

Can Mediation Prevent Civil War in Self-Determination Disputes?

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Abstract

Mediation is a tool used frequently by international actors to try to reduce violence and resolve intrastate disputes. A large literature has shown that mediation can contribute to durable civil war ending settlements. Mediation is also used in disputes that are not in active armed conflict, and we know much less about the use of mediation as a tool of conflict prevention. In this article, we argue that mediation is particularly well suited to preventing disputes from escalating to violence. We analyze the role of mediation in conflict prevention using new data that we have collected on the use of mediation in a random sample of self-determination disputes. We find that self-determination disputes that are not in armed conflict frequently experience mediation, and some suggestive evidence that mediation can contribute to the prevention of civil war in these disputes.

Introduction

Mediation is a tool outside actors frequently use to resolve conflicts and reduce violence. High-profile peace agreements such as the Good Friday Accords in the Northern Ireland conflict, the Oslo Accords in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the southern Sudanese conflict were all facilitated by international mediators. A range of organizations send mediators to intrastate disputes, including the United Nations (UN), regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and Inter-Governmental Agency on Development (IGAD), and non-governmental organizations such as Swiss Peace and the Community of Sant'Egidio.

A huge academic literature examines the effect of mediation in intrastate disputes. Quantitative studies examine whether the occurrence of mediation generally, as well as characteristics of mediators such as the leverage they bring, the organizations they represent, and the number of mediators present, bring about reductions in violence and durable peace agreements. This literature is facilitated by data sets that provide information about mediation in intrastate armed conflicts, such as the Civil War Mediation data set (CWM) (DeRouen, Bercovitch, and Pospieszna 2011), the Managing Low-Intensity Conflict (MILC) data set (Melander, Möller, and Öberg 2009), the Managing Intrastate Conflict (MIC) data set (Croicu et al. 2013), and the African Peace Processes (APP) data set (Duursma and Gamez 2022). A number of qualitative studies focus on specific cases of mediation and examine the process through which mediators can help disputants to overcome barriers to agreement and contribute to conflict management.

The mediation literature is too large to summarize fully here, but in general its

conclusions are quite optimistic. Many studies show that mediation can help combatants reach ceasefire agreements and lead these agreements to be more durable (at least in the near-term). Additional studies demonstrate that mediation leads to reductions in violence even in disputes in which a ceasefire agreement is not achieved. This research, combined with a general sense among policymakers and practitioners that mediation is an effective, and relatively inexpensive, tool of conflict management has contributed to its widespread use.

The literature on mediation has revealed many important findings but is nevertheless limited in its focus on violent conflicts. This is particularly true of the quantitative studies. Data sets on mediation generally start with a set of conflicts that are or have recently been violent and identify instances of mediation during and following these periods of violence. Each of the data sets described above, for instance, begin with the conflicts in the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP)-Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict data set (ACD; Gleditsch et al. 2002; Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg 2022) or other UCDP coded conflicts and code instances of mediation either during or after violent conflict that reaches the 25 battle-death in a calendar year threshold.

While much high-profile mediation occurs in violent conflicts, mediators are frequently sent to intrastate disputes where escalation to violence is feared but armed conflict has not yet broken out. The United Nations, African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and many other IGOs express a commitment to and invest resources into conflict prevention. Some existing studies show that diplomatic interventions, such as mediation, are often used in disputes that have not escalated to armed conflict (Beardsley, Cunningham, and White 2017; Breslawski, Cunningham, and Fleishman 2022). These mediation efforts

generally receive much less attention than those that take place in active civil wars, and we know much less about the effect of mediation in intrastate disputes that are not violent.

In this article, we examine whether mediation in intrastate disputes can prevent the outbreak of armed conflict. To identify a set of potential armed conflicts, we examine self-determination (SD) disputes. SD disputes involve a group that wants greater control over the affairs in its territory (which could include, but is not limited to, secessionist groups). SD disputes are a leading cause of civil war, but many of these disputes do not become violent. In addition, within the SD disputes that do become violent, many have periods when they are not in civil war. As such, we argue that these can be viewed as a set of potential civil wars in which we can examine the impact of mediation.

