

**Territorial Expansion, Shared Ethnicity, and Institutional Incentives:
A Theory, Model, and Empirical Assessment**

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Abstract: Why do states engage in irredentism? Previous scholarship has suggested irredentism is more likely when political elites manipulate ordinary citizens susceptible to ethnic demagoguery. However, this paper advances a new theory with rationalist micro-foundations that accounts for the incentives of both elites and citizens to support irredentism. Our model predicts irredentism is most likely to occur when it enables political elites to provide a particular mix of private goods, public goods, and welfare transfers to citizens who desire them at the lowest tax rate possible. This occurs mostly in majoritarian democratic electoral systems and military dictatorships, which are predicted to be most predisposed to irredentism. It happens the least in proportional electoral systems and single party dictatorships, which are thus predicted to be least inclined to irredentism. We test our theory's predictions with a new dataset covering all observed and potential irredentist cases from 1946 to 2014.

Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014,¹ Serbia's expansion in the early 1990s, and Nazi Germany's occupation of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia from 1938-1945 are all well-known instances of irredentism: state expansion on the basis of shared ethnicity. The *potential* for countries with ethnic majorities to unify with cross-border kin through territorial annexation exists anytime ethnic groups are spread across political borders in a majority-minority configuration. Given its myriad potential globally, why do more states *not* pursue such territorial expansion when the opportunity exists? More than two-thirds of the groups in the Minorities at Risk Project (Gurr 2000) and about half of the groups in the Ethnic Power Relations data (Cederman et al. 2013) constitute potential targets for irredentist expansion. In a purely nationalist world, all ethnic majorities would seek unification with their kin in neighboring countries, and the world would be replete with such conflicts until most nations were sorted into their respective homogeneous nation-states.

However, there are clearly significant constraints. Less than four percent of all potential cases from 1946 to 2014 actually produced irredentist conflicts (Siroky and Hale 2017). In most cases, unification efforts never surpass the rhetorical level, and irredentism is nothing more than the proverbial dog that does not bark. There are so many examples of such cases that it is difficult to choose just a few. At the same time, and much more politically important, many irredentist conflicts remain active and unresolved today: e.g., Armenia's claim on Nagorno-Karabakh, Ireland's claim to Northern Ireland, Serbia's claim to Republika Srpska, China's claim to Taiwan, India's claim to Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as well as Pakistan's reciprocal claim to Jammu and Kashmir in India, Somalia's claims to parts of Kenya and Ethiopia, and so on. Irredentism is a critical problem in world politics and thus merits more sustained theoretical

¹ On Russia's revision of the post-1991 borders, see Socor 2014; Ayres and Saideman 2014.

attention and comparative analysis than it has thus far received (Horowitz 1991; Saideman and Ayres 2008; Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009; Cederman, Rügger, and Schvitz 2021).

Most previous research on irredentist conflict has either focused on single case studies, (Andreopoulos 1981; Borsody 1988; Gagnon 1995; Gavrilis 2003; Haines 1937; Gutman 1991; Kitromilides 1990; Kolstø, Edemsky, and Kalashnikova 1993; Landau 1991; Munck 1999; Petacco 1998; Plaut 1999; Suhrke 1975) comparative case studies (Chazan 1991; Saideman and Ayres 2000), or statistical analysis of global data (Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009; Cederman et al. 2013; Siroky and Hale 2017). Theoretically, these studies are also diverse, making disparate assumptions about the rigidity or fluidity of ethnicity.

In this article, we begin with rationalist micro-foundations – drawing in particular on selectorate theory – but we do not stop there. We then incorporate these micro-foundations into a computational model that allows preferences to be fluid and heterogeneous, bringing in key constructivist dynamics. Finally, we test the core empirical implications of this theoretical model against a new, comprehensive dataset of irredentism. Specifically, this article aims to make three contributions: (1) to develop stronger micro-foundations that link the incentives of both leaders and masses to pursue irredentism within institutional constraints; (2) to analyze irredentism as an emergent behavior by exploiting the power of computational modeling; and (3) to empirically validate the theory’s predictions using new data on irredentism.

The Argument in a Nutshell

While irredentism represents a continuum, reflecting everything from “soft” rhetorical territorial claims all the way to military action, we define it here as a state’s use of military force

against a neighboring state to annex ethnic kin and territory. It is a central government decision to militarily add a region to its current state on the basis of ethnic similarity, and to simultaneously remove that region from the proprietorship of another country (Gellner 1983, 1, 57; 1992; Ambrosio 2001, 7; Neuberger 1991, 103; Horowitz 1991, 10; Petacco 1998). This emphasis on military action, as opposed to rhetorical claims, allows for a more replicable and concrete measure of irredentism that is less prone to subjective interpretation.

Utilizing this definition, we propose an original framework to explain why politicians and ethnic majorities are more or less predisposed to support irredentism. The model begins with micro-foundations, first clearly defining the preferences for both political elites and ordinary citizens, and then showing how political institutions compel elites to translate those preferences into particular national tax and redistributive policies. These policies, we argue, then influence the appeal of irredentism to citizens and subsequently to state leadership. The model assumes that political elites must balance their desire to maximize state revenue against the need to provide their political support base with some combination of **p**private goods, welfare **t**ransfers, and **p**ublic goods (which we hereafter refer to collectively as “PTP goods”). While the annexation of foreign territory may offer an attractive option for states to increase revenue, it is equally clear that this benefit must be balanced against the cost of supplying PTP goods to any newly incorporated citizens, not to mention the risks associated with war itself.

