**Assessing State Making Strategies**

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**Abstract**: Sovereign statehood entails considerable benefits for political entities recognized by the international system’s other sovereign states. Consequently, many political entities within sovereign states, particularly in the developing world, seek to enjoy these benefits themselves, and do so by attempting either to secede from their hosts or to take over part or all of the sovereign states within whose borders they operate. Resisting these internal contenders is an especially important part of the state making process for sovereign states. The most effective way sovereign states can resist them is to deter them from emerging in the first place. We investigate the effectiveness of different state making strategies aimed at resisting and deterring internal contenders. To do so we take advantage of a new dataset characterizing 187 “territorial contenders” within 62 developing world sovereign states. We find that only forceful reintegration of internal contenders reliably deters the emergence of subsequent challenges.

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Most states face one or more threats from political entities that arise within their borders and challenge their continued existence. Some of these internal challengers want to seize part of the state’s territory and become a sovereign state themselves. Others seek to take over the entirety of the state and replace it as the recognized sovereign over that entire country. Yet others simply want to govern themselves autonomously and make no claims about recognition. Regardless of the challengers’ intentions about sovereign independence, the threats and challenges they pose to states are so severe that they very often lead to conflict between the state and challenger. Eliminating these internal threats is arguably the most important part of each state’s state making experience. So central are these threats and state strategies for responding to them, that Charles Tilly uses the term “statemaking” specifically to designate the general phenomenon of “attacking and checking competitors and challengers within the territory claimed by the state…” (1990:96).

What should states do? They could violently respond by attacking the forces massed by their internal competitors. Alternatively, they might negotiate with these challengers in hopes of gaining their acquiescence to restored state rule over the entire territory. Finally, they might ignore these internal challenges, perhaps trying to out-govern them so that the citizens of the state will “vote with their feet” and place their allegiance with the state. Live-and-let-live tolerance may arise instead because the state is so weak it is unable to govern all of its territory and so poor it has little to offer in concessions. All of these potential responses are varieties of state making strategies. In the interests of peace, stability, and development, it is important for states to employ strategies most likely to restore order within their borders. Not only is it important for states to address any existing internal challenges, but it is also important for them to do so in a way that signals capacity to deter, or legitimacy to preempt, any subsequent internal challenges from emerging.

Little or nothing is known about which state making strategies are the most likely to succeed. Assessing state making strategies is our goal, and in hopes of doing that we have developed a theoretical argument anticipating varying success across the different options. In order to test our theoretical expectations empirically, we make use of a recently released dataset about “territorial contenders” (Lemke and Crabtree forthcoming). Territorial contenders are political entities that control populated territory but lack diplomatic recognition as sovereigns. By taking territorial control away from sovereign states, territorial contenders directly challenge the state’s legitimacy and usurp some of its resources, diminishing its capacity. Because of the seriousness of the challenge they pose to sovereign states, territorial contenders are the best set of non-state actors against which to test arguments about state making strategies.

The conceptualization of territorial contenders subsumes a number of types of non-state territorial entities, such as de facto states (Florea 2014), rebels that govern territory (Arjona 2016; Huang 2016; Stewart 2018), warlords (Marten 2012; Mukhopadhyay 2014), territorial self-determination movements (Coggins 2014), and unrecognized states (Caspersen 2012). Lemke and Crabtree (forthcoming) show that the more territorial contenders in existence the worse the conditions for the sovereign state, its neighbors, and the larger international community. This is because territorial contender presence is strongly correlated with both civil war and state failure. Consequently, knowing which state making strategies are best at eliminating territorial contenders and deterring the emergence of more is important for researchers interested not only in state making but also in intrastate conflict and state failure.

We develop our theoretical argument in more detail in the next section, but briefly stated, we anticipate that the initial emergence of a territorial contender is influenced by characteristics of the sovereign state. That is, territorial contenders are more likely in large, poorly governed, weak states with diverse populations and rough terrain. However, whether a state suffers from additional territorial contenders is, we posit, influenced by how the sovereign state responds to earlier territorial contenders. We argue that forceful reintegration of past territorial contenders sends an unambiguous signal of capacity which deters subsequent territorial contender emergence. Using the newly available territorial contenders dataset and a variety of statistical estimation techniques, we find considerable support for our deterrence/signaling argument. Accommodative and tolerant state making strategies either do not reduce the probability of subsequent territorial contender emergence or worse, actually increase that risk. The best way to avoid the civil wars and state failure episodes associated with territorial contender presence is to root them out forcefully.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Theoretical Argument:

We begin with the assumption that almost all sovereign states could confront a territorial contender on their territory. We say “almost all” because some are too small (Monaco occupies less than one square mile of territory), or have such tiny populations (Tuvalu claims fewer than 13,000 people according to its 2012 census) that it is hard to imagine the opportunity or motivation for a territorial contender to emerge. But, with the possible exception of such micro-states, it is likely true that all sovereign states could experience the emergence of at least one territorial contender.

What might cause the emergence of that first territorial contender? We propose that territorial contender emergence is more likely where capacity and legitimacy are low. Seizing and controlling territory is profitable because by controlling territory a territorial contender controls geographic resources and human capital. But becoming a territorial contender is risky because it frequently provokes a violent response from the sovereign state. However, the risk of taking control of territory is lower where grievances are substantial (sovereign state has low legitimacy) and/or where retaliation is not as fearful (sovereign state has low capacity).

Worries about retaliation are reduced when the sovereign state covers a large territory with lots of inhospitable terrain, has a very diverse population, is relatively poor, and is a newly independent state. Large amounts of inhospitable terrain governed by a relatively poor and newly-independent sovereign state makes insurgency more likely according to Fearon and Laitin (2003), who identify these characteristics as coinciding with low political capacity. Autocratic governments ruling over diverse populations often coincide with illegitimacy due to substantial grievances (Cederman et al. 2013). If these factors make insurgency and rebellion more likely, it is plausible that they also make territorial contender emergence more likely. Thus, geographic, political, economic, and demographic characteristics should help us anticipate which sovereign states are more likely to experience a first territorial contender.