To do so, we have created new data on all occurrences of mediation in a random sample of SD disputes from 1991-2015. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive data on mediation in a range of both violent and nonviolent disputes. These data show that, while mediation is commonly used in violent conflict, it is also frequently used in periods in which disputes are nonviolent. As such, these data provide us an opportunity to examine the impact that mediation has in nonviolent intrastate disputes.

We argue that mediation is likely to be a particularly effective tool in intrastate disputes that are currently nonviolent but with the potential for escalation. Mediation as a form of conflict management is generally less coercive than economic interventions such as sanctions or arms embargo, and military interventions. Unlike those tools, which are primarily designed to manipulate the costs and benefits of fighting vs. settling, mediation is voluntary and designed to facilitate reaching agreements that address some of the underlying issues in the dispute. Once disputants are engaged in violence, mediation can certainly succeed, but

it is much more likely to be successful when parties have an openness to negotiation but need help overcoming barriers to bargaining. Before escalation to violence, however, mediation is designed to convince parties not to fight (rather than to stop doing so), and we argue that the environment is potentially more conducive there.

We test the implications of this argument by first examining whether periods of mediation are followed by a lower likelihood of armed conflict onset or by reductions in violent activity. Our initial results show the opposite of what we expect—a positive relationship between mediation occurrence and civil war onset and incidence. We think that this is likely due to issues with our modeling strategy, which we discuss briefly in the results section and plan to work to address in future iterations of the analysis. Second, we test whether mediation leads to a higher likelihood of political settlements in SD disputes. Although we find a positive effect of mediation on the likelihood of political settlements in most of our models, the results fail to attain statistical significance. We think that this is because the temporal relationship between mediation and concessions is not aligned with using the dispute-year as the unit of analysis as we do in the analysis.

If, in future analysis, we find that mediation is particularly effective at preventing armed conflict in nonviolent disputes, this finding would make several contributions to our understanding of mediation and conflict prevention. First, it would provide further support for the increased use of mediation as a low-cost and effective tool of conflict management. Second, it could suggest that conflict prevention can work, a subject of both academic and scholarly debate. Third, it would shed light on a potentially disturbing recent trend—the decline of peace agreements in conflicts. Scholars have noted that conflicts are less likely to see peace agreements reached in recent years, and see this as a potential signal of the

declining effectiveness of conflict management. However, if mediation is increasingly used before disputes become violent, it might suggest a selection effect whereby disputes that are amenable to negotiation never become violent, leaving a subset of violent conflicts where conflict management is less likely to be effective.

Mediation in Intrastate Armed Conflicts

Mediation is a form of conflict management in which an individual, group, or organization works to help disputants change their behavior, resolve issues of disagreement, and/or find ways other than physical means to address the dispute (Bercovitch and Houston 1996; Beard-sley 2008). Mediation is voluntary for all actors—mediators are free to decline to mediate or to walk away, and disputants are not required to participate in mediation nor to abide by any agreement reached (this is different from arbitration, where agreements are binding). A lot of different types of actors serve as mediators, and mediation can involve efforts to bring about negotiations between top-level governmental officials or actors at the local level.

The literature on mediation has identified a number of ways that mediators can help manage or resolve conflicts. Often, disputants are unwilling to talk directly, and mediators can open up a line of communication between them. In some cases, this involves shuttle diplomacy in which mediators meet with each disputant separately and then relay messages back and forth. In addition, mediators can also draw on their expertise and experience and make substantive suggestions for ways that disputants can address the issues under dispute. Both of these are non-coercive ways to facilitate settlement.

While mediation is voluntary, mediators can use leverage to pressure disputants to

reach agreements. This leverage can be material, in the form of economic inducements for settlement, such as promises of foreign aid, or economic pressure to convince parties to stop fighting, such as threats of sanctions. Mediator leverage can also come from nonmaterial sources such as perceptions of legitimacy and credibility (Reid 2017; Duursma 2020). Mediator leverage can also facilitate agreement by providing political cover for leaders to make potentially unpopular concessions and shift the blame to the mediator to try to deter paying political costs. While leverage can facilitate agreement, too much leverage may mean that agreements are not self-enforcing, leading them to break down over time (Beardsley 2008, 2011).