Citizens, like political elites, also seek to enhance their own utility, which is increasing in the state’s provision of PTP goods. However, the utility of citizens is decreasing in the tax rate, limiting the extent of PTP goods that the state can provide. Citizens also possess heterogeneous preferences for the provision of specifically public goods, which are often exacerbated by ethnic and cultural differences. All else equal, a higher degree of ethnic differentiation generally

implies more heterogeneous preferences for public goods and makes it more costly for the state to provide them for citizens, requiring a higher tax rate.

Individuals do not operate in politics in an institutional vacuum, however. On the contrary, we argue that political institutions shape how political elites implement the preferences of citizens into national policy and, in particular, how they mix PTP goods for citizens. This particular mix determines the cost-benefit calculus of pursuing irredentism. We differentiate proportional democracies from majoritarian electoral systems, and also examine single-party and military dictatorships, to examine how institutions shape incentives.² Building on previous work, especially studies on varieties of democracy and interstate conflict initiation (Pickering and Mitchell 2017, 4–5; Morgan and Campbell 1991; Maoz and Russett 1993), on the impact of proportional/majoritarian systems on ethnic conflict generally and irredentism more specifically (Lijphart 2004), and on the relationship between dictatorship and conflict initiation (Pickering and Mitchell 2017, 5–6; Pickering and Kisangani 2010; Lai and Slater 2006; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014; Peceny and Butler 2004), these four “ideal” regime types cover the vast majority of institutional types in the world for the last 70 years, and allow our analysis to have to broadest coverage for the time period we analyze in the article.

The proposed theory predicts that irredentism is most likely in majoritarian electoral systems and military dictatorships, and that it is least likely in single-party dictatorships and proportional electoral systems. The main reason, we suggest, is that majoritarian systems encourage state leadership to provide public goods rather than transfers (Milesi-Ferretti, Perotti,

² Geddes et al. (2014, 315) categorize 9.37 percent of the autocracies coded in their dataset as military, 12.96 percent monarchies, 1.44 percent oligarchies, 32.54 percent single party dictatorships, 25.09 percent personalist dictatorships, and 8.6 percent a combination of party/personalist dictatorships. Although they find it meaningful for their purposes to disentangle military dictatorships, monarchies, and personalist dictatorships, Geddes and colleagues acknowledge that all are characterized by the small selectorates and small winning coalitions. As far as our theoretical framework concerned, these types are interchangeable, and we include each within the “military” category.

and Rostagno 2002, 610). Incorporating ethnic kin in these conditions shifts the median preference for public goods further toward that of the ethnic majority, enabling the state to provide public goods to citizens that are closer to the preferences of the ethnic majority at a lower cost. This encourages irredentism. Proportional systems, on the other hand, encourage state expenditures in transfers (Milesi-Ferretti, Perotti, and Rostagno 2002, 610). Ethnic majorities in these situations find themselves in situations where incorporating ethnic kin means they will have to share more valuable transfer benefits with a larger number of individuals, providing a brake on the desire to incorporate them into a unified polity.

In single party dictatorships, a small party elite covetously safeguards its positions and understands that the incorporation of ethnic kin through annexation in these systems could potentially produce new competitors. This is because anyone could potentially be a member of the party. Annexation is thus threatening, and thus we predict that irredentism is less likely. By comparison, in military dictatorships where leadership consists of some proportion of officer corps of the military (a very small proportion of the population), the threat of unwanted competition through annexation is substantially smaller (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), and irredentism should be more likely. To empirically test these predictions, we make use of data on all observed and potential irredentist events from 1946 to 2014 (Siroky and Hale 2017), matched to data on all institutional regimes across the world (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014; Bormann and Golder 2013).

In sum, this study complements and extends previous approaches by explicitly theorizing and testing how domestic institutional constraints influence international behavior. It specifies the incentives of the masses to support irredentist initiatives rather than simply assuming that the elite can dupe them when useful. Leaders have been presumed to deploy the ethnic card as a

dominant strategy, and ethnic majorities have been assumed to be either easily hoodwinked or predisposed to nationalist rhetoric. Both assumptions have been heavily criticized, and for reasons with which we concur on the whole. Particularly in situations where one ethnic group constitutes a majority of the population, the argument goes, politicians may make (primordial) ethnic appeals to the majority in order to ingratiate themselves to voters and divert attention away from domestic issues by promising to redeem ethnic kin in a neighboring territory. This explanation accounts for the political incentives of elites to annex ethnic kin in neighboring territory, but it fails to elucidate for the incentives and costs that the masses take into account when deciding whether to support irredentism.

In this study, we relax these strict primordial assumptions behind ethnic outbidding and mass support for nationalism, and we develop stronger but also more flexible micro-foundations for the study of irredentism, formally deriving all actor utilities, and offering precise predictions about the conditions under which we should expect to observe irredentist behavior. The computational model explores how these utilities shape irredentism, leading to testable predictions that we assess empirically. The results show, in short, that the model generates accurate predictions and captures key aspects of irredentism. The next section describes the full theory and its core intuitions as well as its predictions. While the theory requires the use of some technical language, we have relegated all equations and formal description to the appendix.

