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Success Breeds Success? War Outcomes, Domestic Opposition, and Elections

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War outcomes are unlikely to effect elections if the major parties did not disagree over the war. Leaders who enter into wars are more likely to be punished for defeat or rewarded for victory if the opposition did not support the government during the war. Employing original data on legislative opposition during interstate wars, this paper examines all elections since WWII in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and India. The results confirm that leaders are far more likely to be punished (rewarded) for bad (good) outcomes if the opposition did not support the war. Further, there is no direct effect of either war outcomes or the position of the opposition. It is only when considered in conjunction with the opposition's behavior that the important link between war outcomes and elections is revealed.

Keywords accountability, costs, elections, war, opposition

Introduction

Following the surprisingly swift and relatively low-cost victory in the Persian Gulf War, many commentators considered the reelection of President George H.W. Bush virtually assured. Yet he, like Winston Churchill before him, found that delivering victory for one's nation on the battlefield did not ensure that the public would deliver victory for their leader in the ballots. This begs the question: Do war outcomes affect electoral outcomes, as they are so often assumed to by scholars of international relations?

This is an important question, as a stronger link between war outcomes and leadership tenure for democratic leaders than nondemocratic leaders is assumed by extant explanations of the democratic peace proposition (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, 2003), the tendency of democracies to win a disproportionate amount of the wars they fight (Reiter and Stam, 1998, 2002), and the tendency of wars involving democracies to be shorter than those that do not involve democracies (Bennett and Stam, 1998). Yet the accountability of democratic leaders' decisions in matters such as war has not yet received the critical attention it deserves.

I seek to redress this shortcoming by specifying the causal mechanism through which democratic leaders can be held to account. I argue that the opposition must differentiate itself from the government if the government is to be held accountable. My analysis of all post-WWII elections in all continuously democratic states that fought wars during this period confirms the expectation that the effect of war outcomes on elections depends upon the opposition's wartime behavior. More specifically, good (bad) outcomes are more likely

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to be rewarded (punished) when the opposition opposed continuing the war than when they supported it.

The Importance of Opposition Behavior

The cornerstone of the claim that there is a stronger link between war outcomes and leadership tenure in democracies is the greater accountability of democratic leaders in general—not just with regard to foreign policy outcomes. When leaders face greater competition over a larger potential pool of potential supporters, there exists a greater incentive to institute policies preferred by the majority of the selectorate (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). In democracies, competition for office is institutionalized in the form of popular elections. If it is competition between the government and the opposition for the support of the general population that ensures accountability, then the political fortunes of the leader must necessarily depend (at least in part) upon the behavior of the opposition.

I assume that elections are contests between strategic parties, who prefer first and foremost to attain office. Voters are assumed to make their decisions based upon both the platforms offered by the parties as well as the past performance of the government. Spatial models of elections (Downs, 1957; Adams et al., 2006; Schofield and Sened, 2006) emphasize the importance of the distance between the policy positions offered by the parties and those preferred by the voters (generally the median voter). The retrospective theory of voting assumes that voters have good reasons not to blindly believe the promises of candidates. While little information is available to help voters decide how credible the promises of the opposition are, the policy record of the government sends a signal about what the voters can expect if they return the government to office (Fiorina, 1978; Achen and Bartels, 2004).

The argument here combines elements of both approaches. I assume voters look to the past performance of the government to establish an expectation of future outcomes should they return the government to office, but they do not disregard the positions adopted by the parties. There must be some difference between the candidates for voters to prefer the opposition to the government, even if the government's record is unimpressive.¹ If the public has no reason to believe the opposition would have implemented a different policy, then there is no reason to prefer them to the current government. With respect to war, this implies that if the opposition supported the war, then the voters will attribute less responsibility for the outcome of the war (be it good or bad) to the government and instead determine which party is to be preferred on the basis of another issue, where there is a clearer distinction.

The act of opposition then simply acts to politicize the war. By contrast, opposition support dampens the effects of war outcomes by reducing the perceived political nature of the war. If the government loses a war that the opposition opposed, it is more likely to suffer electorally than it would be if the opposition had supported. If the government secures a victory after the opposition opposed continuing the war, the government is likely to be rewarded more so than if the opposition supported. This amounts to claiming that there is no direct, independent effect of opposition behavior on electoral outcomes. Opposition does not itself make the government more or less likely to fare well in the next election; it acts only as a determinant of the importance of the war's outcome.