Empirical research generally shows that mediation has a positive effect, once the selection of mediation is dealt with. Not all intrastate conflicts have mediation, and those that do are not randomly chosen. This likely means that there is some systematic pattern in which disputes do, and do not, involve mediation. Scholars have taken a number of approaches to deal with the non-random selection of mediation (Beber 2012; Gartner and Bercovitch 2006) and these generally show that mediators go to the hardest conflicts—those with the worst prospects for settlement. Once these selection effects are dealt with, the empirical research generally shows that mediation makes ceasefire agreements more likely, these agreements longer lasting, and can lead to reductions in violence in disputes when agreements are not reached.

We draw on this large and important literature to examine whether and how mediation can also play a role in preventing the outbreak of violence. To do so, we focus on a subset of intrastate disputes—SD disputes—that are particularly prone to civil war. In the next section, we briefly describe the characteristics of SD disputes and then examine how

mediation can help states and SD groups to design agreements and to choose means other than violence in their disputes, leading to a reduced likelihood of violent armed conflict.

Mediation in Nonviolent SD Disputes

SD disputes occur when organizations or individuals representing a group organized around some identity (such as ethnicity, language, region, religion, etc.) seek greater control over the territory the group inhabits than the state government wants to give them. In some cases, organizations in SD groups make demands for secession, but in others most actors desire to stay within the same state but with greater local control.

There are many of these disputes around the world. Cunningham (2013) identifies 146 disputes in which organizations make active claims for greater self-rule. Sambanis, Germann, and Schädel (2018) identify 464 such disputes, including those with no organized claims-making. Many SD disputes—such as the Cornish in the United Kingdom and Saami in Norway—involve little violence and never escalate to organized armed conflict. Other disputes—such as that involving southerners in Sudan, the Kurds in Turkey, or the Moro in the Philippines, lead to decades-long, destructive civil wars. In still others, such as the Basque in Spain and Casamance in Senegal, there are periods of armed conflict alternating with periods when the disputes are not violent.

SD disputes can represent major challenges to states and the regions within which they operate. Most states are extremely resistant to give up power or territory and frequently these groups are the subject of state repression. When SD disputes escalate to civil war, they can have profound effects on the region. International actors and states both have incentives

to de-escalate these disputes, before they become full-scale civil wars. At the same time, SD groups rarely achieve their goals through violence, and civil wars are incredibly costly. While South Sudan did emerge as an independent country following two civil wars over a 40 year period, the country remains one of the poorest in the world and has experienced continued armed conflict among groups in the newly independent country.

The costs of violent conflict mean that states, organizations representing SD groups, and regional and other international actors have incentives to try to prevent these disputes from escalating to armed conflict. These incentives provide a good environment for mediators to succeed. Because mediation is voluntary and mediators generally have limited ability to put heavy pressure on the parties involved, mediation is most successful when disputants have an openness to settling, or at least to avoiding violence, but need help getting over the hurdles to doing so. This situation, we argue, characterizes many nonviolent SD disputes.

Drawing on the literature on mediation, we can group the various strategies that mediators use into two broad categories—conflict management and conflict resolution. By conflict management, we mean efforts to influence the behavior of actors toward the dispute, not to resolve the underlying issues. Mediators do this primarily by using leverage—either material or nonmaterial—to convince states to be less repressive toward groups, and for non-state actors to use means other than violence to pursue their goals. In SD disputes that are not violent, this effort involves convincing actors not to choose violence, as opposed to in violent conflicts where it involves convincing actors who have already decided to use violence to stop doing so. In this environment, we anticipate that mediators need to apply less leverage to avoid violence.

By conflict resolution, we mean that mediators can actually assist disputants in re-

solving the underlying issues. SD disputes can appear zero-sum: SD groups want more local control, states do not want to give up power. This appearance can be exacerbated by the mistrust that state and SD actors often have of one another. However, much mediator training revolves around helping parties to move beyond stated positions and to identify their underlying interests, and the ways in which these interests may not be zero-sum. Mediators, particularly those with experience in similar disputes, can work to bring about compromise by facilitating productive dialogue and by suggesting substantive proposals. Even if these compromises do not address all the issues under dispute, they can lower tensions, leading to a reduced likelihood of violence. Both the conflict management and conflict resolution arguments lead us to our main empirical prediction:

H1: When states and organizations representing SD groups engage in mediated negotiations, civil war will be less likely.