Theory and Model

Our theorizing begins by creating a virtual world to begin thinking about irredentism systematically. In this world, state borders form endogenously and potentially separate ethnic

groups into majority-minority configurations. As a result of state formation that does not match national geography one-to-one, opportunities for irredentism emerge. Since our argument concerns the effect of institutions on incentives for and against irredentism, we then systematically vary institutions within the various political boundaries (“regime types”), and let them interact with each other over time. This yields several testable implications, which we then validate using new global data and statistical modeling.³

In our model, like in the world we actually observe today and historically, national borders include some ethnic kin but potentially exclude others. Leaders must therefore decide whether irredentism is in their interest. A key advantage of exploring this model computationally is that we can imbue actors in the model with heterogeneous preferences and have them face diverse institutional constraints, allowing us to perturb, manipulate, and analyze them in theoretically useful ways that would be difficult to accomplish with observational data and historical analyses (Epstein 1999; Goldstone and Janssen 2005; Lansing 2002; Miller and Page 2007; Benoit 2001; Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004). Furthermore, since we theorize irredentism as an emergent macro-level outcome resulting from the interacting interests of state leadership and their constituents - and then wish to explore how these interactions are mediated through political institutions - computational models provide an ideal platform for modeling these types of bottom-up, emergent processes. Finally, due to our emphasis on heterogeneous preferences, these processes would prove intractable using more traditional formal models (Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004; Benoit 2001; Cederman 2001; Miller and Page 2007; de Marchi and Page 2014), and it is for this reason that a computational model is necessary.⁴

⁴ Some readers may question whether the results of such models are predetermined or “built-in” by a computer program. For replies, see Miller and Page 2007, 69; Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004, 212.

Once predictions are generated through a computational model, we then can offer an empirical assessment using systematic and comprehensive observational data on irredentism and political institutions. We explicate the theory in two parts, the first focusing on the incentives of leaders and citizens, and the second emphasizing the constraints imposed by disparate institutions.

Leaders and Citizens

We assume that leaders seek to remain in power, and in order to do so must provide the requisite goods and resources to a specific subset of citizens whose support is critical to remain in office. However, the particular mix of PTP goods provided to core supporters differs dramatically across different types of political institutions. The selectorate (S) consists of the group of individuals in a country who have some degree of say in who becomes a leader. What is important about being in the selectorate is that it gives one an opportunity to be in the winning coalition (W), which is defined as the “subset of the selectorate... such that the subset’s support endows the leadership with political power over the remainder of the selectorate as well as over the disenfranchised members of the society” (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, 51) Thus, when making decisions, state leaders are focused on how such a decision will impact its core political support and the median core supporter within W (Downs 1957; Riker 1962; Levi 1989; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), for if leaders fail to maximize the utility of median supporters in W , they risk being unseated by a political competitor.

Moreover, citizens possess preferences for the amount they would like state leadership to spend on PTP goods. Given the choice, each citizen would prefer to receive lavish private goods from the state as a reward for loyalty to the regime. However, if citizens are not in a position to receive abundant private goods, or if private goods must be divided among too many supporters

in W that they cease to be valuable (as in most consolidated democracies), citizens possess their own individual preferences⁵ for the particular mix of public goods and transfers they would like the state to provide (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Milesi-Ferretti, Perotti, and Rostagno 2002). In the model, individuals are also members of nations, which are “relatively large and territorially concentrated ethnic group[s] with a sense of common history and putative homeland” (Hechter 2000, 14). The preferences for public goods of individuals *within* each nation tend to be more similar to each other than they are to the preferences of individuals *outside* of that nation (Hechter 2000, 23; Miguel 2004; Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Habyarimana et al. 2007, 710).

Finally, leaders seek to maximize state revenue (through taxation or foreign conquest) in order to effectively provide the PTP goods desired by W (Alesina and Spolaore 2003, 71–72; Bolton, Roland, and Spolaore 1996; Wittman 1991).⁶ The degree to which state leadership can conquer territory to raise revenue is naturally limited by the ability of its neighbors to defend themselves. The ability of state leadership to tax is also constrained, for additional taxation generally decreases citizen productivity, and there are diminishing returns to higher tax rates. Moreover, if leaders fail to orient taxes to a rate that satisfies their core median supporter in W , they may be ousted either through an election or a coup. Since citizens would like to receive generous PTP goods, while paying as little as possible in taxes, leaders are left with the constrained optimization task of providing these goods and services at an efficient tax rate. In each round of our model, leaders can choose to raise or lower tax rates by incremental amounts.

⁵ These preferences are distributed randomly and possess both a mean and rate of dispersion.

⁶ The gains from foreign conquest are dependent on the degree to which the preferences of the annexed match the numerically dominant nation.

Political institutions critically inform this decision, subsequently shaping the ensuing distribution of PTP goods to citizens, and in turn influencing the cost-benefit calculus of irredentism.

Institutions

The theory focuses on four “ideal-type” institutional arrangements - majoritarian democracy, proportional democracy, single party dictatorship, and military dictatorship – and here we develop the theoretical intuition linking each one to the provision of PTP goods and the calculus of irredentism.