Competing Views of the Effect of Opposition

Counter-hypotheses could be offered in either direction. One view would be that opposing a war undercuts the government's ability to conduct the war, and this act will be perceived by

¹Public opinion scholars argue that opinion only polarizes on important issues in the face of partisan discord (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2007). Regarding opposition during international crises, Schultz states that, "by going on record as opposed to the conflict, the opposition politicizes the issue and positions itself to exploit the outcome in the next election" (2001, 80).

the public as seditious and unpatriotic, leading voters to reject the opposition and rally behind the government. The best way for the opposition to win office, according to this view, would be to support the government's war efforts, while offering a more popular platform on other issues. If true, we would expect to observe a negative and significant effect of opposition support on the incumbent's performance in the next election regardless of the outcome of the war (since opposing the government would always improve the government's electoral prospects). The other view would be that a persistent antiwar message will inevitably erode support for the government's war efforts. If true, the opposition's best strategy for electoral victory would be to unfailingly attack the government's conduct of the war, regardless of the facts on the ground.² This would lead us to expect to see a positive and significant effect of opposition support on the incumbent's performance in the next election.

Both of these views assume the public's reaction to the opposition's position-taking is independent of characteristics of the war itself. The theory presented here presumes a more sophisticated public. The public in this view deems opposition legitimate and necessary to safeguard against reckless foreign policy. But it does not reward the opposition for abusing this power and blindly opposing all wars. The public implicitly grants the government the benefit of the doubt and pays little attention to foreign policy. In so doing, they avoid the costs of information-collecting. They are willing to do so because they trust the opposition to alert them if the government has entered into a war unwisely. The opposition's best strategy for winning the next election, according to this view, is to support wars that are likely to end in victory and to oppose wars that are likely to end in defeat. If the opposition errs from this strategy and chooses to oppose a war that is likely to be successful or supports a war that is likely to fail, the government will reap the benefits of their folly. The outcome of the war itself is insufficient to produce a clear preference among the electorate for either the government or the opposition. If this view is correct, we would not expect to observe any independent effect of either opposition behavior or war outcomes on electoral outcomes.

This yields the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The incumbent's probability of reelection is larger (smaller) after winning (losing) a war if the opposition opposed the war than if it supported.

Hypothesis 2: Opposition support has no independent effect on electoral outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: War outcomes have no independent effect on electoral outcomes.

Research Design

I examine all elections involving the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and India since World War II. No other state was both continuously democratic throughout the postwar era and a primary participant in an interstate war. I do not consider democratic allies fighting on behalf of other democratic states.³ This produces 51 elections, 18 of which were war elections. By war election, I mean that a war had either ended since the last election or was currently ongoing.

²See Mabe and Levy (2004) for an interesting discussion of the possibility of politically motivated opposition to wars that are expected to be popular. Their argument assumes the opposition can prevent the government from gaining any electoral advantage from a victorious war by opposing it and persuading voters that the war was itself politically motivated.

³While the theoretical argument advanced here might well be applied to wartime elections for allied states, collecting data on opposition party positions for such observations would pose a considerably greater challenge than collecting data on the positions of opposition parties for democratic states that were primary participants in a conflict.

Incumbent Party Reelection

The electoral outcome to be studied is a binary indicator of whether the incumbent party retained office.⁴ Since the dependent variable is binary, I estimate a logistic regression. For various reasons, alternative measures of electoral outcomes are undesirable.

The institutional differences between the four states in the analysis make it difficult to have any sense of what constitutes a large share of the vote. The mean incumbent vote share for the United States for the elections included in this analysis is 50.2%. The mean incumbent vote share for Israel, by contrast, is 35.7%. A linear regression with vote share as the dependent variable would thus not produce results that lend themselves readily to interpretation.

Alternatively, the change in the incumbent party's share of the national vote could be used. While preferable to vote share as a dependent variable, this measure is likewise difficult to interpret as increases (decreases) in incumbent party vote share are not necessarily comparable across systems. This measure would ask the model to produce a level of precision in its estimates that the data do not allow, given the differences across electoral systems. Gaining 5% more of the popular vote than in the previous presidential election in the U.S. means something quite different than does gaining 5% more of the national vote in an Israeli election to the Knesset. The average change in incumbent party vote share for incumbents that won is just about 5% in the U.S., while it is -0.3% in Israel. That is, the average incumbent who wins reelection in Israel does marginally worse than they did in the previous election. The correlation between change in incumbent party vote share and incumbent victory is over 0.7 in the U.S. and India, around 0.5 in the U.K., but only a bit over 0.2 in Israel. This suggests that this measure does not allow for as much generality across electoral systems as it might appear on the surface. Small changes carry profound implications in some systems (Israel) but not others (U.S. or India).