In addition, our argument that mediators can contribute to conflict resolution by helping states and SD groups find compromises they could not find on their own, leads us to expect that political agreements will be more likely following mediation in these disputes:

H2: When states and organizations representing SD groups engage in mediated negotiations, political settlements will be more likely.

New Data on Mediation in SD Disputes

Does SD dispute mediation reduce the likelihood of civil conflict and increase the likelihood of political settlement? Answering these questions requires data on dispute mediation both

outside of and during conflict. Although there are data sets recording instances of mediation during civil wars, such as the CWM, MILC, MIC and APP data sets discussed in the introduction, to this point no data set exists that does record mediation events for SD disputes, both during and outside of civil conflict.

To address this gap, we created an original data set on mediation in SD disputes—the Mediation in Self-Determination Disputes data set (MSDD). These data are coded using a random sample from the total population of disputes identified by Cunningham (2013). Of the overall 146 SD disputes included in her data we retained 136 for our sample and are in the process of coding mediation events for them in random order for the time period of 1991 to 2015. We currently have data on 26 of these disputes, representing roughly 20% of the total number. Table 5 displays the full list of disputes in our sample and can be found in the appendix.

In the MSDD, we define a mediation event as a meeting between one or both parties to an SD dispute and a third party in which (1) the dispute is discussed and (2) the third party shows a clear intent to have the dispute resolved peacefully, either via proclamation or action. While the parties to the dispute are either the state government or a direct affiliate, or an organization that is part of the SD movement, third parties acting as mediators may be individuals, state governments, international or non-governmental organizations, or other political entities.

To identify mediation events, we coded English-language news articles after processing search results from NexisUni with a machine learning (ML) model trained on hand-coded news articles. The model assigns labels to individual news articles that reflect the probability of their containing meetings of disputants with third parties. Only news articles with a

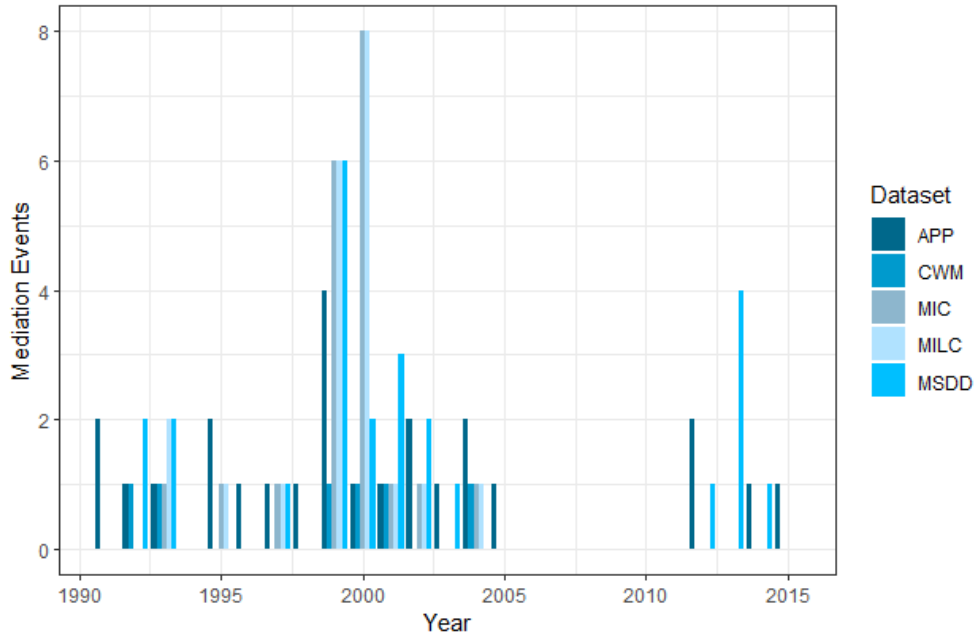
probability great than 50% were retained for manual coding, drastically reducing the number of articles human coders have to go through while, on average, retaining a more than 80% overlap with events coded by hand only. After ML processing human coders went through news articles, entering events in the data set using part (1) of the aforementioned definition. In a second step events were coded as either mediation or not, using part (2) of the definition. To code mediation, coders looked for either explicit statements during or after meetings or actions like shuttle diplomacy as evidence for a third party's interest in peaceful conflict resolution.