In democracies, S is the total number of citizens with the right to vote, and W is the group of individuals whose support is necessary for the leader to stay in power. In an idealized majoritarian democracy with a single electoral district, the size of W is typically very large (51% of the population - the size necessary to achieve an electoral majority). In these situations, the state is unlikely to supply private goods to W , for such resources would have to be divided up between far too many individuals for them to be valuable. The state is thus more likely to spend revenue on public goods and welfare transfers that provide greater value to individuals in W (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). However, the particular citizens to which leaders must be responsive in a democracy varies and depends on whether the electoral system is majoritarian or proportional.

Whereas proportional systems incentivize politicians to channel government spending toward programs that increase the well-being of particularly social constituencies across the country (welfare transfers), majoritarian systems tend to spend on programs that benefit specific localities (public goods) (Milesi-Ferretti, Perotti, and Rostagno 2002, 609–10). Transfers include social spending such as unemployment benefits or elderly medical benefits that assist a

targeted set of individuals.⁷ Public goods include schools, fire departments, or road signs that benefit only a particular district and whose usefulness decreases as an individual finds herself farther from where that public good is distributed.

We allow preferences for public goods to vary across ethnic groups, just as they often do in reality with respect to preferences over the language of instruction in schools along with *inter alia* the location and form of policing services (Hechter 2000, 23; Miguel 2004; Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Habyarimana et al. 2007, 710).⁸ Since *W* in majoritarian systems represent more targeted local interests, adding ethnic kin with similar preferences for public goods significantly benefits the material welfare of individuals within the ethnic majority. Increasing the number of ethnic kin through annexation moves the preferences of the median citizen for public goods closer to the general preferences of individuals in the ethnic majority. The enlarged and more homogenous polity can cater to its winning coalition's preferences for public goods more efficiently, since political leaders increasingly have incentives to disregard the preferences of ethnic minorities. For their part, ethnic minorities continue to pay taxes and underwrite the costs of public goods from which they derive progressively less benefit. In this way, they can experience "positive discrimination in material terms" (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012, 85).

⁷ The model assumes transfer beneficiaries are evenly distributed across the country.

⁸ In view of a large body of constructivist research that indicates individuals have both multiple and malleable ethnic identities (Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004; Hale 2004, 460–61), we do not assume that either ethnic identities or preferences are permanently fixed, immutable, or even uniform within a particular ethnic group. Instead, we agree these identities and preferences are malleable over the long-term, although they tend to be quite "sticky" in that "attributes associated, or believed to be associated, with descent are ... difficult to change in the short term" (Chandra 2006, 414). Attributes like language representing barriers to effective communication and providing easily identifiable and particularly "thick" ethnic traits and preferences are also particularly sticky (Chandra 2006, 414; Hale 2004, 468–69; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012, 85). However, we do not assume every member of an ethnic group responds to these constraints similarly. One of the great advantages of our computational model is that, within ethnic groups, individuals internalize these constraints in different ways. Those with "thick" ethnic attributes will have stronger ethnic preferences, while individuals who activate along less thick attributes will have weaker ones. Though preferences vary systematically across ethnic groups, within groups these impacts vary. Furthermore, we assess the sensitivity of our model results by changing the degree to which preferences vary across groups systematically. In this way, the use of computational modeling allows us to incorporate both primordialist and constructivist assumptions into our analysis.

While **proportional democratic** systems also have large S and W , like majoritarian systems, the particular incentives provided by proportional representation prioritize social spending on welfare transfers over public goods (Milesi-Ferretti, Perotti, and Rostagno 2002, 609–10). Moreover, the benefits of welfare transfers are more broadly distributed across the population and are not subject to the same kind of ethnic preferences as public goods. W is less likely to want goods and services that correspond to ethnic differences, and the benefit of irredentism in terms of more efficient provision of public goods to the ethnic majority is not as pronounced. In proportional democracies, increasing the number of ethnic kin through annexation may still move the preferences of the median citizen for public goods closer to the general preferences of individuals in the ethnic majority in W , but because transfers are prioritized over public goods, the gain is marginal compared to the gain in majoritarian systems. Furthermore, if ethnic kin are added, more highly prized transfers now have to be shared with a larger number of individuals. Since proportional systems in democratic regimes provide less benefit from irredentism to the demographic majority, the model predicts a smaller count of irredentist events than in **majoritarian democracies**.

In authoritarian systems, either S or W is restricted much more substantially than it would typically be in a democratic electoral system. This makes it possible for members of W to be rewarded with substantial direct and private benefits from state largesse for their loyalty that are not made available to the rest of S and that are not typically viable in democratic electoral regimes. State leadership calculates the mix of private versus public goods that will solidify support and maximize the utility of W and often taxes citizens at a heavy rate to provide generous private payoffs to a small number of citizens. The result is that often the state invests very little in public goods or transfers.