However, those physical, political, economic, and demographic factors likely do not help us understand *how many* territorial contenders will ultimately emerge. For example, both DR Congo and Indonesia have nearly ideal characteristics for territorial contender emergence, and for much of their independent histories have had non-representative governments well able to provoke grievances. And yet, DR Congo eventually played host to eighteen territorial contenders while Indonesia has hosted only four. Why the striking difference? If both have time-invariant characteristics favoring territorial contender emergence but we nevertheless observe variation over time and across these cases in the number of territorial contenders emerging, then it must be that some other factor influences how *many* territorial contenders emerge.

We return to the cases of DR Congo and Indonesia below, but for our theoretical discussion we re-emphasize consideration of capacity and legitimacy. If perceptions about low capacity and low legitimacy make the emergence of a first territorial contender more likely, then subsequent information about how incapable or how illegitimate a sovereign state is should influence the emergence of subsequent territorial contenders. We theorize that the most relevant way in which perceptions about capacity and legitimacy can change after the emergence of the first territorial contender is found in how the sovereign state *responds* to that first territorial contender. If the sovereign responds by annihilating the territorial contender, a chilling message is sent to other opposition groups. They have learned that taking territory away from that sovereign is costly; likely they are deterred from establishing territorial control. If instead the sovereign is unable to eliminate the territorial contender, it sends a message of incapacity to other opposition groups, specifically that seizing territory is relatively costless. If the sovereign relies on foreign intervention to eliminate the territorial contender, it may also weaken its legitimacy since it has had to rely on foreign assistance to handle a job it should have been able to accomplish itself. In short, there are successful and unsuccessful ways for sovereigns to deal with territorial contenders. If the sovereign is successful its perceived legitimacy and capacity increase, and thus subsequent and additional territorial contender emergence should be less likely. If instead the sovereign is unsuccessful its perceived legitimacy and capacity decrease, raising the likelihood another territorial contender emerges. Our theory as developed thus far offers two broad hypotheses:

**H1**: Inhospitable terrain, autocratic governance, underdevelopment, and large and diverse

populations increase the probability of territorial contender emergence.

**H2**: How the sovereign state responds to a past territorial contender influences the subsequent emergence of additional territorial contenders within its territory.

We expect sovereign state responses to be strong influences on the fate of territorial contenders that emerge. We represent sovereign state responses as the state making strategies central to our inquiry. However, our conceptualization of strategy rests not on what the state intends (which neither we nor potential territorial contenders can observe), but rather by the result of the sovereign state’s response. In the new territorial contenders dataset, five outcomes characterize territorial contenders’ fates: they can be absorbed into a competitor territorial contender, they can be forcefully reintegrated into the sovereign state, they can be peacefully reintegrated into the sovereign state, and they can be recognized as sovereign states themselves – usually after defeating the sovereign state in war and being recognized in its stead. Absent one of those “death” types, a territorial contender persists in independent control of territory. Sovereign states may wage war against or may negotiate with territorial contenders. They also may choose to live-and-let-live. Of course, they may pursue some mix of these strategies simultaneously or sequentially. But importantly, what potential territorial contenders observe is the fates of territorial contenders that precede them. This “logic of revealed capacity” justifies our conceptualization of state making strategies as the fates of territorial contenders.

Some of these outcomes are unambiguous in terms of their implication for deterring additional territorial contenders from emerging. Persistence clearly indicates the sovereign state has failed to eliminate the territorial contender. Peacefully tolerating the existence of a territorial contender indicates that the costs of taking territory away from that sovereign state are low. This signal is even stronger if the sovereign state engages in conflict with the territorial contender, yet the territorial contender nevertheless persists. On the other end of the capacity and legitimacy spectrum, forceful reintegration is also unambiguous. It clearly indicates the sovereign is able to succeed when “attacking and checking competitors and challengers within the territory claimed by the state” (Tilly 1990:96). Absorption into a competitor territorial contender sends an ambiguous message to other would-be territorial contenders, because in those instances the sovereign state has not conquered the territorial contender, but the territorial contender nevertheless was unable to persist as an independent political entity. The former should increase and the latter dampen the enthusiasm of other would-be territorial contenders for seizing control of their own territory in defiance of the sovereign state.

Peaceful reintegration also sends a mixed signal. On the one hand the sovereign state again reigns supreme, or at least retains its place as recognized sovereign over the territory, and the territorial contender is no longer independent. But, in these instances it is likely the territorial contender received concessions from the sovereign state, perhaps substantial ones, to induce it to reintegrate without having to be conquered militarily. This might incentivize other would-be territorial contenders because they might perceive the message as being “if you seize territory and make yourself a significant threat, the sovereign state will grant some of your demands.”

This leaves unaccounted one final “response” by the sovereign state: instances where the sovereign is unsuccessful at reintegrating the territorial contender and the territorial contender not only persists but is itself recognized as a sovereign state. Situations like this are clearly instances of failed responses by the sovereign state, and thus communicate a lack of capacity to other would-be territorial contenders. That should make the emergence of more territorial contenders likely, except that in all but one instance of territorial contender recognition as sovereign, the previously recognized state no longer existed. An example is the Hutu government fleeing across the border into Zaire in 1994 when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (which had qualified as a territorial contender by controlling territory in Rwanda’s north [Mamdani 2002: 186-7]), seized power in Kigali and was recognized by the rest of the world as the legitimate sovereign of Rwanda. The incapacity of the Hutu-controlled state was no longer a factor in the deliberations of opposition groups in Rwanda contemplating becoming territorial contenders. This suggests that recognition of a territorial contender as a sovereign state should diminish the likelihood of additional territorial contenders emerging, an expectation consistent with some research on the strength of states that started as successful rebels (Toft 2010; Carter et al. 2012).

Unfortunately, this straight-forward expectation is contradicted by an equally straight-forward expectation that recognition of a territorial contender as a sovereign state could provoke other opposition groups to emerge as territorial contenders in hopes of similarly enjoying the privileges of sovereign statehood (and they are many, see Fazal and Griffiths 2014). There are several examples of this. In 1979 after governing Chad’s three northern departments for years, Goukouni Oueddei’s forces swept into N’Djamena and were recognized as the sovereign state governing Chad. Eager for a similar success, Hissene Habre established a territorial contender in eastern Chad along the border with Sudan. It went to war with the new Chadian state, and by 1982 had conquered N’Djamena and won recognition as the sovereign state controlling Chad. Additional cases of territorial contenders being recognized as sovereign and then plagued by territorial contenders of their own occurred in Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Cambodia. In these cases, one territorial contender’s success serves as a powerful example motivating other opposition groups to themselves become territorial contenders.

