Blainey, Geoffrey. 1973. *The Causes of War*. New York: Free Press.

Brecher, Michael, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 2000. *A Study of Crisis*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Brecher, Michael, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Kyle Beardsley, Patrick James, and David Quinn. 2017. *International Crisis Behavior Data Codebook, Version 12.* http://sites.duke.edu/icbdata/data-collections/.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and David Lalman. 1992. *War and Reason*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Davies, Graeme A. 2002. "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of International Conflicts: A Directed Dyad Analysis, 1950–1982." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (5): 672–692. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200202236169.

Chiozza, Giacomo, and Goemans, Henk E. 2004. "Avoiding Diversionary Targets." *Journal of Peace Research* 41 (4): 423–443. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343304044475.

Coser, Lewis A. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. New York: The Free Press.

Fearon, James D. 1998. "Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1): 289–313. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.289.

Gelpi, Christopher 1997. "Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (2): 255–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002797041002003.

Gelpi, Christopher F., and Michael Griesdorf. 2001. "Winners or Losers? Democracies in International Crisis, 1918–94." *American Political Science Review* 95 (3): 633–647. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055401003148.

Goertz, Gary, and Paul F. Diehl. 1993. "Enduring Rivalries: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (2): 147–171. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600766.

Haas, Michael. 1968. "Social Change and National Aggressiveness, 1900–1960." *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence*: 215–244.

Haynes, Kyle. 2016. "Diversity and Diversion: How Ethnic Composition Affects Diversionary Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (2): 258–271. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqv006.

—. 2017. "Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?" *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34 (4): 337–358. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215593723.

Hazlewood, Leo. 1975. "Diversion Mechanisms and Encapsulation processes: The Domestic Conflict-Foreign Conflict Hypothesis Reconsidered." *Sage International Yearbook of Foreign Policy Studies* 3: 213–244.

Hewitt, J. Joseph, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 1999. "One-sided Crises in the International System." *Journal of Peace Research* 36 (3): 309–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343399036003004.

Jung, Sung C. 2014. "Foreign Targets and Diversionary Conflict". *International Studies Quarterly* 58 (3): 566–578. https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12087.

Kanat, Kilic B. 2011. "Leadership Style And Diversionary Theory Of Foreign Policy: The Use Of Diversionary Strategies By Middle Eastern Leaders During And In The Immediate Aftermath Of The Gulf War." Ph.D. diss. Syracuse University. https://surface.syr.edu/psc_etd/104.

Levy, Jack S. 1989. "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique." In *Handbook of War Studies*, eds. Jack S. Levy and Manus I. Midlarsky. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 259–288.

—, and L. I. Vakili. 2014. "Diversionary Action by Authoritarian Regimes: Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas Case." In *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky. New York: Routledge, 118–145.

Maoz, Zeev. 1989. "Joining the Club of Nations: Political Development and International Conflict, 1816–1976." *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (2): 199–231. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600537.

Mayer, Arno J. 1969. "Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870–1956: A Research Assignment." *The Journal of Modern History* 41 (3): 292–303. https://doi.org/10.1086/240409.

Meernik, James, and Peter Waterman. 1996. "The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents." *Political Research Quarterly* 49 (3): 573–590. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299604900306.

Miller, Ross A. 1995. "Domestic Structures and the Diversionary Use of Force." *American Journal of Political Science*: 760–785. http://www.jstor.org/ stable/2111653.

—, and Özlem Elgün. 2011. "Diversion and Political Survival in Latin America." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55 (2): 192–219. https://doi. org/10.1177/0022002710381064.

Morgan, T. C., and Christopher J. Anderson. 1999. "Domestic Support and Diversionary External Conflict in Great Britain, 1950–1992." *The Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 799–814. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647829.

Nye, Joseph S., Gideon Rachman, Walter R. Mead, John Mearsheimer, Steven Walt, Peter D. Feaver, and Louis Fisher. 2012. *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Pearson, Frederic S., and Robert Baumann. 1974. "Foreign Military Intervention by Large and Small Powers."*International Interactions* 1 (4): 273–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050627408434412.

Pickering, Jeffery, and Emizet F. Kisangani. 2005. "Democracy and Diversionary Military Intervention: Reassessing Regime Type and the Diversionary Hypothesis." *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (1): 23–43. https://doi. org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00333.x.

—. 2010. "Diversionary Despots? Comparing Autocracies' Propensities to Use and to Benefit From Military Force." *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (2), 477-493.10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00442.x.

Prins, Brandon C. 2005. "Interstate Rivalry and the Recurrence of Crises: A Comparison of Rival and Nonrival Crisis Behavior, 1918– 1994." *Armed Forces & Society* 31 (3): 323–351. https://doi. org/10.1177/0095327X0503100302.

Richards, Diana, T. C. Morgan, Rick K. Wilson, Valerie L. Schwebach, and Garry D. Young. 1993. "Good Times, Bad Times, and the Diversionary Use of Force: A Tale of Some Not-so-free Agents." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37 (3): 504–535. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200279303700 3005.

Schubert, James N., Patrick A. Stewart, and Margaret A. Curran. 2002. "A Defining Presidential Moment: 9/11 and the Rally Effect." *Political Psychology* 23 (3): 559–583. 10.1111/0162-895X.00298.

Simmel, Georg. 1898. "The Persistence of Social Groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 3 (5): 662–698.

Simon, Marc V., and Harvey Starr. 1996. "Extraction, Allocation, and the Rise and Decline of States: A Simulation Analysis of Two-level Security Management." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40 (2): 272–297. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002796040002003.

Sirin, Cigdem V. 2011. "Is it Cohesion or Diversion? Domestic Instability and the Use of Force in International Crises." *International Political Science Review* 32 (3): 303–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110380554.

Starr, Harvey. 1994. "Revolution and War: Rethinking the Linkage between Internal and External Conflict." *Political Research Quarterly* 47 (2): 481–507. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299404700213.

Tir, Jaroslav. 2010. "Territorial diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict." *The Journal of Politics* 72 (2): 413–425. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609990879.

Trumbore, Peter F., and Mark A. Boyer. 2000. "International Crisis Decision-making as a Two-level Process." *Journal of Peace Research* 37 (6): 679–697. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343300037006002.