While in most authoritarian regimes private rewards are doled out generously to W , the size of W relative to S is extremely small in single party dictatorships compared to military dictatorships. For example, it may be the case that all citizens have the right to vote, but true decision-making power is wielded by a small number of people who are members of the party elite. In single-party dictatorships, individuals in W understand that, if W were to shift, there is a large pool of individuals that would readily take their place, since “practically anyone can be brought into the coalition and everyone is replaceable”(Buono de Mesquita et al. 2003, 68). As a result, members of W covetously safeguard their positions and understand that the incorporation of ethnic kin through annexation in these systems would produce new competitors. Since annexation is potentially threatening to this W , irredentism ought to be less likely in single party authoritarian systems than in military dictatorships. By comparison, where the size of W relative to S is larger, such as in military dictatorships (where S is the officer corps of the military, a very small proportion of the population, but W is a majority of that officer corps), the threat of unwanted competition through annexation is substantially smaller. As a result, the theory predicts that irredentism will be significantly more likely in **military dictatorships** than **single party dictatorships**.

Figure 1 summarizes the difference between the size of S and W across these four ideal type regimes: majoritarian democracies, proportional democracies, single-party dictatorships and military dictatorships. Each star represents one person, the darker oval represents S , and the lighter oval represents W .

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 2 illustrates and summarizes *the implications* that the size of S and W have for the state’s decisions to spend revenue on PTP goods and in turn for incentives to engage in

irredentism. In military dictatorships and single party dictatorships, relatively little revenue is delegated to public goods or transfers, for electoral considerations play little substantive role in policy-making decisions. Instead, the state invests heavily in providing private goods to core supporters. Irredentism is thus driven by the degree to which integrating new ethnic kin into the state might potentially threaten core supporters' access to private goods that the state provides. Because this threat is higher in single party dictatorships, we expect the likelihood of irredentism to be lower in single party dictatorships than in military dictatorships.

[Figure 2 about here]

On the other hand, in democratic electoral systems, the size of S and W are large enough that the distribution of private goods are not politically beneficial to state leadership, and so leadership focuses on providing either transfers or public goods to its population. On average, the electoral incentives of majoritarian electoral systems encourage the production of public goods relative to transfers, while the electoral incentives of proportional electoral systems encourage transfers relative to public goods. Since preferences for public goods are influenced by ethnicity (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Kimenyi 2006; Baldwin and Huber 2010, 645; Fernández and Levy 2008), irredentism is more attractive in majoritarian electoral systems because incorporating ethnic kin into the state moves the median voters' preferences for public goods closer to the ethnic majority, allowing the state to provide public goods more efficiently at a lower tax rate. As proportional electoral systems invest less heavily in public goods, these incentives are not as pronounced, which leads to less irredentism than in majoritarian systems.

To summarize, the model⁹ predicts the following clustered expectations, from most to least likely to engage in irredentism: (1) military dictatorships and majoritarian electoral systems, and (2) proportional electoral systems with single party dictatorships.

Empirical Validation

To assess our theoretical predictions, we utilized data collected on the entire universe of potential and actual irredentist cases from 1946 to 2014 (Siroky and Hale 2017),¹⁰ along with comprehensive data on each country's political institutions (Bormann and Golder 2013; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014), focusing on four main (mutually exclusive) types: 1) majoritarian electoral systems (*Majoritarian*), 2) proportional electoral systems (*Proportional*),¹¹ 3) dominant, single-party dictatorships (*Single Party*), and 4) both military and personalist dictatorships (*Military*).¹²

The specification also includes controls that have been highlighted in the literature, including the margin of the largest ethnic group in the irredentist state, since more homogeneous states are thought to be more likely to engage in irredentism (**Margin**) (Horowitz 1985, 281–88; Carment and James 1997; Lake and Rothschild 1998). It also includes the degree to which the ethnic enclave is ethnically homogeneous (as opposed to heterogeneous, or dispersed within the host state (**Dispersed**) (Moore and Davis 1998; Horowitz 1985, 285), the degree to which the

⁹ Full technical details of the model are provided in the appendix.

¹⁰ This dataset is organized by triads constituted by: 1) a potential expansionist irredentist state, 2) an enclave residing outside the irredentist state's borders whose ethnicity matches the group in power in the potential irredentist state, and 3) a host state in which that co-ethnic enclave resides. Each triad is observed on a yearly basis, making a triad-year the unit of observation.

¹¹ We provide additional regime controls using Polity IV data, as described below.

¹² We combined Geddes et al.'s (2014) Military and Personalist categories into a single category as both systems are characterized by small selectorates and small winning coalitions. Due to a small number of cases, we eliminated their Monarchy category from our primary analyses. In the appendix, we include the disaggregated and omitted categories, and their inclusion has little substantive impact on our results.

ethnic enclave is discriminated in the host state (**Discrim**) (Davis, Jagers, and Moore 1997; Horowitz 1985, 291; Moore and Davis 1998, 93–94; Saideman and Ayres 2008), and the ratio of wealth in the host state relative to the potential irredentist state (**WealthRatio**) (Alesina and Spolaore 2003, 71–72; Alesina, Spolaore, and Wacziarg 2000; Bolton, Roland, and Spolaore 1996; Wittman 1991, 127–127).