In sum, we anticipate that persistence makes subsequent territorial contender emergence more likely. This will be true especially when persistence coincides with inconclusive fighting between sovereign and territorial contender. We further anticipate that forceful reintegration makes subsequent territorial contender emergence less likely. Finally, we anticipate that absorption into another territorial contender, peaceful reintegration by the sovereign state, and promotion of a territorial contender to sovereign status, will occupy a neutral ground, neither increasing nor decreasing the likelihood of subsequent territorial contender emergence. These considerations allow us to offer more specific versions of **H2**:

**H2a**: If the territorial contender persists and the sovereign state tolerates it peacefully, subsequent territorial contender emergence is more likely.

**H2b**: If the territorial contender persists even though the sovereign state engages in conflict with it, subsequent territorial contender emergence is more likely.

**H2c**: If the sovereign state forcefully reintegrates the territorial contender, subsequent territorial contender emergence is less likely.

**H2d**: If the sovereign state peacefully reintegrates the territorial contender, or if the territorial contender is absorbed by a competitor territorial contender, or if it is promoted to sovereign state status, subsequent territorial contender emergence is unaffected.

Our theory suggests that more capable and more legitimate sovereign states suffer from fewer territorial contenders emerging on their territory, and further that how sovereign states respond to any territorial contenders that do emerge sends messages to other opposition groups affecting their decisions about becoming territorial contenders as well. This is a deterrence story, and we know of no other research on internal conflict or state making strategies that offers an argument quite like ours.

Within internal conflict research Walter’s (2009) investigation into government efforts to deter future ethnic secessions is similar, though she does not consider the initial emergence of challengers to the sovereign state. Her argument is that states facing many potential separatist movements will be more likely to wage war against any one that challenges the state. This deterrence logic parallels the famous “chain-store paradox,” and addresses bargaining theory concerns about why less-costly bargains could not be reached by reference to expectations about future conflicts. In effect, sovereigns’ and territorial contenders’ (or, in Walter’s case, ethnic separatists’) bargaining efforts are complicated by the state’s concerns about later bargaining interactions with subsequent actors. Lake (2010/11) offers Saddam Hussein’s concerns about future conflicts with Shiite and Kurd opponents in Iraq as reasons why he could not agree to a war-avoiding bargain with the US in 2003 that would have indicated he did not possess weapons of mass destruction.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Similarly, there are few competitors within state making research about strategies state makers can undertake to deter the internal “competitors and challengers” about which Tilly writes. Boone’s research (1995a, 1995b, 2003) comes closest. She explains why African state penetration varies from state to state and across regions within a given state by consideration of the distribution of resources and the type of communal structure characterizing each sub-state region. While explicitly presenting these as state making strategies, Boone’s research largely ignores Tilly’s competitors and challengers, and is entirely silent as to when they challenge the state. Also, Boone does not speculate about how the state’s treatment of one region might influence its interactions with another. Our arguments thus have little overlap.

Comparative politics scholars have paid considerable attention to strategies individual leaders follow to remain in power. Research on coup-proofing and cooptation serve as examples (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018). We conceive of these as leader preservation strategies, while the state making strategies of interest to us are better thought of as state preservation strategies. We conceive of the state as a group of governing institutions, as is common in state making research. For example, Centeno (2002:2) defines the state as “the permanent institutional core of political authority on which regimes rest and depend,” while Tilly (1991:1-2) sees states as “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories.” In these conceptualizations the state is larger than the governing regime and certainly larger than the leader. Sometimes government and individual leaders act in the interest of the state (e.g. when they obey the law and leave office after losing an election, or when they invest in long-term development), but when they mutate political organizations to prolong their individual stay in office, they are not contributing to state making. Trade-offs between leader-preserving and state-preserving strategies are an interesting topic far too large for this article. Instead, we focus on a different set of strategies than do researchers focusing on leader survival.

Finally, our argument emphasizes signals about capacity and legitimacy. These concepts are important in a number of related research agendas. We have known for decades that political capacity is a strong predictor of interstate war outcomes (Organski and Kugler 1980, specifically Chapter 2; Kugler and Domke 1986). Fjelde and de Soysa (2009) explore the relationships between state capacity and civil war onset. De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2012) demonstrate that political capacity makes both territorial rebellions and terrorist campaigns less likely. Turning to political legitimacy, Englebert (2000) shows it to be a strong correlate of economic development. This is relevant because, as shown below, more developed sovereign states are less likely to face a first territorial contender. Lemke and Carter (2016) show that sovereign states with better birth legacies are more likely to fight and win wars, after also showing that sovereign states with better birth legacies enjoy higher levels of both capacity and legitimacy. Our work shares with these other scholars the anticipation that capacity and legitimacy are associated with better outcomes for the sovereign states under investigation. But none of these other scholars have theorized about the effect of capacity or legitimacy on competitions between sovereign states and territorial contenders.

Illustrative examples:

Before turning from our theory to our discussion of how we evaluate our hypotheses, we present two brief illustrative examples of our argument as depicted in real world cases. The cases in question are the widely-varying experiences of two states, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with respect to territorial contenders emerging within their territories.

Within two weeks of independence in July 1960, the Republic of the Congo was confronted with secession by its mineral-rich Katanga Province. During the colonial era Katanga had generated the majority of the territory’s exports, so its retention was important. When Congo proved unable to subdue Katanga, a substantial UN force intervened, eventually returning the province to Congolese sovereignty. In the intervening years Katanga governed itself, maintained an army, and struggled to survive. In short, Katanga was a territorial contender. Its existence was ample testimony to the illegitimacy with which residents of Congo’s southeast regarded the government in Leopoldville, and its continued independence denied Congo’s government resources which would have enhanced its capacity to control all of its territory. The existence of this territorial contender was a substantial challenge to the Congo.