With this methodology we have identified 760 mediation events for 26 disputes spanning 650 dispute-years. This is a substantially higher number of mediation events than is found in any existing cross-national data set. This is true because the MSDD identify mediation events in disputes such as the the Walloons in Belgium, Hungarians in Slovakia, Muslims in Sri Lanka, and indigenous groups in Mexico and Colombia that never experience armed conflict. In addition, the MSDD identify greater numbers of mediation events in years during and after armed conflict than other data sets that also code these periods.

Figures 1 and 2 provide a direct comparison of our data with that in the MILC, MIC, CWM, and APP data set. Each of these projects seek to code mediation efforts, but build their coding around armed conflicts in the UCDP-PRIO ACD. In Figure 1, we examine the number of mediation events identified in each year in each data set in the Senegal-Casamancia dispute. That dispute experienced an internal armed conflict from 1991-2003 and then again in 2011, and there are mediation events identified in all five data sets, including ours.

Figure 1 shows that our data identifies most of the mediation events found in the existing data, as well as others not found. In particular, we see that in 2013 the other four

Figure 1: Senegal-Casamancia Dispute Mediation Data Set Comparison

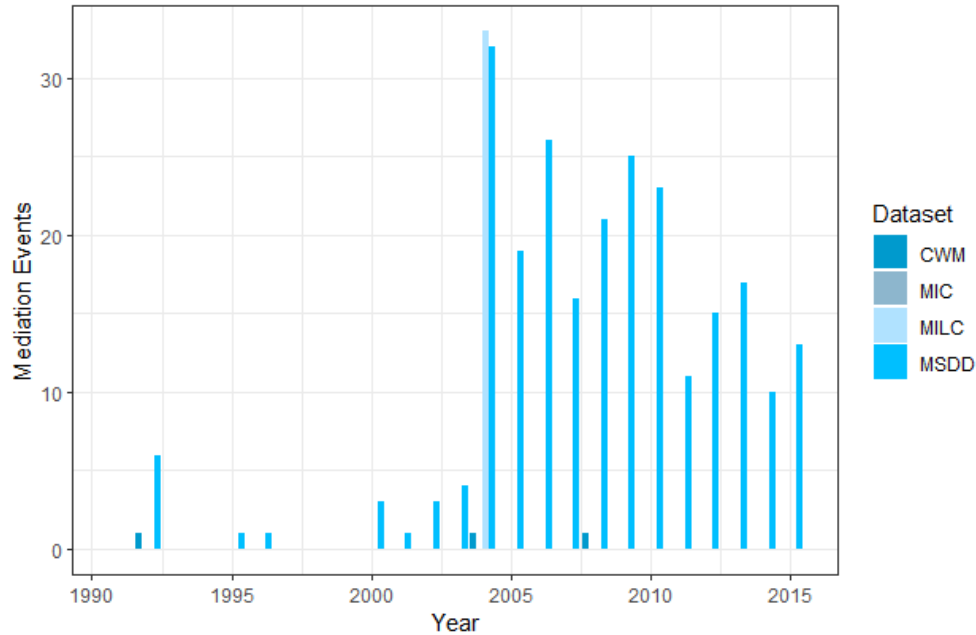


data sets identify no mediation events, while we find several events, including mediation by a Swiss NGO, Geneva Call, and the Government of Guinea Bissau surrounding de-mining efforts in the Casamance region, as well as direct talks in Rome, Italy to establish an agenda for upcoming peace talks, mediated by the Catholic Community of Sant’Egidio.

Figure 2 compares the MSDD, MIC, MILC, and CWM for the Georgia-South Ossetia dispute. As the figure shows, the MSDD data identify dramatically more mediation events in this dispute than existing data projects. This includes events led by various state governments including both Russia and the US, throughout the temporal period. The difference is especially stark from 2008 to 2015 when the MSDD finds over 100 mediation events while the CWM, the only other data set collecting data in this temporal period, finds no events.

The importance of identifying the effect of mediation outside of civil war is further illustrated by Table 1, which provides a side-by-side comparison of dispute years with and without civil war in terms of whether they experienced any mediation effort. We find that

Figure 2: Georgia-South Ossetia Dispute Mediation Data Set Comparison



a majority of years with mediation take place outside of the context of civil war, further underlining the need for data on mediation especially outside of civil conflict.