Using a binary measure of whether the incumbent is retained is crude, but it does not produce results with a misleading level of false precision, and therefore the predicted effects of the variables are more straightforward in their interpretation.

War Outcomes and Opposition Position

The data on war involvement, fatalities, prewar population, and duration were taken from the Correlates of War data set, version 3.0 (Sarkees, 2000).

I employ Slantchev's (2004) ordinal ranking of war outcomes rather than the conventional Correlates of War win, lose, or draw categorization. This ranking codes the outcomes of wars relative to the prewar goals of the initiators. Rather than simply observing victory, draw or defeat, this categorization observes victory, some gains, some concessions, or defeat. This eliminates the problem of how to treat draws, as well as providing a more precise test of the link between good (bad) outcomes and electoral reward (punishment). In the case of elections that took place during ongoing wars (as was the case for 5 of the elections analyzed here), I attempted to follow Slantchev's decision rule to make a judgment as to how the war would have been coded if it were to have ended the day of the election.⁵

⁴The data on which party won office in each election were taken from various public sources, including the official websites of the Israeli Knesset and the Indian Election Commission.

⁵While some wars do have swings, none of the elections analyzed here were held at any point during an ongoing war such that the likely result of the war would have then appeared to be different than what it ultimately turned out to be. For example, in 1968, there may have been great uncertainty over how much longer the U.S. would fight in Vietnam, but if the war were have ended in 1968, the U.S. clearly would have failed to achieve its prewar goals, as remained true when the war did end in 1973.

I rely on original data capturing the opposition party position. Following Schultz (2001), I rely on historical accounts and newspaper reports to determine whether the primary opposition party(ies) supported or opposed the war. However, whereas Schultz coded opposition party position for cases of extended immediate deterrence, I examine interstate wars. Schultz also codes opposition in a binary fashion. I sought to allow for greater variation, distinguishing between full-fledged opposition, as in cases of a call for immediate withdrawal, from criticism of the government's conduct of the war. Further, cases where a major opposition party was torn on the issue of whether to support the war (as the Democratic Party in the United States was regarding the war in Iraq in 2004), are not treated as the same level of opposition as cases where the party is nearly unanimous in advocating the cessation of conflict. There is little reason to expect the same effect in these two cases, so a more nuanced measure is desirable.

It is important to note that opposition can come from any party, including the executive's own party. There are cases in the data set (such as the Vietnam War), where that is the case. Consider also Labour opposition to British involvement in the War in Iraq under a Labour Prime Minister. However, only major parties are considered. In multiparty systems, there are nearly always small fringe parties on the far left that can reasonably be expected to oppose any and every war. If we consider the behavior of all political parties equally, we will observe no variation, with every war involving opposition from at least these radical parties. Therefore, I focus on the behavior of those parties that could head coalition governments (such as Labor and Likud, in Israel).

I code *War Outcome* from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating that no war took place, 1 representing concessions relative to the prewar aims of the government, 2 representing some gains relative to prewar goals, and 3 representing decisive victory.⁶

I code *Opposition Position* from 0 to 5. As with war outcome, 0 on this variable indicates no war took place. A score of 1 represents staunch opposition to continued participation in the war. A score of 2 indicates criticism short of full-fledged opposition. This may be either that the opposition generally supported of the cause but advocated less aggressive war aims or pursuit of the existing aims, or that there was significant division within the ranks of the opposition over whether to support the war. A score of 3 indicates tacit approval for the war, in that the opposition was ambiguous in its position or tentatively critical of the government early on, but offered no significant criticism once major combat operations began. A score of 4 indicates the opposition vocally expressed support for the war. A score of 5 indicates the opposition advocated an even more aggressive position than the government.⁷

The use of such scalar variables for war outcomes and opposition position is not without drawbacks. It imposes the assumption that the difference between full opposition and criticism is the same as that between tacit approval and explicit support. The model will estimate effects as though the variables were interval level measurements, when in fact there is little theoretical basis for considering this categorization to be more

⁶Note that Slantchev coded the outcomes from the perspective of the initiator. For those wars where the democratic state under analysis was not the initiator, I assume that gains for one side necessarily imply losses for the other and simply take the inverse of Slantchev's coding. For example, Slantchev codes the outcome of the Yom Kippur war as gains for Egypt. I thus code the outcome of this war as concessions for Israel.