Congo’s woes worsened when Katanga’s persistence emboldened other opposition groups to emerge as territorial contenders. South Kasai seceded soon after Katanga, and Congo’s northwest region, dominated by the city of Stanleyville, assumed self-governance in resistance to Mobutu’s removal of Lumumba as prime minister (Stanleyville had been Lumumba’s base of support). In 1961 the Balubakat region of north Katanga seceded from the Katangan territorial contender, emerging as a fourth territorial contender on Congo’s territory. Even after Katanga was conquered and reintegrated, additional territorial contenders emerged (Kwilu in 1963, and a second Stanleyville-based territorial contender in 1964), and in the 1990s a second period of war, unrest, and territorial contender presence unraveled Zaire and its successor state, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Territorial contender challenges to the sovereign state are a dominant theme in any discussion of state making in Congo-Zaire-DRC (for more details about the 1st Congo Crisis see Young 1965, and Lemke 2011; for details about the 2nd Congo Crisis, or “Africa’s World War,” see Reyntjens 2009).

In contrast, Indonesia has confronted far fewer territorial contenders than has Congo. In April 1950 the South Molucca islands declared independence as the Republic of South Molucca, establishing a local government and constructing a territorial contender. Indonesia responded by deploying 20,000 troops which reconquered the islands and inflicted 5000 deaths (Sarkees and Wayman 2010:411). In 1958 discontent with Sukarno’s increasingly autocratic government caused military leaders in Sumatra and Sulawesi to declare independence after taking control of territory on those islands. Indonesia again responded with overwhelming military force, reconquering the territory within a year. After losing its territory the organization that had governed the Sumatran territorial contender became a guerrilla insurgency, which Indonesia pursued ruthlessly resulting in over 27,000 fatalities and the elimination of opposition by 1962 (Sarkees and Wayman 2010:413-414). Like Congo, Indonesia faced territorial contenders as challengers within their territory, questioning their legitimacy and depleting the resources helpful for maintaining government capacity, but unlike Congo, Indonesia rose to the challenge posed by its territorial contenders, convincingly crushed them, and thereby deterred other opposition forces from becoming territorial contenders.[[3]](#footnote-3) Krain (1997:fn 1) and Walter (2007: Chapter 6) express similar claims about Indonesia’s successful deterrence against additional domestic challengers.

As the examples above suggest, it is common for sovereign states to confront territorial contenders. In the Congolese example the territorial contenders largely overwhelmed the sovereign state, necessitating massive foreign intervention. Congo prevailed in the 1st Congo Crisis, but the seeds were sown for a second crisis thirty years later, one bringing an entirely new regime to power, featuring multiple territorial contenders, and involving intervention not only by the UN again, but also by a half dozen neighboring states, leaving Congo seemingly permanently atop lists of failed or failing states. Indonesia was far more successful in defeating territorial contenders when they emerged, and doing so quickly, such that there was little time for one territorial contender’s survival to empower other opposition groups to themselves seize control of territory. Indonesia’s relative lack of subsequent territorial contenders is all the more impressive when one considers how favorable its geography is for opposition groups to seize control of territory. With more than 6000 inhabited islands, many of them mountainous and jungle covered, Indonesia is ideal territory for territorial contenders to carve out areas to govern as independent enclaves. Deterrence seems to have worked in Indonesia, while failure to deter has had predictable consequences in the DRC.

Research Design:

The analyses reported here take advantage of a recently completed dataset about territorial contenders. It is described in detail in Lemke and Crabtree (forthcoming); a brief description follows.

The new dataset includes information about territorial contenders from the time each first gained control of territory until it no longer controls territory, or when it is recognized as a sovereign state. The territorial contenders dataset does not require political entities to have persisted for a specific length of time nor to have declared independence nor to be involved in conflict with a sovereign state. Rejecting such inclusion thresholds differentiates territorial contenders from specific subsets such as de facto states (Florea 2014) or rebels that govern territory (Arjona, Steward, Huang), but greatly expands the number of actors included in the dataset. As a result it complicates the data making process because it requires finding information about many more candidate entities. Due to these constraints the dataset reports territorial contenders within the territories of a random sample of 62 developing world sovereign states rather than for the entire international system. Coders were assigned sovereign states from the sample and instructed to read widely in that country’s history, looking for instances when part of the national territory was governed by something other than the sovereign state recognized as possessing the territory.

All told 187 territorial contenders were identified on the territories of the 62 developing world states included in the sample. This averages just over three territorial contenders per sovereign, with a range from zero territorial contenders (twenty sovereign states in the sample never had any territorial contenders on their territories) to twenty territorial contenders (in Burma). This detail about the overall number of territorial contenders plaguing each sovereign state is the most important element of this new dataset for this article. Such variation is not found among de facto states. Florea’s (2014) dataset has 34 de facto states in total and no more than 3 on the territory of any one sovereign state. A second important type of information in the new dataset is how long each territorial contender persisted and how each died (if it did, 27 of the 187 were still in existence in 2010 – the year coverage ends).[[4]](#footnote-4) This variable indicates whether the sovereign state was successful in responding to the threat posed by the territorial contender, which is central to our theoretical argument.

Our first hypothesis anticipates that largely static characteristics are the best predictors of which sovereign states confront territorial contenders. Our second hypothesis (in its general form) anticipates that how sovereign states react to existing territorial contenders is the best predictor of whether subsequent territorial contenders emerge. These hypotheses envision two separate but linked dependent variables both characterizing annual observations of sovereign states: the emergence of an initial territorial contender, and the emergence of subsequent territorial contenders.

Censored probit is the best estimator for dealing with data structured like our argument anticipates. In the analyses below we estimate a censored probit model in a dataset of sovereign state years. In the first stage, the dependent variable (“First TC Has Emerged”) takes on a value of one for all sovereign state years after a first territorial contender has emerged. Some sovereign states in our dataset (20 of 62 or 32%) never experience a territorial contender. However, the bulk of sovereign states in the dataset (42 of 62 or 68%) experience at least one territorial contender at some point in their history, and thus they are scored zero on this variable prior to the emergence of that first territorial contender, and one thereafter. In the second stage the dependent variable (“Subsequent TC Emerges”), which is recorded only for sovereign state years after an initial territorial contender has emerged, indicates whether any subsequent territorial contender emerges.