Further, since dyadic regime characteristics have also often been noted in the literature, we include regime dyadic considerations based on whether a country has two anocratic regimes (**anoc/anoc**), an anocratic irredentist state and a non-anocratic host state (**anoc/no**), a non-anocratic irredentist state and an anocratic host state (**no/anoc**), and two non-anocratic states (**no/no** – the omitted reference category). We focus on anocratic regimes because they appear particularly predisposed to interstate violence (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Mansfield and Snyder 2002b; 2002a; Gurr 2000; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Muchlinski 2014).¹³ Finally, we consider five additional controls: 1) the population of the host state (**HostPop**), 2) the population of the irredentist state (**IrrPop**), 3) the disparity in military capabilities between the host and irredentist states (**PowerDisparity**), and 4) whether or not the potential irredentist (**IrrSoviet**) or 5) host (**HostSoviet**) states were formerly part of the Soviet Union.¹⁴

We estimate a logistic regression model with standard errors clustered by triad. To correct for temporal dependence, we used cubic polynomial transformations from the number of

¹³ We include traditional and mutually exclusive regime controls of democracy, autocracy, and anocracy for the irredentist state in the appendix. We also provide tabulations for how our anocracy dyads map onto our Majoritarian, Proportional, Party, and Military institutional designations.

¹⁴ “Margin” is the difference between the largest ethnic group in the potential irredentist state and the second largest ethnic group in the potential irredentist state as a proportion of the population. “Dispersed” is a dichotomous indicator assessing whether a particular coethnic group in the host state is geographically dispersed or concentrated. “Discriminated” is also a dichotomous indicator for whether a group experiences ethnic discrimination. “WealthRatio” is the annual ratio of the host state’s GDP per capita divided by the GDP per capita of the potential irredentist state. Finally, “PowerDisparity” is the natural log of the host state’s Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC from the Correlates of War) divided by the potential irredentist state’s CINC. See Siroky and Hale (2017, pages 120-122) for additional variable information.

peace years in each triad dating back to the previous irredentist conflict if there was one (Carter and Signorino 2010).

[Table 1 about here]

For the institutional categorical variables, Majoritarian serves as the omitted reference category, and the results for Proportional, Party, and Military are interpreted against Majoritarian as a baseline measure. Proportional institutions are associated with a -1.73 decrease in the log-odds of engaging in irredentism as compared to majoritarian institutions, and this relationship is statistically significant. As the interpretation of raw logit coefficients can be difficult, we discuss the results of our key institutional variables of interest in terms of percentage changes. In other words, proportional institutions are associated with an 82.2% decrease in the log-odds of irredentism when compared to majoritarian institutions. Single-party dictatorships, similarly, are associated with a 73.7% decrease in the log-odds of irredentism as compared to majoritarian institutions, and this difference is also statistically significant. Military dictatorships, on the other hand, are not statistically differentiated from majoritarian democracies in predicting irredentism by our model.

Our empirical results provide substantial support for the predictions of our computational model. As discussed above, our computational model predicted two general patterns. Both proportional democracies and single-party dictatorships were not statistically differentiated from each other in predicting irredentism, but both were predicted as having lower propensities for irredentism than majoritarian democracies and military dictatorships. Similarly, majoritarian democracies and military dictatorships are not statistically differentiated from each other, but both are predicted by the computational model as having higher propensities for irredentism than either proportional democracies or single-party dictatorships.

In order to visually illustrate this point, Figure 3 presents predicted probabilities of irredentism for each of our four regime types as predicted by our empirical models.¹⁵

[Figure 3 about here]

The general empirical patterns that we observe in the data echo many of the model's predictions. Overall, both proportional electoral systems and single party systems are associated with a lower predicted probability of irredentism compared to majoritarian and military institutions. The predicted probability of irredentism for a state with a proportional electoral system is only 0.019. Similarly, single-party dictatorships have a low predicted probability of engaging in irredentism: 0.025. Meanwhile, states with majoritarian electoral systems are associated with a much higher predicted probability of engaging in irredentism (0.050), and so are military dictatorships (0.052). These two institutional forms are not statistically differentiated from each other, but are statistically different from single-party dictatorships and proportional electoral systems. The empirical analysis provides strong validation and increases our confidence in the computational model's predictions.

Most of our control variables are not statistically significant. However, we briefly note that when both the irredentist and host states are anocratic, this greatly increases the log odds of irredentism relative to dyads where neither of the regimes is anocratic. We also see irredentism is more likely when either the irredentist or host state is anocratic. As mentioned earlier, we include these anocratic dyad controls as interstate conflict is stipulated to be more likely under anocracy generally. Interested readers can examine how these anocratic dyads map over our own institutional categories in the appendix. We also run a version of our models in the appendix excluding the anocratic dyads. Their exclusion does not impact our general model results.

¹⁵ The full model results when excluding each of our four institutional types as a reference variable are in the appendix, Table 1.

The results have several important implications. Because we have developed a micro-level accounting for the incentives to engage in irredentism given varying institutional configurations, we can explain empirical variation in observed variation in irredentism across these configurations. This is particularly useful in explaining observed variation *within* democratic regime types and *within* autocratic regime types. Whereas much of the literature has traditionally posited that democracies are less likely to go to war, for various reasons, than autocracies, the current analysis suggests that, at least with regard to irredentism, this may not be the case with particular democratic institutions as we see majoritarian democracies are among the regimes that are most likely to engage in military conflict to annex ethnic kin. Similarly, while autocracies are often seen as being particularly likely to initiate interstate conflict, our theoretical model and accompanying empirical tests suggest single-party dictatorships are far less likely to initiate irredentist conflict than majoritarian democracies. Detailing the incentives of citizens to follow the ethno-populist appeals of leadership, rather than problematically assuming they blindly allow themselves to be whipped up into a frenzy by political leadership, has also enabled us to develop predict institutional impacts on such processes that are borne out by our empirical analyses.

