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Unilateral secession, international recognition, and great power contestation

Peace Research

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Abstract

Recognition of aspiring states from established states is central to becoming a member state of the international system. Previous research suggests that great power recognition decisions regarding aspiring states rapidly converge toward either recognition or non-recognition, yet great power convergence has still not occurred in the case of Kosovo after more than ten years. Unilateral secessions typically remain wholly unrecognized, since they violate the norm of home state consent, yet Kosovo has now been recognized by more than 100 countries. Why do some countries extend recognition to unilateral secessions, and do so early, whereas others delay recognition or withhold it altogether? In the case of Kosovo, great power influence and contestation, rather than convergence, have played a key role in shaping recognition decisions. We argue that countries in the US sphere of influence, with strong economic and military ties, are more likely to recognize Kosovo and to do so relatively fast, whereas countries influenced by Russia are less likely to recognize Kosovo at all, or to do so only after an extended delay. However, great powers are not equal in influencing other states to adopt their preferred position, since the USA is more powerful than Russia and can benefit from working alongside allies within the Western-oriented world order. We estimate a non-proportional Cox model with new time-varying data on Kosovo recognition and provide evidence that US military ties influenced other countries in extending recognition to unilateral secession.

Keywords

international recognition dynamics, major powers, secession, sovereignty, survival modeling

Why do some countries recognize unilateral secessions and do so swiftly, while other countries delay or withhold recognition? Whereas secessions with home state consent (e.g. South Sudan from Sudan) are often universally recognized,[1] secessions without home state consent (e.g. Somaliland from Somalia) ordinarily attract few if any recognitions.[2] The case of Kosovo is puzzling, for it is a case of unilateral secession (lacking home state

consent from Serbia) that is nonetheless recognized by many countries. Why is Kosovo different? Why did so many countries recognize it, while many others did not or did so only after a significant delay?

Recognition is an essential component of statehood (Coggins, 2014; Krasner, 1999; Sterio, 2012),[3] and has been shown to profoundly influence public opinion

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[1] We are grateful to Reviewer 1 for this point.
[2] According to Coggins's data, 168 out of 258 (65%) secessionist movements that received no recognition from any great power also failed to become full members of the UN. Among 73 secessionist movements that secured recognition from at least one great power, 28 became UN members and 45 did not.

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[3] For example, Krasner (1999: 7) argues that external recognition, inter alia, 'facilitates treaty making, establishes diplomatic immunity, and offers a shield against legal actions taken in other states'.

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about partition in conflicts over contested sovereignty (Shelef & Zaira, 2017). Grant (1999: xx) addresses key debates over how to understand recognition and notes that '[t]he most telling episodes of recognition in recent years have surrounded the breakup of Yugoslavia'. Yet the literature provides few explicit predictions about the occurrence or timing of recognition.

South Ossetia and Abkhazia, also unilateral secessions over which great powers are split about recognition, have been recognized by Russia, but not the USA or other great powers. Unlike Kosovo, both are only recognized by a handful of countries. This comparison demonstrates the importance of power differences between great powers, and suggests that the USA has been more successful than Russia in promoting the international recognition of unilateral secessions.[4] Pavkovic (2020: 171) claims that unilateral secessions are unlikely to attain broad international recognition unless 'sponsored by a major power (such as India or the US) which is capable of lobbying other states to secure its recognition'. The recognition of Bangladesh's unilateral secession (1971) also generated great power contestation. India, which intervened against Pakistan, recognized Bangladesh on 6 December 1971. The USSR (January), UK (February)[5] and USA (April, 1972) followed (Library of Congress, 1989; US Congress, 1972). However, Pakistan's close ally, China, actively opposed recognition and vetoed Bangladesh's admission to the United Nations in 1972 (Datta, 2008: 757). Two years later, after Pakistan extended recognition, China followed suit. The contested recognition of Bangladesh (between 1971 and 1974) illustrates the significance of home state consent and great power contestation in shaping the recognition of unilateral secessions.

Because internal wars have become a dominant form of conflict in the post-Cold War period (Wimmer & Min, 2009: 2), especially conflicts between states and secessionists (Fazal & Griffiths, 2014; Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014; Walter, 2006), the dilemma of recognizing unilateral secessions has gained even more urgency. Contested sovereignty disputes can be protracted, and what matters is not only the ultimate outcome (i.e. did

secession succeed or not?), but also the period of contestation and instability (e.g. how long did it take for certain actors to extend recognition?). Timing is crucial because the pursuit of international recognition *during* civil wars shapes the conduct of the civil war itself by further incentivizing the warring parties to hold the national capital to create 'facts on the ground' (Landau Wells, 2018).[6] Analyzing the timing of recognition also enables us to capture how military and economic ties with great powers can translate into foreign policy convergence over time. This approach can thus distinguish between those countries that recognized Kosovo months after its declaration of independence and those that did so later, along with those that have continued to withhold recognition. The study of international recognition, we submit, is enriched by focusing both on final outcomes and temporal dynamics that generated those outcomes.