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Predictors in the first stage are composed of the same five variables discussed above with respect to the results presented in Table 1. In the second stage I include a series of variables representing how the sovereign state responded to previous territorial contenders on its territory. “Peace with TC” takes on a value of 1 if a territorial contender exists within the sovereign state’s territory during that year, but the sovereign state is not involved in conflict with it. Similarly, “Conflict with TC” takes on a value of 1 if the sovereign state is involved in military conflict with a territorial contender during that year. These two variables (and the other sovereign state response variables) come from the new territorial contenders dataset described above; these two are necessary in order to test **H2a** and **H2b**. Unlike the other response variables, these two indicate contemporaneous presence of a territorial contender (with or without armed conflict) on the sovereign state’s territory. The other response variables indicate the fate of territorial contenders within the last twenty years, generally due to interaction with the sovereign state.[[5]](#footnote-5)

“TC Forceful Reintegration (t-20 years)” takes on a value of 1 if a previous territorial contender within that sovereign state’s territory was forcefully reintegrated within the last two decades. This variable is necessary in order to test **H2c**. Finally I turn to the variables that send mixed signals and which are not expected to affect the probability of additional territorial contender emergence. “TC Peaceful Reintegration(t-20 years) takes on a value of 1 if a previous territorial contender was peacefully reintegrated within that sovereign state’s territory within the last twenty years. “TC Absorbed by other TC(t-20 years)” takes on a value of 1 if a previous territorial contender within that sovereign state’s territory was absorbed by a different territorial contender within the last twenty years. And “TC Promoted(t-20 years)” takes on a value of 1 if a previous territorial contender within that sovereign state’s territory was promoted to sovereign with the last twenty years. These three variables are necessary in order to test **H2d**.

One modeling challenge of censored probit analysis is the identification of instruments that plausibly explain the dependent variable in the first stage but are unrelated to the dependent variable in the second stage. I make clear in the results section below that my theoretical argument is not only supported by the results, but also has suggested a series of variables which coincidentally do a good job satisfying the identification criteria making a censored probit a good choice for generating valid estimates with which to test my hypotheses.

An alternate modeling strategy would be to structure the analysis using a repeat failure model (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2002 provide a discussion). Repeat failure models are far less common in IR research than are censored probit models, and this motivates my decision to use a censored probit. However, I modify the censored probit reported below in two ways to incorporate attractive features of duration models. First, to account for temporal non-independence in both stages I include cubic polynomials for sovereign state years in the first stage, and include cubic polynomials for years since the last territorial contender emerged in the second stage. In addition, in the second stage I include a variable (“Number of Past TC in Sovereign”) which simply counts the running tally of territorial contenders up to that point in each sovereign state’s history. This serves as a parameter indicating the number of past failures, and is a feature of repeat failure models. In the results table below I do not present coefficient estimates for the cubic polynomial terms since I have no hypotheses about them and because six of them would take up considerable space.

Another plausible estimator for my purposes might be a zero-inflated negative binomial model. Unfortunately, it imposes an assumption of two types of zeroes, or in my argument’s terms, that there are two kinds of sovereign states without territorial contender challengers: those not currently confronting a territorial contender and those that cannot confront a territorial contender. This assumption both contradicts my theoretical argument and is hard to substantiate based on consideration of real world cases. With the possible exception of microstates like Singapore, it is hard to imagine a sovereign state that could not confront a territorial contender at some point in its history.

Additionally, while a zero-inflated negative binomial is attractive because it, like censored probit, would allow me to test the general argument that structural characteristics of sovereign states are the best predictors of whether a first territorial contender emerges at all but sovereign state responses to initial territorial contenders are the best predictors of subsequent emergence, it would require me to alter the second dependent variable, “Subsequent TC Emerges.” Each sovereign state year is coded for whether a new territorial contender emerges. This takes on values of zero and one. There are only 15 observations in the dataset that have more than one new territorial contender emerge in a given year after the initial territorial contender emerges (thirteen cases = 2, two cases = 3). There is thus very little variation (beyond 0 and 1) in the number of new territorial contenders emerging in a given year, and thus very little additional information for a count model to leverage. Instead, in order to use a zero-inflated negative binomial I could re-specify the dependent variable as the number of territorial contenders in existence during any given year in a sovereign state’s existence. This has considerably more variation (it ranges from 0 to 11), but it gets at a different question: how many territorial contenders there are, rather than whether additional territorial contenders emerge.

Similarly, it might be thought that a hurdle model would be a good alternative to a censored probit, because it too has a selection stage (does the observation have zero or more than zero territorial contenders) separate from an outcome stage (how many additional territorial contenders are there). An attractive feature of hurdle models is that they do not impose an assumption of different types of zero-observations; that is, using a hurdle model does not require assuming there are sovereign states that could not experience territorial contender emergence. Unfortunately, the same limitations in variation on new territorial contender emergence would require me to use the number of existing territorial contenders in a given year as my dependent variable. Consequently I would not be testing **H2** in its specific or general forms, and thus I would not be testing my theory. The conclusion remains the same: the censored probit model is the best estimator for testing my hypotheses.

Empirical Analyses:

Table 2 reports the results of my censored probit analysis of **H1** and the specific variants of **H2**. It demonstrates considerable support for my theoretical argument.

If **H1** is correct, the five variables should be good predictors of “First TC Has Emerged.” Of the five all but one have the predicted sign (“Democracy” has a positive coefficient estimate, but is statistically insignificant), two are statistically significant at conventional levels, and two are close. The odds ratios indicate substantively large effects for “Development,” “Mountainous Terrain,” and “ELF.” These results are consistent with **H1**.