Empirical Analysis

For the purpose of our analysis, we use the self-determination dispute-year as our unit of analysis. We restructure our data so aggregate mediation events to the dispute-year. To test H1 we use multivariate logit models and cluster standard errors on the dispute. Civil war onset and civil war incidence are our outcome variables. These variables are based on the UCDP-PRIO ACD (Gleditsch et al. 2002). Cunningham (2013) has tied these civil wars to SD disputes in her data, and we use this coding to identify civil wars in these disputes. The civil war onset variable takes on a 1 if at least 25 battle deaths occur in a dispute in a given year and when said year has been preceded by at least three years where violence was not

Table 1: Cross-tabulation of Mediation and Civil War Incidence per Year

Mediation	Civil War		Row total
	No	Yes	
No	351	69	420
	83.6%	16.4%	100%
Yes	97	76	173
	56.1%	43.9%	100%
Column total	448	145	593
	75.5%	24.5%	100%

above that threshold. In turn, the civil war incidence variable is coded as a 1 in every year where the conflict reaches at least 25 battle deaths.

We employ two versions of our main independent variable, mediation. First, we use a binary mediation variable with a one-year lag as our independent variable, taking on a 1 if there was at least one mediation event in a given dispute year and 0 otherwise. Second, we use a logged mediation count variable with a one-year lag, counting the number of mediation events in a given dispute year. As the likelihood of civil war onset may be influenced by previous instances of conflict, we account for temporal dependence. In line with Carter and Signorino (2010) we use duration count variables which record the number of years since the last civil war onset and incidence, respectively, as well as their squares and cubes.

Further, we address omitted variable bias by including several control variables. First, we include a logged count of the number of SD movement factions active in a given dyad-year, as more factions have been found to lead to a higher likelihood of bargaining failure and thus civil war (Cunningham 2013). Data for this variable originate from the updated Strategies of Resistance Data Project (SRDP) by Cunningham, Dahl and Frugé (2020). Second, we control for democratic regimes, using a binary indicator that takes on a 1 if the

PolityIV score of a given country is > 6 . Due to a high degree of peaceful conflict resolution democracies may see more mediation while the likelihood of civil war is reduced. Third, we use a binary indicator on previous concessions, taking on a 1 if a given SD movement has received either cultural or political concessions in the past. Cunningham (2013) finds that a history of concessions makes civil war in these disputes less likely, and argues that they could indicate that governments are interested in peaceful resolution of disputes. This interest could increase the likelihood of mediation as well. Data for this variable is obtained from the updated SRDP. We also include a variable indicating whether the state is currently experiencing another civil war, as civil wars tend to spread spatially and countries in civil war might be more likely to attract the attention of mediators generally. Finally, we include a variable indicating the ratio of factions out of an SD movement that used violent tactics in a given dispute year. The variable is included as the use of violent tactics on behalf of rebels may have an impact on the likelihood of mediation and surely civil war onset. Table 2 gives summary statistics for all main variables used in the analysis. The summary statistics show that almost one third of all dispute-years saw mediation events.

Table 3 shows the logit regressions results for H1. Squared and cubed duration count variables are used in all models but omitted from the table. The analyses in Table 3 show the opposite effect of mediation as that predicted by H1. In all models, the sign on the mediation variable is positive, although it is only statistically significant in both models of civil war onset using the two different operationalizations of mediation and not including most controls. Hence, differences between the effects of the two mediation variables are marginal.

While these results could suggest that mediation is counter-productive in SD disputes,

Table 2: Summary Statistics for the Main Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Civil war onset	478	0.029	0.169	0	1
Civil war incidence	614	0.244	0.430	0	1
Mediation (binary)	595	0.292	0.455	0	1
Mediation (log count)	595	0.392	0.722	0.000	3.497
SD factions (log count)	616	1.097	0.713	0.000	2.398
Democracy	563	0.419	0.494	0	1
Previous concessions	616	0.631	0.483	0	1
Other civil war in state	614	0.402	0.491	0	1
SD faction violence	522	0.121	0.205	0	1

we think that this is unlikely for at least two reasons. First, we think that our modelling strategy does not fully deal with the selection issues here, particularly over time. Several of the SD disputes in our data experience mediation in almost every year, and also see low-intensity conflict which occasionally crosses the 25 battle-death threshold. Examples of this pattern include the Georgia-South Ossetia and Senegal-Casamancia disputes described above. These type of cases would show a positive relationship between mediation and civil war onset.