We investigate these dynamics in the case of Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia 12 years ago, but remains contested with three of five permanent UNSC members recognizing it. Just about the same 3:2 ratio (recognizing to non-recognizing states) exists in the world at large: slightly over 100 out of 193 currently recognize Kosovo. Since the USA has been the strongest proponent of Kosovo's independence, whereas Russia has been the key opponent, US allies have been more likely to recognize Kosovo and to do so swiftly, whereas countries closer to Russia have been less likely to recognize Kosovo or to do so with a delay. Great power contestation matters in the context of contested sovereignty, especially when it takes the form of promoting and preventing recognitions. Ker-Lindsay (2012: 114) focuses on the foreign policy of counter-secession, including the role of great powers, and notes the Russia has 'played an active role in attempting to prevent countries from recognizing Kosovo'. Sterio (2020: 109) also points out that Russia has 'actively lobbied other states to deny recognition to Kosovo'. We focus on two proxies for great power influence and ties. First, we assess the potential impact of *economic* ties through the use of Russian and US foreign direct investment (FDI); and second, *military* ties through Russian and US arms sales to third countries.

Great power influence is asymmetrical, however, since the USA is more powerful than Russia and can invest

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[4] Cases of unilateral secession where great powers have converged (on non-recognition) also exist (e.g. the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is only recognized by Turkey).

[5] Musson argues that the timing of British recognition was influenced by business interest in East Pakistan and geopolitical interest in limiting communist influence in South Asia. Many Commonwealth members were reluctant to recognize Bangladesh 'even with the example of the major players before them' (2008: 136).

[6] Landau Wells (2018) focuses on civil wars over control of the government rather than secessionist claims to statehood, and on which claims to central authority international actors recognize. Actors therefore act strategically to expedite the timing of international recognition.

greater resources into building its influence abroad. Moreover, the United States benefits from what Ikenberry (2008, 2011) calls the 'Western-oriented world order' or the 'liberal hegemonic order', and from hierarchical international relations structures around Washington (Lake, 2009). We can observe this in evidence regarding Kosovo. The USA has worked closely alongside its allies such as the UK and Germany to multiply its influence abroad; an opportunity that Russia lacks. Although the USA is more powerful than Russia, the ability of Washington to push for recognition is constrained by a widely accepted norm against unilateral secession. While the international system is characterized by contradictory norms regarding secession (e.g. territorial sovereignty vs. rights of nations to self-determination), the norm of home country consent is still strong, for inter alia it protects countries vulnerable to their own secessionist challenges.

A theory of influence

Coggins (2014) shows that great powers influence the recognition decisions of other great powers – their decisions often converge quickly and shape outcomes. While our argument builds on Coggins (2014), it also generates new insights. First, Coggins (2014) claims that great powers converge and coordinate their recognition decisions because of their shared interest in the stability of the international system. However, as Coggins also observes (2014: 10), the case of Kosovo does not seem to follow this pattern. Great powers have still not converged, more than a decade after Kosovo's declaration of independence. Among the UNSC permanent members, the USA, France, and the UK quickly recognized Kosovo, but China and Russia have not. While great powers do have common interests in international stability, their interests diverge in other areas (e.g. spheres of influence, who writes international rules, etc.).

When great powers take opposite sides in a recognition dispute, they may compete and spend formidable resources in their attempts to influence other countries. Ker-Lindsay (2017: 7) argues that, regarding Kosovo specifically, 'Washington and Moscow have lobbied hard for and against recognition, respectively'. The reason is that the decisions of small countries matter more in cases of contested recognition than in many other matters, for UN membership requires two-thirds support in the General Assembly (XIV Rule 136). While the most powerful states continue to play a key role, an aspiring state 'must secure the recognition of an overwhelming majority of its peers' to obtain membership in the international community (Coggins, 2018: 28). Since many countries may not have strong interests in particular recognition disputes, they may be willing to adopt the position of their more influential partners, if their incentives align. Great powers can thus influence these recognition decisions (Sterio, 2020).

Second, Coggins (2014) treats great powers as equals, except when this assumption is relaxed to distinguish between more (i.e. USA, UK, and USSR/Russia) and less (i.e. France and China) powerful actors. The latter are more driven by domestic constraints, she argues, and more influenced by stronger great powers (Coggins, 2014: 58, 76). However, regarding Kosovo, Russia is not following the United States; in fact, Moscow is explicitly opposing Washington. China did the same when it opposed the other four UNSC members over Bangladesh. Both cases show that great power convergence in unilateral secession is not a given, and that weaker great powers do not always follow stronger ones.