**H2a** anticipates that when a sovereign state has an existing territorial contender peacefully residing on some part of its territory, additional territorial contender emergence is more likely. **H2b** anticipates that this positive effect will be even larger when the sovereign state is engaged in conflict with the persisting territorial contender. The coefficients on “Peace with TC” and “Conflict with TC” are both positive, statistically significant at well beyond conventional levels, and have reasonably large substantive effects as indicated by the odds ratios: existing territorial contenders not involved in conflict with the sovereign state make subsequent emergence about 71 percent more likely, and conflict between the sovereign and an existing territorial contender increases that probability by 122 percent. A linear combination post-estimation calculation indicates the difference in effects of these two variables is statistically significant at p = 0.108. Thus, **H2a** and **H2b** are strongly supported.

**Table 1**: Censored Probit Results

Coefficient p-value † Odds Ratio

Y2: Subsequent TC Emerges

Peace w/TC 0.539 0.000 1.714

Conflict w/TC 0.798 0.000 2.221

TC Forceful Reintegration (t-20 years) -0.226 0.059 0.798

TC Peaceful Reintegration (t-20 years) 0.014 0.893 1.014

TC Absorbed by Other TC (t-20 years)  0.140 0.430 1.150

TC Promoted to Sovereign (t-20 years) -0.194 0.158 0.824

Number of Past TC in Sovereign 0.017 0.909 1.017

Outcome Intercept -1.963 0.000

Y1: First TC Has Emerged

Development -0.892 0.001 0.410

Democracy 0.007 0.763 1.007

Geographic Area 0.0004 0.013 1.000

Mountainous Terrain 0.165 0.142 1.179

ELF 0.896 0.197 2.450

Selection Intercept -2.177 0.001

Rho 0.355 0.039

Wald χ2 61.230 0.000

Observations 4270

Censored Obs 1824

Uncensored Obs 2446

† = p-value calculations reflect two-tailed tests based on robust standard errors clustered by sovereign state. Cubic polynomials omitted to conserve space.

**H2c** is also supported. The coefficient for “TC Forceful Reintegration(t-20 years)” is negative (as hypothesized), statistically significant, and substantively large. The odds ratio indicates forceful reintegration makes the odds of subsequent territorial contender emergence 20 percent less likely. Finally, **H2d** is also supported. The coefficient for “TC Peaceful Reintegration(t-20 years)” is positive, but fails to achieve statistical significance. The coefficient for “TC Absorbed by Other TC (t-20 years)” is positive but insignificant. And the coefficient for “TC Promoted to Sovereign(t-20 years)” is negative but insignificant. Admittedly, a null hypothesis is an easy test to pass, but that all three mixed-signal variables fail to achieve significance is a harder-to-achieve and thus more-meaningful result.

Table 2 also reports a coefficient for “Number of Past TC in Sovereign.” It is statistically insignificant. This result does not affect interpretations of my theory, because I have no hypothesis about it. Re-running the model reported in Table 2 without this variable produces no changes in the conclusions. Nevertheless, it is interesting that it is not a significant predictor of the emergence of new territorial contenders. I included this variable to serve as an indicator of the number of past-failures. I would have interpreted a positive and significant effect as evidence of contagiousness and a negative and significant effect as evidence of the bar rising higher and higher against each territorial contender’s emergence. An insignificant coefficient may mean that the information contained in this variable adds nothing above the information represented in the sovereign state response variables motivated by my theory.

In the research design section I foreshadowed that the variables included in the censored probit do a good job satisfying the identification criteria. The results in Table 1 provide preliminary evidence suggesting that the five covariates included in the selection stage of the model reported in Table 2 correlate with (a version of) “First TC Has Emerged” and do not correlate with (a version of ) “New TC Emerges.” Table 2 indicates that the five variables do a good job differentiating sovereign states that have at least one territorial contender on their territory from sovereign states that never experience territorial contender presence. In addition, if I iteratively include each of the five variables from the first stage as covariates in the second stage none of them changes any of the estimated coefficients for the second stage variables, and only “ELF” and “Geographic Area” are statistically significant predictors of “New TC Emerges.” This means that the five variables do a good job predicting the first dependent variable but have little or no impact on the second. Finally, the rho statistic reported in Table 2 is positive, and is statistically significant. A significant rho validates the choice to estimate a censored probit.

In addition to the analysis reported in Table 2, I have re-run the censored probit model in a number of alternate ways. An obvious sensitivity analysis is to change the duration over which sovereign state responses might have an effect on the subsequent emergence of territorial contenders. For example, I re-estimated the model in Table 2 with the four non-contemporaneous response variables equal to one only if that response had occurred within the previous ten years. Doing so produces very nearly identical results and the substantive conclusions are unchanged. All four hypotheses receive support. I also re-ran the model in Table 2 with the four non-contemporaneous response variables equal to one if that response had *ever* occurred within that sovereign state’s previous history. Once again the results are very similar. **H1**, **H2a**, **H2b,** and **H2c** are supported. The only change given this different way to measure the independent variables is that **H2d** is now not supported. This sensitivity analysis shows that when peaceful reintegration is measured as persisting for a longer time, it has a dampening effect on subsequent territorial contender emergence (coefficient = -0.309; p = 0.023, odds ratio = 0.734). Similarly, the coefficient for “TC Promoted to Sovereign(ever)” is also negative and significant (coefficient = -0.323, p = 0.023, odds ratio = 0.724). The coefficient for Absorption by another territorial contender remains insignificant.

Another sensitivity analysis is suggested by the extreme position Burma occupies in the distribution of territorial contenders. While the average sovereign state in my dataset has three territorial contenders active on its territory across time, Burma has 20. To investigate whether my results are sensitive to Burma’s many, many territorial contenders, I re-estimated the model in Table 2 including a variable coded one if that sovereign state annual observation were of Burma. Including this “Burma” dummy does not change the conclusions reached about any of the hypotheses. However, adding a control for “Burma” again produces a statistically significant coefficient for “TC Promoted to Sovereign(t-20 years)” (coefficient = -0.259, p = 0.021, odds ratio = 0.772). The coefficient for “Burma” itself is not significant. This seems odd given Burma’s many territorial contenders. But, the estimated coefficient is contingent on the other variables included in the second stage, and Burma also scores high on “Peace with TC” and “Conflict with TC.” This suggests that Burma has so many territorial contenders not because Burma itself is especially prone to territorial contender emergence, but rather because Burma has done such a poor job dealing with the territorial contenders that have emerged. Aside from this partial lack of support for **H2d**, this sensitivity analysis does not change the results.