Conclusion

This article proposes a new approach to analyzing irredentism, a fundamental (if relatively rare) problem of international security that has rarely been studied using these kinds of social science approaches and methods. It makes three contributions: first, it provides stronger micro-foundations that incorporate the political calculus of leaders and the economic interests of citizens across five distinct institutional regimes; second, it develops a new computational model of irredentism and third, it examines its theoretical predictions using observational data.

The theory argues that state leaders are motivated by staying in power and maximizing revenue, but are constrained in this endeavor by the need to provide social welfare and public goods to their constituents who maximize their own economic utility. Political leaders interested in maximizing the utility of their core constituents can provide more transfers and public goods by raising the tax rate, but this extraction lowers overall productivity (reducing the potential source of tax revenue), diminishes individual wealth and reduces popularity, which can cause leaders to be ousted from power. On the other hand, leaders can lower taxes to help citizens retain their personal wealth but doing so ultimately lessens the amount they have to spend in the short term on PTP goods. Political leadership is wary of disrupting the optimal relationship between taxation and the provision of public goods for citizens, and any decision to annex territory and incorporate ethnic kin carefully considers the implications for this relationship. Leaders engage in irredentism when doing so clearly increases the utility of the median core political supporter, which largely depends upon the institutional arrangement.

Instead of assuming that irredentist conflict should be less likely in democracies and democratic dyads, we theorized that different types of democracies and dictatorships carry unique implications for irredentism, and demonstrated that there is as much heterogeneity *within* institutional types as there is across them—specifically, the model predicted (and the empirics validated the finding) that majoritarian democracies and military dictatorships are most likely to engage in irredentism (in that order), whereas proportional democracies and single party dictatorships are least likely to engage in irredentism. These results clearly challenge some of the conventional wisdom about the democracy/dictatorship divide, and show that both democracies and dictatorships have variants that are much more *and* much less predisposed to irredentism.

Moreover, we have situated leaders and masses within these institutional settings and provided them with clear micro-foundational incentives. Theories emphasizing the role of elites in driving ethnic conflicts can help us better understand the incentives of political leaders to mobilize masses for irredentist conflict, but “the insistent question of why the masses follow” (Horowitz 1985, 104) has yet to be connected to the calculus of leaders. Most of the literature emphasizing the importance of ethnic outbidding has tended to assume leaders behave rationally, but that the masses are mobilized based on emotional considerations, such as fear, dignity, resentment or anger. This study proposes a new set of micro-foundations for both the elite and the masses. The theory affords an explanation for why, in some institutional contexts but not in others, the masses may find ethnic appeals agreeable, and why leaders may find it in their interest to make such ethnonationalist appeals. This approach moves the study of irredentism forward beyond the assumptions embedded in elite-centric ethnic outbidding models by providing new micro-foundations, built around the incentives afforded to elites and masses under different institutions, and in doing so explicitly links domestic incentives and institutions to larger international behavior and phenomena.

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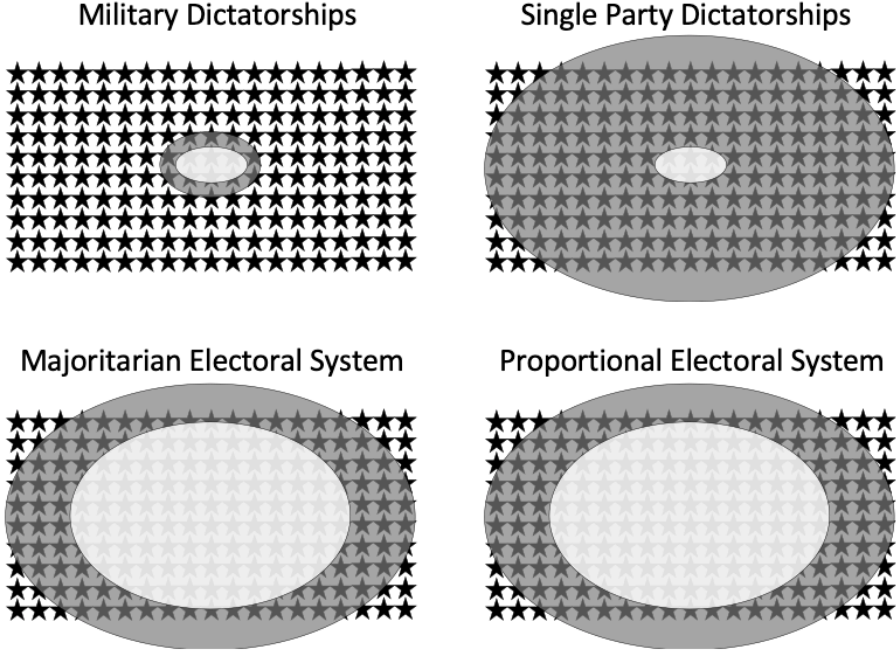
Table 1: Logistic Regression Results