Ikenberry's (2008, 2011) arguments about the Western-oriented world order also help explain why the USA has been more influential than Russia and why some great powers have acted together (USA and UK) and some have not (USA and Russia). Ker-Lindsay (2019: 47) argues that the UK has been the most important European supporter of Kosovo's independence, playing a leading role with the United States. '[I]n the years following the declaration of independence, it appears barely a meeting would take place between senior officials from the UK and non-recognizing countries without the subject of recognition being raised'. Germany has also supported Kosovo's independence and 'continues to raise potential recognition with non-recognizing states in bilateral meetings' (Himmrich, 2020: 77). According to Ker-Lindsay (2012: 118), one reason the UK, Germany, and France have pushed so hard for Kosovo's independence 'was precisely because the United States had thrown its weight behind the idea'.

Third, although Coggins considers negotiated consent important, her analysis emphasizes different dynamics (2014: 54–55). By contrast, we claim that this norm serves as a crucial constraint on great power influence in recognition disputes. Many countries have stated that they did not recognize Kosovo because of it, and others have alluded to concerns about secession domestically. By contrast, we show that other international norms, such as the ability of international institutions (e.g. the ICJ) to compel or influence the behavior of their members, is limited compared to the home state consent norm, which serves the interest of powerful and established actors. For states that face secessions of their own

or fear one in the future, this norm is understandably useful. Finally, we seek to build on Coggins's (2014) empirical contributions. Her dataset ends in 2000, includes only great power recognition decisions, and covers more decolonialization than secession. This study focuses on unilateral secession, the recognition decisions of all countries, not just the great powers, and on how great powers influence other counties' recognition decisions.

Ikenberry (2011: 26) argues that liberal hegemony is a hierarchical order, and that the hegemon exercises control over subordinate states primarily concerning their external policies. Alliances constitute a key element of this order, and NATO was in part 'a device to lock in political and economic relations within the Atlantic area' (Ikenberry, 2011: 207). According to Lake (2009: 53) '[t]he price of extending the American defense umbrella over its former enemy was a radical limit on the independence of Japan's foreign policy. West Germany was similarly constrained.' Lake (2009: 2) understands international relations in terms of pervasive hierarchical relationships whereby dominant states exercise authority over other states, and that some of 'the cost of foreign and military aid to subordinates' should be considered among 'the costs of hierarchy' (2009: 103).

The UNSC permanent members controlled nearly 90% of the arms market in 200–16, and the USA alone accounted for more than 40% of all arms sales globally (Grimmett, 2016: 21). Superpowers sometimes exploit their dominant status in the global arms market to influence importers' policies (Quandt, 1978: 121–122; Menon, 1986: 214), balance against their rival's influence (Krause, 1991: 321–325) or impose hegemony (Harkavy, 1980: 198). We expect countries with security and economic ties to the USA or Russia to align their recognition decisions with the USA or Russia. The extent that the USA or Russia transfers arms to that country and makes foreign direct investments into it is a proxy for potential influence over foreign policy (Pierre, 1981: 3, 48).

The USA was particularly successful at influencing importers' foreign policy through arms transfers during the Cold War (Sislin, 1994: 681). The Soviet Union also made arms importers align with Soviet objectives in the Middle East and Africa (Krause, 1991). Russia has used close military ties with Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela to secure their recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while nearly all NATO members, the Gulf States, Turkey, and Colombia have recognized Kosovo. Arms sales denote a close security relationship in which the recipient ultimately purchases security at the expense of its autonomy (Kinsella, 1998: 9). While Kosovo is not the prime foreign policy objective of the USA or Russia, arms transfers might nonetheless influence the importer's recognition of Kosovo – the more arms a country receives from the United States, the higher the probability of recognizing Kosovo and doing so early; the obverse for recipients of Russian arms.

Beyond military levers, great powers use economic ties to influence countries. Strong interdependence among countries might lead to their alignment on a range of international policy issues by creating similar preferences (e.g. Keohane & Nye, 1977; Holsti, 1982). Simultaneously, interdependence can generate concerns about losing access to markets, and dependence on aid, investment or trade renders weaker partners more vulnerable to donor pressure (Keohane, 1967). Biglaiser & Lektzian (2011) find that that, prior to imposing sanctions, the USA decreased its FDI to that country. Major powers, notably the USA, have used international economic mechanisms to influence voting in international organizations (Wang, 1999; Dreher, Nunnenkamp & Thiele, 2008; Dreher & Sturm, 2012; Eldar, 2008). Dreher & Sturm (2012: 370) consider FDI a 'measure of foreign influence'.[7]

Local economies reliant on US or Russian foreign direct investment may be particularly vulnerable to these instruments and cast their lot with the USA or Russia by extending or withholding recognition to Kosovo. Given its stronger economy and preponderant status in the IMF and World Bank, the United Sates has significant financial resources to sway countries. Although Russian economic prowess is more limited, Moscow has offered lucrative arrangements to developing countries in exchange for the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[8] Arms transfers and economic ties are thus proxies in this analysis for great powers interest and influence.[9]

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[7] Dreher & Sturm (2012: 370) also consider the possibility that 'strong economic ties with developed countries might as well create feelings of exploitation'.