One final bit of commentary about Burma, if I exclude the 63 annual observations of Burma from my dataset and re-estimate the censored probit model reported in Table 2, the fundamental story does not change. However, without Burmese cases in the analysis the coefficient for “TC Promoted to Sovereign(t-20 years)” is again significant and negative (coefficient = -0.309, p = 0.002, odds ratio = 0.734), suggesting again a condition under which the successful elevation of a territorial contender to sovereign state status has a dampening effect on subsequent territorial contender emergence. Interestingly, without the Burmese cases the coefficient for “Number of Past TC in Sovereign” is now positive and significant (coefficient = 0.046, p = 0.073, odds ratio = 1.047). This is a very small effect, but it suggests the possibility of contagiousness whereby past territorial contender emergence makes subsequent emergence more likely regardless of how the sovereign state responds, but only in a world without Burma.

In the research design section above I discussed why a censored probit model is preferred to other mixture models like zero-inflated negative binomial (ZiNB) regressions or hurdle models. There I indicated that a lack of variation would require me to re-specify the dependent variable as “Number of TC” currently in existence in each sovereign state each year. This is substantively different from “New TC Emerges,” but bears a passing similarity conceptually because worse conditions for sovereign states are present when higher values on either of these variables are observed. Reflecting on this, I have also estimated ZiNB and hurdle models with the alternate dependent variable. In a ZiNB or hurdle model estimated with this different dependent variable (results not show, but available in the online appendix), **H1** and **H2b** are supported but the other hypotheses do not fare as well. This is not terribly surprising, given a different dependent variable and different estimator. It is reassuring though that the general logic of the theoretical argument is supported: structural variables are good predictors of whether sovereign states have any territorial contender challengers while sovereign state response variables are good predictors of how many territorial contenders there are. In both ZiNB and hurdle models “TC Peaceful Reintegration (t-20 years)” has a positive and significant coefficient. For those preferring this modeling strategy, a conclusion is that making concessions to territorial contenders, even when those concessions end the territorial contender’s independence, is a bad idea as it is associated with a greater number of territorial contenders in the future.

The results in Table 2 offer strong support for my theoretical argument and are robust to a large number of reasonable changes to model specification. The censored probit model fits the argument and the data, and is the best choice for testing my theory. However, even if drastic alterations are made to the outcome variable and estimator, there is still support for some of the specific hypotheses, and there is confirmation of the general argument: constant or slowly-changing structural characteristics of sovereign states account for whether they face competition from territorial contenders, but how the sovereign states respond offers us the best opportunity to anticipate whether additional territorial contenders emerge.

Discussion:

The argument and findings above are directly relevant to state making research. State making researchers are interested in how states come to be, and how well they survive. Territorial contenders are state makers, and thus information about them is extremely valuable for complementing what we already know about sovereign states. As indicated above, almost all empirical research about state making, and particularly about Tilly’s (1990) bellicose theory, analyzes sovereign states. But Tilly’s argument is clearly about all state makers, and as indicated above one of the essential state making activities Tilly anticipates all successful state makers undertake is the elimination of internal competitors. Territorial contenders are the premier internal competitors to sovereign states. Thus, how well sovereign states perform in meeting the challenge posed by territorial contenders is central to anticipating how well built their states will be.

The theory anticipates that vanquishing territorial contenders sends positive signals about a sovereign state’s capacity and legitimacy, and makes subsequent territorial contender emergence less likely. A state making expectation based on my results is that deterring subsequent territorial contenders is associated with longer sovereign state survival and greater success in building a better state. A broader implication of my work is for state making researchers to pay more attention to the strategies state makers employ in confronting their challengers.

My results show that forcefully reintegrating the territory of territorial contenders within the area controlled by the sovereign state at least partially insulates successful sovereigns from subsequent challenges. This may seem very non-controversial, but my results also show no evidence that peacefully reintegrating territorial contenders insulates sovereigns from subsequent challenges: winning works, making accommodations does not improve conditions for sovereign state makers. Depicting successful military campaigns or peaceful negotiations as state making strategies is quite crude, and yet it is more sophisticated than existing research which leaves entirely unspecified how state makers respond to internal challengers.

One omission from my argument and analyses is consideration of strategies to deter initial territorial contenders from emerging. Surely leaders of sovereign states are savvy enough to offer concessions to or to administer preemptive attacks against contenders within their borders *before* they assert control over territory and become territorial contenders. The comparative politics literature on autocratic cooptation (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gerschewski 2013; Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014) suggests an additional direction research like mine could take. Specifically, we might expand my argument to generate hypotheses about such strategies for inclusion in the first stage of the censored probit. It may be that I find concessions never to improve conditions for sovereign states because by the time I consider concessions, that is, after the territorial contender has emerged, it is too late. Perhaps concessions given prior to territorial contender emergence prevent that first emergence.

My results offer interesting implications for civil war research as well. While the overlap between territorial contender and rebel group is far from perfect, there nevertheless are many territorial contenders engaged in civil wars and many civil wars that involve territorial contenders. Within civil war research there is a well-established finding linking decisive military victories with a lower probability of civil war recurrence (this extends back to Licklider 1995). More recently, Toft (2010) develops a logic justifying why rebel victory should be associated with a lower likelihood of civil war recurrence. Of particular interest to civil war researchers might be the finding here about forceful reintegration of territorial contenders. It persistently makes the emergence of additional territorial contenders less likely. These forceful reintegrations are a kind of government victory. If government victories against territorial contenders deter future opposition groups from themselves becoming territorial contenders, perhaps a similar deterrent logic explains why government victories in civil wars are better than negotiated settlements at reducing the risk of civil war recurrence. That is, when governments decisively win civil wars perhaps other opposition groups within the state are deterred from initiating civil wars against that government. Thus, civil war researchers might find the general deterrent argument developed here useful for their research on civil war onset and recurrence. Walter (2006) includes a deterrent logic in her theory about government decisions to initiate conflict against separatist groups. The argument and evidence marshaled here justifies more scholars following in her wake.