VARIABLES	(1) Majoritarian
1.Majoritarian	
2.Proportional	-1.73*** (0.50)
3.Party	-1.34** (0.58)
4.Military	0.07 (0.55)
Anoc/anoc	2.02*** (0.47)
Anoc/no	0.88* (0.45)
No/anoc	0.73*** (0.24)
Margin	0.30 (0.50)
Dispersed	-1.55 (1.14)
Discrim	-0.18 (0.53)
WealthRatio	-0.28 (0.31)
HostPop	0.00 (0.00)
IrrPop	-0.00 (0.00)
PowerDisparity	0.07 (0.10)
IrrFSoviet	-0.77 (0.70)
HostFSoviet	0.32 (0.49)
Peace years	-1.47*** (0.23)
Peace years ²	0.09*** (0.02)
Peace years ³	-0.00*** (0.00)
Constant	0.22 (0.64)
Observations	3,527

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 1: Selectorate (Dark Oval) and Winning Coalition (Light Oval) by Institutional Type¹⁶



¹⁶ Majoritarian electoral systems and proportional electoral systems have similarly sized selectorates and winning coalitions. What explains variation in propensities for irredentism in these institutional forms is rather the varying way interests get translated into different propensities by their electoral institutions for the state to provide public goods and transfers.

Figure 2: Mechanisms Linking Regime Type to Irredentism

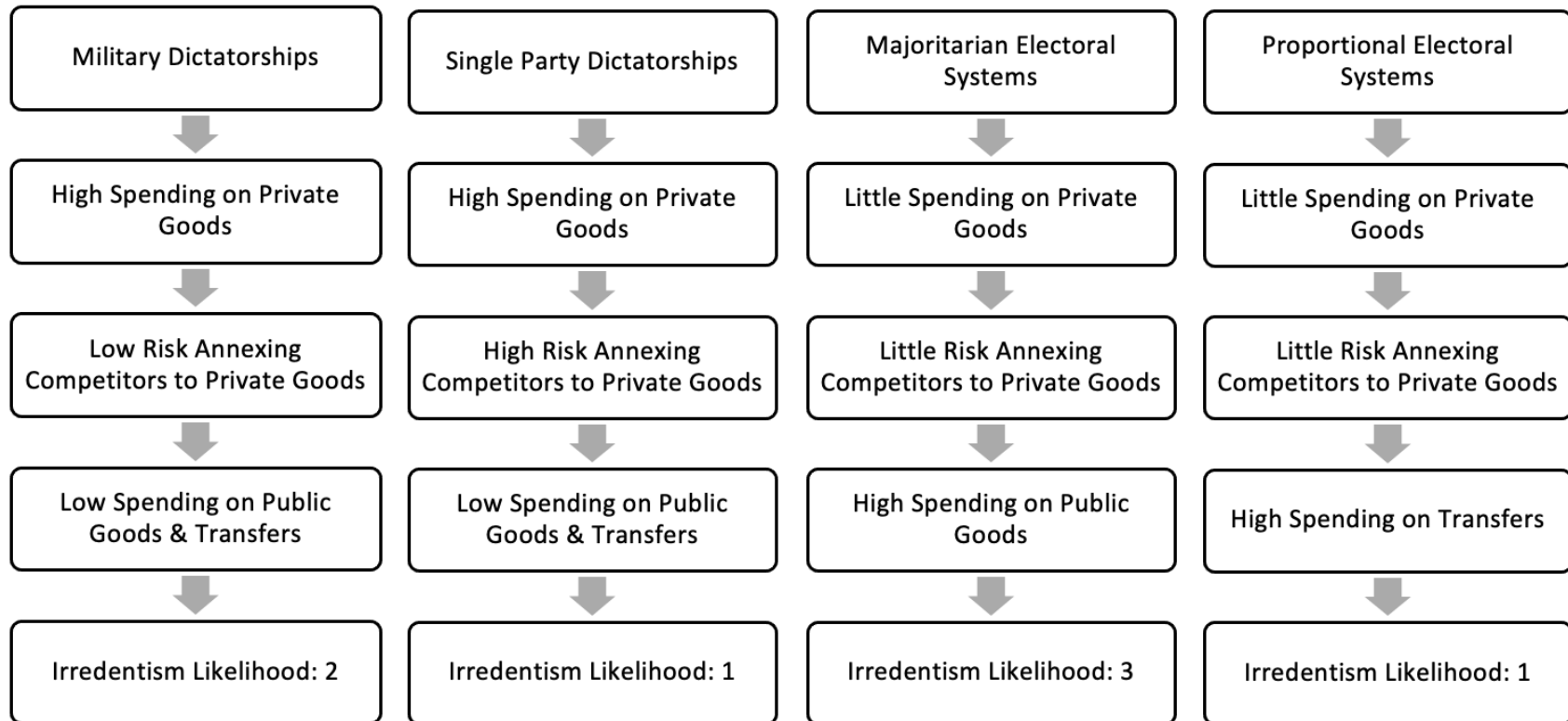


Figure 3: Empirical Results: Predicted Probability of Irredentism by Political Institution