⁷While this last outcome represents criticism of the government, it is clearly not of the sort that would result in the government being better able to exploit victory for electoral benefit. In fact, the government ought to benefit from victory less if the opposition claims it would have pressed for even more concessions from the adversary. The results remain the same, however, if this last outcome is collapsed into category 4, so that all support is treated the same regardless of whether the opposition is even more committed to the war than the government.

precise than an ordinal measure. However, this approach is preferable to including separate dummies for each category. While using dummies would avoid imposing any assumptions about the relative ordering of the outcomes, it would also introduce a very high level of multicollinearity.

The key variable of interest is the interaction between the opposition position and the war outcome. As Braumoeller (2004) points out, the constitutive elements of an interaction term tell us only the independent effect of those variables when the other variable in the interaction is equal to zero. Since both of these variables are only equal to zero when no war took place, the coefficients on war outcome and opposition position are meaningful only to the extent that they contribute to the overall effect when considered in conjunction with the interaction term. They should not be interpreted directly, as they tell us the effect of the opposition's position on a war that did not take place and the effect of the outcome of a war that did not take place. *WAR*, a separate dummy variable for whether the state experienced interstate war since the previous election, tells us the effect of war relative to peace when all the other war related variables are equal to 0, which they cannot be. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret this coefficient as well. It contributes information to the effects of the other variables and is necessary for the proper estimation of the model; however, it does not indicate the general effect of war relative to peace on reelection. The baseline probability of reelection during peacetime is only uncovered by setting all the wartime variables (including the dummy *War* as well as *War Outcome*, *Opposition Position*, *Fatalities* and *Fatalities per capita*) equal to 0 at once.

Fatalities

Fatalities measures the fatalities suffered by the country during the war.⁸ In those elections where no war was fought (or ongoing), this variable is equal to 0. In the case of ongoing wars, I estimated the casualties suffered to date by calculating the duration of the conflict as of the day of the election, determining what percentage of the total duration of the conflict this represents, and multiplying the total casualties from the conflict by that percentage. In that sense, I crudely assume that as of an election held halfway through a war, half of the casualties that were ultimately suffered would have been suffered so far.

As the loss of 500 lives does not reflect the same level of loss to a nation as small as Israel as it does one as large as India, I also include *Population* and *Fatalities per Capita*. The population variable takes on the value of the nation's population that year in all peace time observations in order to control for the overall effect of population size, but in all wartime elections, *Population* measures the prewar population of the state, which is not always the same as the population in the year of the election. This allows *Fatalities per capita* to more accurately capture the relative devastation of each war.

Note that Gartner et al. (2004) find that the effect of casualties on electoral outcomes depends on the positions of the candidates, much as I have argued about the outcome of a war. I have not interacted *Fatalities* or *Fatalities per Capita* with the opposition's position, as their results suggest would be appropriate. There are already a large number of interaction terms in the model, and including more would make it difficult to test the hypotheses I have set forth. However, should either *Fatalities* or *Fatalities per Capita* fail to achieve significance it will only suggest that the public's reaction to the costs of war is not a simple, direct affair—which is completely consistent with the current literature on the electoral impact of casualties.

⁸Technically, this is war fatalities. Civilian fatalities data are not reflected in these figures.

All Democracies Are Not Equal

Finally, I seek to control for concerns that not all of the countries in the sample are equally democratic. While IR scholars frequently treat all countries with a Polity score greater than 6 or 7 as “democratic,” there are not only meaningful differences within this group, but different measures of democracy. Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues (2003) argue that systems with a large winning coalition and a large selectorate will often be democratic, but their *W* and *S* variables perform quite differently than democracy as measured by Polity. Ray (1995) argues that democracy is characterized by the peaceful transfer of power from one government to another.

Given the strong focus in this paper on the opposition and the view that the ability to remove the government from office represents accountability, I find Ray’s definition useful. Both Israel and India experienced their first peaceful transfer of power from political party to another since independence in 1977. This poses a problem for the current analysis.