[8] According to Ó Beacháin, Comai & Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili (2016: 445), Russia's 'checkbook diplomacy' accounts for Nauru, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, while '[a]s part of the same meeting in Moscow at which Chavez agreed that Venezuela would recognize the two de facto states he also received a $2 billion loan'.

[9] Security and economic ties may reflect pre-existing relationships between great powers and countries in their zone of influence as much they indicate the formal exercise of that influence. While exploring this distinction is beyond the scope of this article, the implications for increasing or lowering the likelihood of recognition are similar.

Other explanations

Facts on the ground

'Facts on the ground' arguments predict that recognitions rapidly converge – if secessionists defeat the government, and establish territorial control, the group's claim is swiftly recognized; if secessionists are defeated or fail to gain territorial control, they remain unrecognized. The case of Kosovo is problematic for this argument. Serbia has not controlled the situation on the ground in Kosovo since 1999, yet close to half of the world's countries have *not* recognized Kosovo as an independent state, more than a decade after its unilateral secession.

Secession

The recognition of secessionist claims may set precedents that embolden other secessionists (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Herbst, 1989; Vrbetic, 2013; Walter, 2006), potentially opening Pandora's box. States facing separatists will therefore prefer to deny or delay recognition elsewhere (Mylonas, 2013). Coggins (2014) argues that vulnerability to such domestic threats reduces the likelihood that a great power will recognize a secession. This logic should also apply to small states facing secession, since they are generally less well equipped to contain such threats and should be systematically more likely to back the status quo by withholding or delaying recognition to aspiring states.

Democracy

Regime type potentially shapes recognition decisions, with democracies mostly aligning with the US position and against the Russian position. Bélanger, Duchesne & Paquin (2005) show that rebels within democracies are less likely to benefit from external intervention by other democracies, for democracies are viewed as more sensitive to human rights than authoritarian states (Davenport, 1999; Salehyan, Siroky & Wood, 2014). If true, then democracies should be less likely to support aspiring states that seek to secede from other democracies, but more likely to support states that seek to secede from non-democracies. Kosovo initially broke from Serbia when the latter was non-democratic. This implies that democracies should be more likely to recognize Kosovo, and to do so early, since Kosovo Albanians pushed for independence from Milosevic's authoritarian regime. However, Kosovo's declaration of independence occurred *after* Milosevic was overthrown and Serbia democratized, so the expected effect is equivocal.[10]

Religion

Studies show that countries are more likely to intervene in civil wars on behalf of co-religionists fighting a group/state of a different religion (Carment, James & Taydas, 2009; Fox, James & Li, 2009). Fox & Sandler (2004: 71) point out that ethnic Albanians in Kosovo received significant support from Islamic organizations and majority-Muslim states. According to Newman & Visoka (2018: 380), 'Kosovo has worked closely with the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to influence its members to recognize Kosovo'. Majority Muslim states may be more likely to recognize Kosovo early.[11]

Like secession, numerous states feel threatened by non-core religious groups, especially those that proselytize (Grim & Finke, 2006). In response, states may not only adopt religious regulation policies that discriminate against minority religions, but also be more reluctant to recognize secessionist states for fear of setting a precedent that could encourage claims from non-core religious groups domestically (Mirilovic & Siroky, 2015, 2017, 2020).

Critical events

Two critical events and institutional endorsements that relate to this dispute potentially influenced recognition. The International Court of Justice's (ICJ) Advisory ruled in 2010 that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law, arguably granting it additional legitimacy and encouraging states to recognize it. Addressing this event also sheds light on how international institutions may influence recognition. According to Ker-Lindsay (2012: 158), '[p]erhaps the most significant example of the attempt to use international law to contest an act of secession and prevent states from recognizing a breakaway territory was Serbia's effort to bring the question of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence before the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'.[12] Caplan (2005) argues that international law also played an important role in shaping the European Community's recognition decisions during the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Second, in 2013, officials from Belgrade and Pristina reached the Brussels Agreement on normalization of relations, which officials from Kosovo claimed 'in a way' constituted Serbia's recognition of Kosovo's

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[10] A third possibility is that democracies evaluate whether the parent state (Serbia) or the aspiring state (Kosovo) is more democratic and decide on recognition accordingly.

[11] For a broader discussion of the role of religion in Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, see Mirilovic (2019).

[12] Ker-Lindsay (2012: 162) observes that, following the ICJ decision, 'the wave of recognitions expected by Pristina and its allies never materialized'.