State failure researchers should care about these findings too. An obvious question asks whether sovereign states are more likely to fail given competitive pressures of territorial contenders on their territory, or whether the causal arrow might run in the other direction, that sovereign state failure makes territorial contender emergence easier and thus more likely. That question is clearly of interest for state failure researchers, and I leave definitive resolution of it to future work. Here, though, I can document effects running from territorial contenders to state failure and from state failure to territorial contenders. In the same sovereign state years dataset used above, I have included a variable indicating the first year of a state failure episode, with those episodes defined by a -77 “interregnum” coding from the Polity project (Iqbal and Starr [2016] advocate this operational definition of state failure). As an independent variable I employ an indicator of the number of territorial contenders currently existing in each sovereign state annual observation. In a Cox model the hazard ratio for this variable’s effect on state failure onset is 1.21, it is statistically significant at p = 0.04, and there appears to be no violation of the proportional hazards assumption. This suggests that each additional territorial contender plaguing a sovereign state increases the hazard of a state failure onset by 21 percent. This is a large substantive effect. Further, when I re-specify the censored probit reported above with an indicator of whether the sovereign state is in a state failure episode (again, using the -77 “interregnum” coding, but not restricted to only the first year of each state failure episode), it generates a positive coefficient in either (or both) stages of the censored probit without affecting my conclusions about the hypotheses. Clearly there is a detailed story to be investigated about how territorial contenders and state failure inter-connect. My intuition is that weak states promote the emergence of territorial contenders, the sovereign’s failure to reintegrate them quickly encourages other opposition groups to become territorial contenders, and the sovereign spirals into failure.

Conclusions:

In the pages above I have presented an argument about capacity, legitimacy, and territorial contender emergence. My theory anticipates that fundamental characteristics of sovereign states related to their capacity and legitimacy (such as their level of development, regime type, terrain, area, and ethnic heterogeneity) help us anticipate which sovereign states are threatened by the emergence of territorial contenders. However, those fundamental characteristics of sovereign states are reasonably static (or are entirely inert), and thus cannot help us anticipate how many additional territorial contenders will emerge. Rather, sovereign states reveal additional information about their capacity and legitimacy by how they respond to territorial contenders that do emerge. If they fail rapidly to reintegrate territorial contenders’ territories, they signal weakness and encourage more territorial contenders to emerge. If, instead, they are able forcefully to reintegrate territorial contenders, they signal strength and deter subsequent territorial contender emergence. Using data recently made available by a new data collection, I tested hypotheses motivated by this argument across a random sample of 62 developing world states plagued by the emergence of 187 territorial contenders. The results of those analyses are robustly consistent and supportive of all of my hypotheses.

The implications of my analysis seem quite clear: the accommodations accompanying peaceful reintegration of past territorial contenders, at best, do not make subsequent territorial contender emergence less likely. Similarly, leaving existing territorial contenders at peace and learning to “live and let live” also does not diminish the likelihood of subsequent territorial contender emergence. The only persistent dampening effect on the likelihood of additional territorial contender emergence is the forceful reintegration of an existing territorial contender’s territory. And that reintegration has to occur: my results suggest that merely fighting an existing territorial contender (without defeating it) encourages more territorial contenders to emerge.

These implications appear grim for incapable sovereign states like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burma. It may be that in larger sovereign states it is possible for the government to persist for long periods of time in the capital city because the territorial contenders occupy remote territory. Burma fits this pattern, where the government has never lost control of the capital city, and for most of Burmese history has controlled the areas adjacent to the capital as well. The many territorial contenders plaguing Burma are found along the country’s mountainous and forested borderlands. Their persistence has not prevented the sovereign state of Burma from persisting, but they clearly have prevented Burma from thriving. My research uncovers no additional strategy for sovereign states like Burma to pursue. Perhaps leaders of incapable sovereign states understand this, and, as hinted above, the absence of viable alternatives leads them to coopt regional powerbrokers within their states in an effort to deter them from setting up rival governments (for example, Englebert [2009] offers this explanation for the relative dearth of secessionism in Africa). Mobutu followed such a strategy, even employing a former territorial contender leader, Moises Tshombe of Katanga, as prime minister in his national government. If such behavior is common, then future research on the emergence of territorial contenders should broaden the analysis of state making strategies to include domestic power sharing arrangements and other tactics for coopting potential rival leaders in order to deter territorial contenders.

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1. We recognize that in some instances territorial contenders are preferable to the sovereign states they confront. Somaliland, for example, is more stable, prosperous, and democratic than the Republic of Somalia is or, arguably, has been since the late 1960s. In general, peace, stability, and prosperity are likely most often advanced by the sovereign state’s success rather than by the persistence of territorial contenders. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alternatively, we might conceive of the source of bargaining failure as indivisibility, specifically that the sovereign state’s reputation as a capable and legitimate opponent is at stake. Selecting forceful integration as the state making strategy the sovereign will follow is surely costly (perhaps terribly so if the sovereign does not emerge victorious), but if successful it sends a clear signal to subsequent challengers and preserves the sovereign state’s reputation as an imposing foe. Issue indivisibility is often dismissed by bargaining theorists, though Hensel and Mitchell (2005), Goddard (2006), and Toft (2006) argue persuasively that it should receive more attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lest readers think African states fail to meet the challenge of territorial contenders while Asian states overcome it, Burma is a prime example of an Asian sovereign state beset by persistent territorial contenders, while Nigeria’s destruction of Biafra in the late 1960s is an example of an African sovereign state destroying its territorial contender challenger. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Coverage begins with independence. Latin American sovereign states included in the dataset are thus present from the early 1800s on, Middle Eastern sovereign states generally begin their inclusion in the inter-war years, and most African and Asian sovereigns enter the dataset after World War II. Full details are in Lemke & Crabtree (n.d.). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The “response variables” representing how the sovereign state has dealt with past territorial contenders have no obvious timeframe against which to test expectations about them. I use a 20 year interval because it seems plausible to me that “lessons learned” by opposition groups will be roughly generational, and twenty years is the standard representation of generations in social science research. In the Results section I discuss how insensitive my results are to the time frame used. For other recent conflict research that sees conflict lessons persisting across twenty year generations, see White (2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)