Possible solutions include omitting all elections in these states prior to 1977. This solution is not desirable, as these elections may contain valuable information even if the incumbent party was inherently more likely to be reelected in these states at that time. There is no particular theoretical reason to believe the political process fundamentally altered in either state on January 1, 1977.

I instead assume that there is a latent process of democratization that was underway in both states from the moment of independence. This process appears to have surpassed a critical threshold in both states in 1977, but the process likely did not either begin or end in that year. To account for this, I include *Israel_India*, a dummy variable equal to one for elections in either of these two countries and zero otherwise; *Time*, a count of the number of years elapsed since 1945; and the interaction of the two. These variables allow me to assess the argument that Israel and India have continuously grown more democratic over time, with more recent elections having a lower baseline probability of incumbent reelection than elections that occurred shortly after independence.

Results

In order to test Hypotheses 2 and 3, I first estimate a model without an interaction between *War Outcome* and *Opposition Position*. The first column in Table 1 presents the results of this baseline logistic regression, while the second column presents the results of the full model.

The results of the baseline model illustrate several important points. First, the coefficients on *War*, *War Outcome*, and *Opposition Position* are all insignificant, confirming both *Hypothesis 2* and *Hypothesis 3*. There are no direct effects of either war outcomes or the behavior of the opposition on elections. This is a troubling finding for those who assume a direct relationship between war and the fate of leaders. The model also suggests that the absolute level of fatalities does not tell us much, while the ratio of fatalities to a state’s population does. *Fatalities per Capita* is negative and significant, as might be expected. Finally the coefficient on *Time* tells us that there is no effect of time on the probability of incumbent reelection in the U.S. or the U.K., while the interaction between *Time* and *Israel_India* tells us that both Israel and India have grown increasingly competitive over time, as I expected.

The full model tells a markedly different story about war outcomes, opposition behavior, and electoral outcomes. The interaction between *War Outcome* and *Opposition Position* is negative and significant, suggesting that good outcomes benefit the government less when the opposition supported the war, confirming *Hypothesis 1*. It is only by considering the

TABLE 1 Incumbent party vote victory by war outcomes and opposition position

Variable	Model 1	<i>p</i> Value	Model 2	<i>p</i> Value
War	-0.578 (1.766)	0.744	-10.459 (6.215)	0.092
War Outcome	0.393 (0.840)	0.640	6.523 (3.433)	0.057
Opposition Position	-0.327 (0.423)	0.440	3.283 (1.999)	0.101
War Outcome- Opposition Position	—	—	-2.163 (1.108)	0.050
Fatalities	1.16E-05 (7.60E-06)	0.128	3.79E-05 (4.12E-05)	0.357
Population	-1.88E-06 (2.25E-06)	0.402	-1.22E-06 (2.41E-06)	0.612
Fatalities per Capita	-0.808 (0.425)	0.057	-1.540 (1.815)	0.396
Israel_India	9.150 (3.470)	0.008	8.937 (3.640)	0.014
Time	0.000 (0.032)	0.992	0.000 (0.033)	0.99
Time*Israel_India	-0.249 (0.086)	0.004	-0.251 (0.092)	0.007
Constant	0.789 (1.038)	0.447	0.746 (1.035)	0.471
<i>N</i>	51		51	
Pr > χ^2	0.1683		0.0344	
Pseudo-R ²	0.2770		0.3259	

Logit regressions, with robust standard errors shown in parentheses. Two-tailed significance levels are reported.

effect of war outcomes conditioned on, not simply in addition to, opposition behavior that we discover the powerful link between war outcomes and electoral outcomes.

The coefficients on the individual terms reveal interesting patterns. To determine the net effect of the variables, we add the coefficients on the base terms to the coefficients on the interaction terms (Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006; Long, 1997). The overall effect of the outcome of a war on the probability the incumbent’s party wins the election is in fact -6.09, adding the coefficients of *War Outcome* (6.53), *War* (-10.46) and *War Outcome*Opposition Position*. This suggests that, holding all else constant, winning a war does not improve a leader’s chance of staying in office versus not fighting a war at all, casting serious doubt on the diversionary theory of war. The overall effect of war involvement, after summing the coefficients of all the relevant terms, is -4.35. Again, this suggests that, all else being equal, leaders who care about nothing but their electoral prospects are best served by delivering peace.