Table I. Summary of main explanations

ARGUMENT	EXPECTATION
MILITARY AND ECONOMIC LEVERAGE	• US arms transfers are likely to have a positive impact on recognition; Russian arms transfers are likely to have a negative effect on recognition. • US FDI is likely to have a positive impact on recognition; Russian FDI is likely to have a negative effect on recognition.
ALTERNATIVES	*Expectations*
SECESSION	• Countries that faced secessionist movements in the past are less likely to recognize
DEMOCRACY	• Democracies are more likely to recognize
RELIGIOUS AFFINITY	• Countries with larger Muslim population are more likely to recognize
REGULATION OF RELIGION	• Countries with stricter regulation of religion are less likely to recognize
CRITICAL EVENTS	• The 2010 ICJ opinion and the 2013 Brussels agreement are likely to encourage recognitions

independence. Serbian officials emphasized that the Brussels Agreement facilitates 'Serbia's way toward Europe'.[13] We therefore investigate empirically how the Brussels Agreement (and the ICJ ruling) may have influenced the remaining non-recognizing countries. Table I summarizes the expectations of our theory and other explanations.

The Kosovo conflict

The collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) has attracted considerable scholarly attention (e.g. Gagnon, 2004; Posen, 1993; Snyder & Ballentine, 1996; Woodward, 1995). SFRJ was a federal state with six republics, which are now all independent states. One republic, Serbia, included two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina. The population of Kosovo is majority Albanian and predominantly Muslim, with a mostly Orthodox Christian Serb minority. SFRJ's 1974 constitution significantly increased Kosovo's and Vojvodina's autonomy. Yet it did not confer republic status, for which many Albanians in Kosovo continued to push, culminating with mass anti-government demonstrations in 1981. Slobodan Milosevic came to power in 1987, reduced autonomy, and imposed repressive policies in Kosovo (Siroky & Cuffe, 2015: 9–10). The leadership of Kosovo's Albanians, Ibrahim Rugova, formed parallel institutions in the province, but Western support amid the wars in Croatia and Bosnia was lacking.

Following the 1996 Dayton peace conference, Rugova's nonviolent path to independence was at odds with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which used violence to oppose the Milosevic regime and push for independence. Initially, the USA and its Western allies tacitly supported the Yugoslav counterinsurgency against the KLA (Woodward, 2007: 7). As violence escalated, however, and the USA, UK, and France failed to coerce Belgrade into accepting the stationing of NATO troops in the province with a referendum in three years at the Rambouillet conference, NATO launched an aerial assault. Milosevic's regime escalated an ethnic cleansing campaign that forced many Albanians to flee Kosovo. The conflict ended with the adoption of UN Resolution 1244, which confirmed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity,[14] while also referring to 'a political process designed to determine Kosovo's future status, taking into account the Rambouillet accords' and providing for an international security presence in Kosovo.

Following the withdrawal of Serbian forces, many ethnic Serbs fled Kosovo to escape a campaign of violence and intimidation by Albanian forces. Serbs were again targeted in 2004 riots when their homes and Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo were destroyed or damaged. As a response, the USA and its Western allies pushed for talks on the final status of Kosovo. In 2005, UN Secretary General Marti Ahtisaari organized talks between Belgrade and Pristina. Belgrade's position was that Kosovo is an inseparable part of Serbia, according to UN Resolution 1244, but could have political autonomy. Provisional authorities in Pristina would accept only independence. Ahtisaari's plan advised independence, protection of Serb interests through mandatory

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[13] Under the agreement, Serbia did not recognize Kosovo's independence. See: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34059497.

[14] The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro became independent in 2006.

seats in the Parliament, local autonomy, and protection of Serb religious sites and cultural monuments in Kosovo (UN, 2005). Russia opposed the proposal's recommendations, while the USA and its allies favored it and supported Kosovo's independence. The UNSC failed to reach an agreement, however, leaving it to the individual states to make recognition decisions.

In 2008, the Pristina authorities declared independence, which Serbia has refused to recognize. Since then, both sides have sought to encourage or discourage other countries to extend or withhold recognition. The United States and many other Western countries have recognized Kosovo, arguing that human rights violations inflicted by the Milosevic regime on Kosovo's Albanians rendered it impossible for Kosovo to remain within Serbia. Proponents of Kosovo's independence also claim that Kosovo is a unique case that does not set an international precedent. However, Russia, China, India, Brazil, and others, including some EU and NATO members, have not recognized Kosovo. These countries tend to emphasize international norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and home-state consent. They doubt that Kosovo is unique, and raise concerns about its implications for other secessions.

Data and methods

The unit of analysis is the country-month recognition decision.[15] The criterion for case inclusion is UN membership. This yields 193 countries for 120 months; that is, 12,889 observations covering all countries in the UN from 2008 to 2018. We measure the timing of recognition using the exact date of recognition, and then aggregate to the month for analysis. The month is listed as 0 up to the month of recognition, 1 in the month recognition happens, and then dropped. It is marked as 'censored' if recognition has still not been extended ten years later (February 2018).