Relatedly, civil war onset and incidence are relatively extreme measures of violence in these disputes. Many disputes never see a civil war onset, and others are in civil war for nearly the entire observed period. In neither of these cases are we able to discern much of an impact of mediation. In future iterations, we also anticipate examining how mediation impacts the level of violence in disputes, although this requires identifying measures of violence that can be used in disputes that never experience armed conflict.

The control variables in Table 3 generally show patterns consistent with those in

Table 3: Logit Models of Civil War Onset and Incidence in State-SD Movement Dyads, 1991–2015

	Dependent variable: civil war					
	Onset	Onset	Incidence	Incidence	Onset	Incidence
Mediation (binary, lag)	1.423* (0.631)	0.369 (0.785)	0.840 (0.502)	0.158 (0.422)		
Mediation (log count, lag)					0.729*** (0.189)	0.529 (0.341)
SD factions (log count, lag)		1.689 (1.086)		2.028** (0.574)	1.639 (1.108)	1.959** (0.588)
Democracy (lag)		-0.318 (1.214)		-2.092*** (0.508)	-0.517 (1.464)	-2.113*** (0.516)
Previous concessions		-3.247** (0.896)		-1.422** (0.449)	-3.287** (0.885)	-1.450** (0.442)
Other civil war in state (lag)		1.945 (1.209)		1.555* (0.747)	1.993 (1.235)	1.626* (0.725)
SD faction violence (lag)		2.137* (0.960)		0.309 (1.000)	1.916* (0.816)	0.209 (1.052)
Years since last civil war	0.266* (0.124)	0.880* (0.364)	-1.203*** (0.216)	-1.803*** (0.269)	0.256 (0.128)	-1.210*** (0.210)
Constant	-4.810*** (0.904)	-8.961*** (2.111)	1.431** (0.469)	0.086 (0.808)	-4.524*** (0.703)	1.515** (0.434)
N	464	380	594	465	464	594
Pseudo R^2	0.094	0.365	0.629	0.765	0.089	0.627

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered on dyad. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Cunningham (2013), although some of them lose statistical significance. Especially previous concessions seem to have a strong negative effect on civil war onset and incidence, which is in line with theoretical expectations. This drop in significance for some control variables is likely due to increase in standard errors from the smaller sample size. Cunningham (2013) examines the 1960-2005 period for all 146 SD disputes in her sample, in these analyses we have 25 disputes for the 1991-2015 period.

To test H2, we also use the dyad-year as our unit of analysis and employ multivariate logit models, clustering standard errors on the dyad. We operationalize our outcome, political settlements, as concessions given to the SD movement by the state it is in a dispute with. The variable is constructed from the same updated SRDP data as the previous concessions variable used in the analysis of H1. Concessions can be cultural or political, ranging from institutionalizing minority rights to land transfers and regional autonomy. The variable is binary and takes on a 1 if an SD movement receives at least one such concession in a given dispute year. Like in our analysis of H1, we use two measures of mediation as our main independent variables: A binary measure and one using a logged count. Both variables are lagged by one year. We also account for temporal dependence again in line with Carter and Signorino (2010). We use a duration count variable recording the number of years since the last concession was granted to the SD movement in the dispute as well as the variable's square and cube.

We address potential confounders by including a number of control variables in our analysis. These variables do not differ from the ones used in the analysis of H1. First, we control for the number of SD movement factions, as previous research (Cunningham 2014) has shown that the number of factions has a great impact on state's calculus on accommodations.

Table 4: Logit Models of Concessions in State-SD Movement Dyads, 1991–2015

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Mediation (binary, lag)	0.139 (0.372)	-0.076 (0.365)		
Mediation (log count, lag)			0.133 (0.215)	0.058 (0.250)
SD factions (log count, lag)		0.166 (0.298)		0.145 (0.303)
Democracy (lag)		0.265 (0.453)		0.254 (0.461)
Civil war incidence (lag)		-0.360 (0.628)		-0.393 (0.630)
Years since last concession	-0.227* (0.106)	-0.160 (0.109)	-0.230* (0.106)	-0.163 (0.108)
Constant	-1.612*** (0.355)	-2.062** (0.663)	-1.613*** (0.359)	-2.058** (0.658)
N	593	540	593	540
Pseudo R^2	0.043	0.042	0.044	0.042

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered on dyad.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Second, we control for regime type as a democracy should be more receptive to third-party mediation and more likely to give out concessions. Third, we control for civil war incidence, the dependent variable in the analysis of H1, as it arguably affects the likelihood of mediation and concessions.