Fatalities per Capita has lost its significance relative to the baseline model. Once we account for the behavior of the opposition conditioned on the outcome of the war, fatalities do not appear to be related to electoral outcomes. This finding is not inconsistent with studies that relate the effect of casualties to position-taking (Gartner et al., 2004). Rather,

TABLE 2 Predicted and observed electoral outcomes, full sample

	Win	Loss
Predicted Win	27 (90%)	9 (42.9%)
Predicted Loss	3 (10%)	12 (57.1%)

as does that article, this result suggests scholars ought not to assume a simple relationship between either the costs of war or the outcome of war and the electoral impact of the war.

The fit of the model is relatively good. The R^2 of the model is 0.33, meaning that this model explains 33% of the variation in the dependent variable. Tables 2 and 3 present the predicted versus actual outcomes of the cases for all elections and wartime elections respectively. The model correctly predicts 39 of the 51 elections, based solely on characteristics of wars (where fought) and a measure of the passage of time in Israel and India. Predicting the modal outcome for each election would lead to a correct prediction in 30 cases. This reduces the number of incorrect predictions from 21 to 12, a proportional reduction in error of 43%. This is no small feat, considering there are no indicators here of any issues that might influence peacetime elections and only 18 of the elections involved wars. More tellingly, the model correctly predicts 16 of those 18 wartime elections. The modal outcome correctly predicts only 10 cases. This reduces the number of incorrect predictions from 8 to 2, a proportional reduction in error of 75%.

Interpretation

To ease interpretation of the magnitude of the effects of war outcomes and opposition behavior, I present a graph of the predicted probability that the incumbent party wins the next election by opposition position for two war outcomes, gains and concessions (see Figure 1). I generated the results by holding *Israel_India* constant at its modal value of 0, *Time* at its mean, and *Fatalities*, *Population* and *Fatalities per Capita* held at the means for wartime elections.

The predicted values indicate that, all else equal, governments who are forced to make concessions are only likely to lose the next election if the opposition offered full-fledged opposition to the war. If the opposition criticizes the government but fails to coordinate a unified stance against the war, the results of this analysis suggest the government is still likely to stay in office with a 0.67 probability. Governments who made gains are not expected to stay in office if the opposition staked out a more hawkish position than the government itself. The results illustrate that the government is unable to use success on the battlefield to its advantage if the opposition supported the war, while by the same token, the opposition will be unable to use poor performance in the war against the government if they did not take a strong stance against the war while it was ongoing.

I now present an illustrative case and the hypothetical result had the opposition behaved differently.

TABLE 3 Predicted and observed electoral outcomes, war elections only

	Win	Loss
Predicted Win	9 (90%)	1 (12.5%)
Predicted Loss	1 (10%)	7 (87.5%)

Effect of War Outcomes and Opposition Position on Incumbent Victory

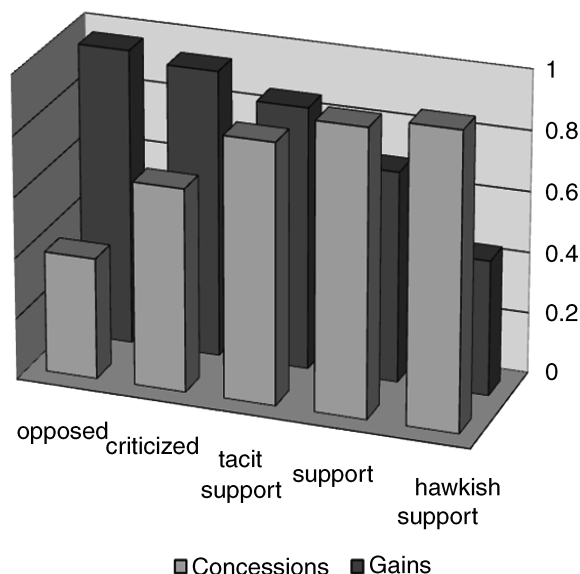


FIGURE 1 Probability of incumbent victory by war outcome and opposition position.