To capture the first sources of influence implied in our theory, we examine the amount of US and Russian FDI into other countries (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2019; Central Bank of the Russian Federation, 2019).[16] Figure 1a shows the main recipients of Russian and US FDI – measured as the total amount for 2007–17 in millions of USD. Over the last decade, Russia has

invested into 91 countries, and the USA has invested into 121, indicating that both countries have economic levers across the globe.[17] Second, for military leverage, we focus on US (Russian) arms transfers to each country using data from SIPRI's Arms Transfers Database (Fleurant et al., 2016). This provides 'trend-indicator values' (TIV) from either the USA or Russia to a given country. TIV denotes the number of items in a transfer multiplied by the known production cost of a similar item in a corresponding class of weapons. After dividing the indicator by 100, we then lag the score by one year to account for possible endogeneity. Figure 1b shows the main importers of US and Russian arms.

Control variables

To investigate domestic vulnerability to separatism, we used data from the Griffiths database on secessionist movements (Griffiths, 2016). We coded countries as 'vulnerable' if they had an active secessionist movement ten years prior to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence.[18] To assess regime type, we included an indicator of democracy for the year prior to the declaration of independence (Cheibub, Gandhi & Vreeland, 2010).[19]

To measure transnational religious affinity with the aspiring state, we included the percentage of a country's population that is Muslim.[20] To capture religious regulation, we used data from the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA).[21] We also evaluate the impact of two critical events: first, the 2010 ICJ Advisory opinion that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law (which potentially influenced 125 countries); and second, the 2013 Brussels Agreement (which potentially influenced 95). Finally, we included each county's ethnic fractionalization index (Alesina

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[15] Source: http://www.kosovothanksyou.com/.

[16] Russian FDI is measured at the most granular level available, which is quarterly net inflows/outflows from Russia to a given country in millions of USD. US FDI is measured in the same way, but on an annual basis, since quarterly data are not publicly available.

[17] The standard in reporting FDI in economic reviews is that a *negative* FDI indicates where outflows of investment exceed inflows. This may indicate, for example, disinvestment, or reinvestment outside the country, discharges of liabilities, advance and redemption of intercompany loans, short-term credit movements, company dividends exceeding recorded income over a given period or company operations being at a loss.

[18] Online appendix Figures A4 and A5 examine five and 20 years prior to independence.

[19] Online appendix Figure A8 examines two additional measures of democracy from V-Dem.

[20] Source: www.thearda.com. Results do not change using an alternative indicator for Islam as the official state religion.

[21] Grim & Finke (2006) developed these indicators.

Russian FDI

US FDI

Net FDI (USD, millions)

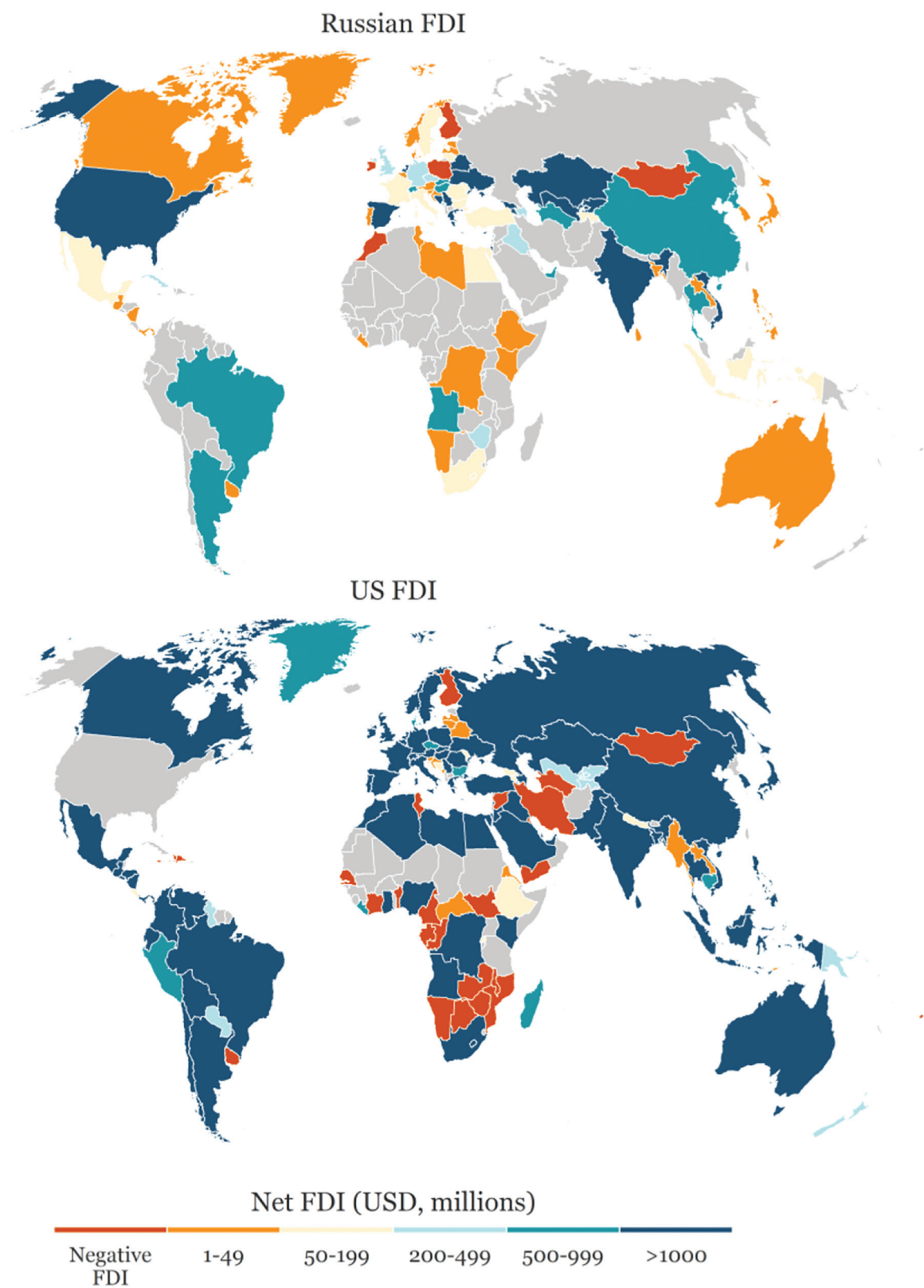| Negative FDI | 1-49 | 50-199 | 200-499 | 500-999 | >1000 |