Logit regression results for H2 are shown in Table 4. Squared and cubed duration count variables are again used in all models but omitted from the table. The results show positive coefficients in three out of four models, although effect sizes are small and not significant. This lack of significance may be due to concessions being a quite rare phenomenon,

as well as to the fact that mediation is quite common, as described above. The general lack of significance for the control variables could result from the rarity as well.

We also think it is likely that we are not picking up the temporal relationship between mediation and concessions well here. By using the lag of mediation, we are examining how mediation in one year affects concessions in the next. But, when mediation is successful at leading to agreement, it often does so quickly. On the other hand, some political concessions are made through the legislative process, which can be quite slow. The dispute-year analysis here may not be the best way to identify the relationship between mediation and concessions in these disputes.

Conclusion

Mediation is generally seen as a key tool of conflict resolution. A wide range of organizations and individuals engage in mediation, bringing together heads of state to negotiate the future of countries, and village elders to address issues at the local level. A large scholarly literature shows that mediation can help to bring about lasting civil war ending settlements and lead to reductions in violence.

We anticipate that mediation can also play a role in preventing the outbreak of civil war in the first place. That anticipation has led us to collect systematic data on mediation in a set of SD disputes that include disputes that never experience civil war, those that see occasional flare-ups of armed conflict, and those that experience long-running violent conflicts. These data allow us to examine how mediation works in disputes without a history of armed conflict, civil wars, and in post-conflict situations.

These data show that, while mediation occurs frequently during civil war, there are many instances of mediation in SD disputes outside the context of armed conflict. Some of this mediation takes place in high-profile disputes with a history of violence like the South Ossetians in Georgia and the Acehese in Indonesia. We also see mediation in disputes without much history of organized violence, including that involving the Gagauz in Moldova, the Walloons in Belgium, and the Zanzibaris in Tanzania.

The data on mediation allow us to examine its impact across a wide range of disputes. Our initial analyses did not show the relationship we expected—that of a reduced likelihood of civil war in disputes following mediation. Similarly, results for the impact of mediation on political settlements are so far not significant, possibly because we do not adequately model the temporal relationship between these two variables. In future iterations of the data analysis we will work to more clearly isolate the impact of mediation on armed conflict, other forms of violence, and government concessions in these disputes. Doing so will contribute to our understanding of mediation as a tool of conflict management and prevention.

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Appendix

Table 5: Sample Disputes and Date Ranges

KGCID	Dispute	Date range
102	Algeria - Berbers	1991 - 2015
104	Belgium - Walloons	1991 - 2015
107	Colombia - Indigenous Peoples	1991 - 2015
118	Mexico - Indigenous Peoples (non-Mayan or Zapotecs)	1991 - 2015
119	Moldova - Gagauz	1991 - 2015
120	Myanmar (Burma) - Rohingyas	1991 - 2015
121	Myanmar (Burma) - Kachins	1991 - 2015
122	Niger - Tuaregs	1991 - 2015
129	South Africa - Afrikaners	1994 - 2015
130	Sri Lanka - Muslims	1991 - 2015
138	Zambia - Lozi	1991 - 2015
217	Myanmar (Burma) - Shan	1991 - 2015
223	Russia - Buryat	1991 - 2015
225	Senegal - Casamacias	1991 - 2015
228	Tanzania - Zanzibaris	1991 - 2015
230	United Kingdom - Catholics	1991 - 2015
234	Zimbabwe - Ndebele	1991 - 2015
301	Angola - Cabindans	1991 - 2015
309	Ethiopia - Oromos	1991 - 2015
310	Georgia - Adzhars	1991 - 2015
311	Georgia - South Ossetians	1991 - 2015
327	Slovakia - Hungarians	1991 - 2015
330	Sudan - Southerners	1991 - 2015
336	Yugoslavia - Montenegrins	1991 - 2015
410	India - Assamese	1991 - 2015
413	Indonesia - Acehnese	1991 - 2015