1983 U.K. General Election

In 1983, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative party had just prevailed in the Falkland Islands War. The Labour Party had been critical of the Conservative government’s handling of the war. Michael Foot, leader of the Labour Party, repeatedly stated that the government would be held accountable for its failure to resolve the issue peacefully or seek a resolution in the UN during the war, while at the same time denouncing the Argentine invasion of the islands and acknowledging the government’s right to defend its claim (Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, 1982). The Conservative Party went on to win the general election with one of the most decisive victories in postwar British history. The predicted probability of a government victory in this election according to the model is 0.76. If the Labour party had instead supported the war, undercutting the government’s ability to use their victory as an issue in the election, the model suggests the probability of a government victory would drop to 0.53. This suggests that if the Labour Party had more definitively supported the government during the Falkland Islands war, the election would have been very close.

Conclusion

As expected, the presence of opposition magnifies the effect of war outcomes on electoral outcomes. These results are robust across a wide variety of robustness checks, as demonstrated in the Diagnostic Appendix. Domestic accountability appears to depend upon the behavior of the opposition. Leaders of democracies may not always need to be quite as selective in choosing when to go to war as has been argued, particularly if there is little reason to expect significant opposition. This suggests that the accountability argument used as an explanation of the democratic peace proposition and other findings may be overstated.

The apparent relative unimportance of fatalities in determining electoral outcomes should be interpreted with care. This result may indicate that public sensitivity to fatalities is contingent upon opposition behavior, just as is the electoral effect of war outcomes.

Indeed, Gartner et al. (2004) suggest just this. This result should be seen as further evidence that the domestic political ramifications of international events depend upon the behavior of domestic political actors and cannot be described by simple relationships. The reaction of the electorate to casualties may also depend upon the amount of uncertainty over the trend of the war's progress implied by the rate of casualties (Gartner, 2008a, this issue) or the characteristics of the conflict, such as the primary political objective of the government, the presence of allies, and the type of commitment the government has made to securing victory (Sullivan, 2008, this issue).

These results also have implications for the diversionary literature. Some diversionary arguments emphasize the value of signaling competence to the public through victory in war. Given that victory will not increase the leader's expected vote share relative to peace by a significant margin if the opposition supports, as they often do when victory is expected, the incentive for diversion may often be quite small indeed. That is not to say there are no cases where it could arise, but it certainly argues for more careful theorizing about the incentive for leaders to go to war in pursuit of an electoral benefit. As another paper in this volume points out, if we are to understand how leaders value war, we must also understand what they expect to get from choosing not to go to war (Kadera and Morey, 2008, this issue).

Linking the expected effect of decisions in the international arena on a leader's political career with theories of international conflict offers great promise. I hope that the results here demonstrate that if we are to look to domestic politics to help us understand international relations, we stand to gain from focusing on the behavior of domestic political actors rather than assuming certain patterns will always hold.

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Diagnostic Appendix

This appendix presents the results of a series of robustness checks to the results presented above. Tables A1, A2, A3, and A4 summarize the results of six models testing for sensitivities in the results of the main analysis.

Model 1 is identical to the full model presented in the main analysis except for the inclusion of fixed effects dummies. The omitted category is a dummy for the U.S. Model 2 excludes *Israel_India*, *Time*, and *Time*Israel_India*. Model 3 collapses the two highest categories of *Opposition Position*, so that hawkish support is treated no differently than support. Model 4 substitutes the convention Correlates of War outcomes for those taken from Slantchev (2004). The new *War Outcome* scale thus observes a 0 for no war; 1 for a loss; 2 for a draw; and 3 for a victory. Model 5 excludes all elections where the incumbent him/herself did not run, removing the implicit assumption that voters will punish a political party and not just the individual leader.

Model 6 includes a measure of GDP growth per capita over the 12 months leading up to the election. The above analysis implicitly assumes that other important determinants of electoral outcomes, the most important of which is economic performance, do not vary systematically with the occurrence of war, the outcome of war, or the opposition’s wartime positions. The economic data were taken from the OECD’s Main Economic Indicators. These data are only available after 1960, forcing me to drop 14 elections from the original 51.

The key result, captured by the interaction between *Opposition Position* and *War Outcome*, is correctly signed in all 6 models. It is at least weakly significant in four of the models, with *p* values ranging from 0.075 down to 0.002. These robustness checks demonstrate that the results above do not depend upon the particular research design choices made. With or without controls for the competitiveness of the system, fixed effects to control for spatial heterogeneity, an alternate coding of one of opposition behavior, an assumption that parties are held accountable for the decisions of those they choose as their leaders, or controlling for economic performance, the results discussed above are generally consistent.