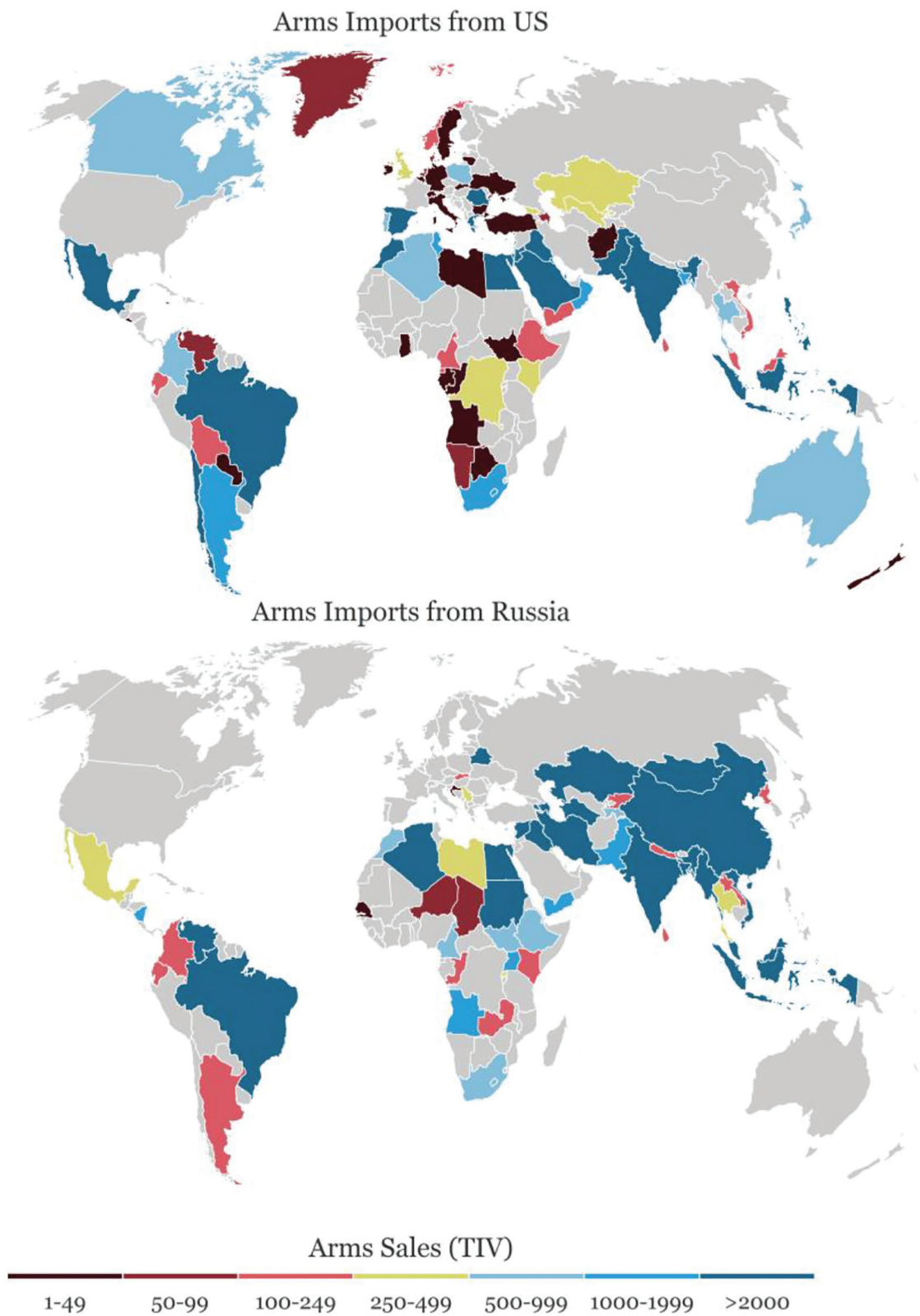Figure 1a. Russian and US Net FDI (2007–17)