TABLE A1 Robustness checks for main analysis

Variable	Model 1	<i>p</i> Value	Model 2	<i>p</i> Value
War	-12.531 (7.331)	0.087	-7.444 (4.289)	0.083
War Outcome	7.580 (3.995)	0.058	4.162 (2.587)	0.108
Opposition Position	3.949 (2.222)	0.076	2.728 (1.314)	0.038
War Outcome *Opposition Position	-2.510 (1.248)	0.044	-1.542 (0.795)	0.052
Fatalities	6.06E-05 (6.15E-05)	0.324	1.77E-05 (8.43E-06)	0.035
Population	7.29E-06 (1.11E-05)	0.510	-2.04E-06 (1.15E-06)	0.075
Fatalities per Capita	-2.610 (2.804)	0.352	-0.786 (0.488)	0.107
United Kingdom	1.618 (2.169)	0.456	—	—
India	7.047 (2.643)	0.008	—	—
Israel	13.052 (9.025)	0.148	—	—
Time	-0.005 (0.036)	0.878	—	—
Time*Israel_India	-0.305 (0.167)	0.068	—	—
Constant	-1.133 (2.613)	0.665	0.902 (0.491)	0.066
<i>N</i>	51		51	
Pr > χ^2	0.0506		0.0741	
Pseudo-R ²	0.3335		0.1109	

Logit regressions, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Two-tailed significance levels reported.

TABLE A2 Further robustness checks for main analysis

Variable	Model 3	<i>p</i> Value	Model 4	<i>p</i> Value
War	-10.876 (6.637)	0.101	-4.143 (3.058)	0.176
War Outcome ^a	6.962 (3.925)	0.076	1.989 (1.504)	0.186
Opposition Position ^b	3.577 (2.370)	0.131	0.540 (0.843)	0.521
War Outcome ^a *Opposition Position ^b	-2.409 (1.351)	0.075	-0.419 (0.394)	0.288
Fatalities	3.62E-05 (3.08E-05)	0.241	1.37E-05 (8.14E-06)	0.093
Population	-1.28E-06 (2.31E-06)	0.579	-1.53E-06 (2.36E-06)	0.515
Fatalities per Capita	-1.667 (1.392)	0.231	-0.844 (0.444)	0.058
Israel_India	8.521 (3.032)	0.005	9.201 (3.256)	0.005
Time	0.006 (0.032)	0.847	-0.004 (0.033)	0.897
Time*Israel_India	-0.243 (0.081)	0.003	-0.254 (0.086)	0.003
Constant	0.582 (1.012)	0.565	0.887 (1.055)	0.401
<i>N</i>	51		51	
Pr > χ^2	0.0414		0.1602	
Pseudo-R ²	0.3071		0.2915	

Logit regressions, with robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. Two-tailed significance levels are reported.

^aIn model 4, *War Outcome* uses the Correlates of War outcome codings rather than those from Slantchev (2004).

^bIn model 3, *Opposition Position* treats the highest level, hawkish support, as no different than support.

TABLE A3 Further robustness check for main analysis

Variable	Model 5	<i>p</i> Value	Model 6	<i>p</i> Value
War	-9.477 (5.886)	0.107	-27.635 (11.154)	0.013
War Outcome	5.789 (3.248)	0.075	15.502 (5.798)	0.008
Opposition Position	3.264 (1.880)	0.083	6.983 (2.595)	0.007
War Outcome *Opposition Position	-2.042 (1.040)	0.049	-4.369 (1.424)	0.002
Fatalities	3.61E-05 (3.99E-05)	0.366	1.40E-04 (8.85E-05)	0.115
Population	-5.79E-07 (2.51E-06)	0.817	-5.54E-07 (2.06E-06)	0.788
Fatalities per Capita	-1.569 (1.840)	0.394	2.369 (3.421)	0.489
Israel_India	6.985 (3.005)	0.020	9.471 (4.344)	0.029
Time	-0.018 (0.037)	0.629	0.010 (0.062)	0.875
Time*Israel_India	-0.200 (0.080)	0.012	-0.254 (0.115)	0.027
GDP Growth Per Capita	—	—	0.410 (0.182)	0.024
Constant	1.307 (1.161)	0.260	-0.832 (2.187)	0.704
<i>N</i>	44		37	
Pr > χ^2	0.0324		0.001	
Pseudo-R ²	0.3021		0.3218	

Logit regressions, with robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. Two-tailed significance levels are reported.