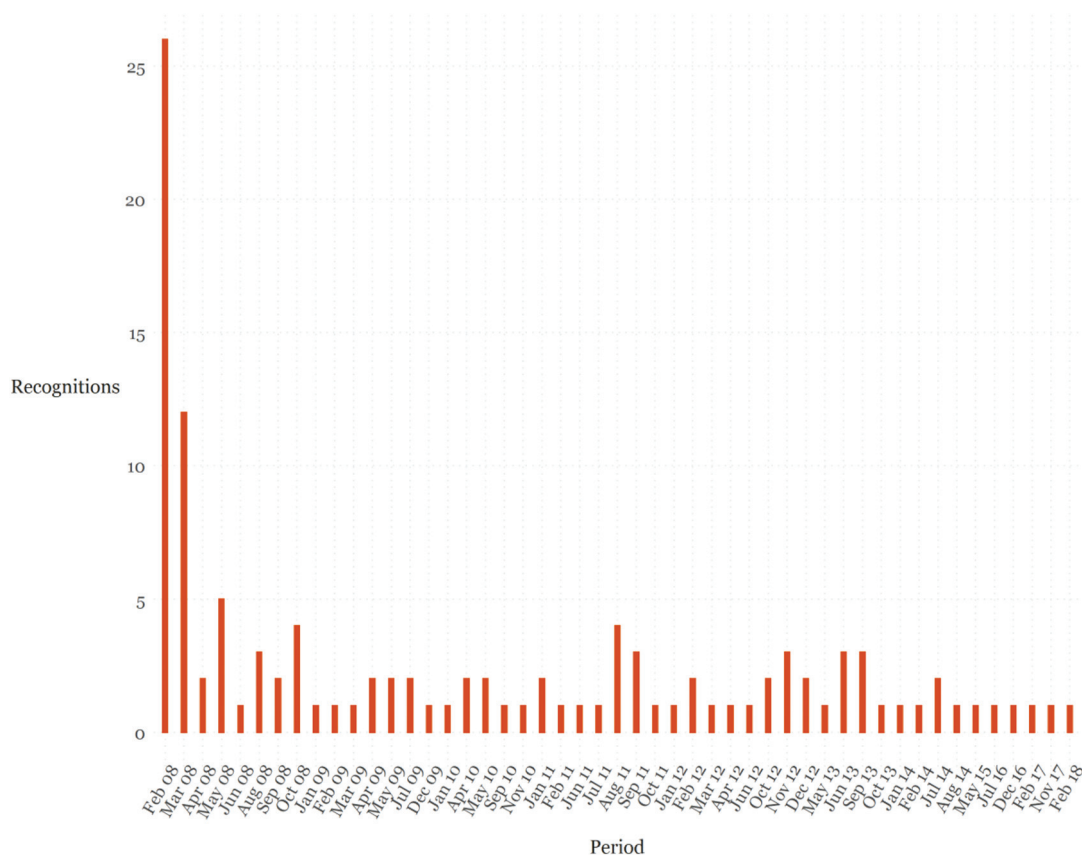Figure 1b. Russian and US arms sales (2007–17)

Figure 2a. Number of recognitions by months (February 2008–February 2018)

et al., 2003), logged gross domestic product per capita (Gleditsch, 2002), and distance from Belgrade.[22]

Who recognized Kosovo?

Since its declaration of independence, Kosovo has been recognized by 117 countries,[23] whereas 76 countries have refused to follow suit. Many recognitions came within the first three months, when 35 states recognized Kosovo, including the majority of EU members, the US, and NATO allies. Overall, 53 countries, or nearly a half of all recognizers, recognized Kosovo within ten months. Figure 2a shows that the pace of recognitions slowed down rapidly from mid-2008 but continued at a steady pace through 2013. By the end of 2014, recognitions became rare. Figure 2b shows *where* most recognizers come from: Western democracies, US allies such as the Gulf states, Turkey and Egypt, and the majority of former French colonies in Africa. Kosovo has failed to

attract recognition from most Asian, Latin American, and post-Soviet countries, however.

Great power influence contributed, for instance, to Montenegro's and North Macedonia's decisions to recognize Kosovo. Those decisions were to some extent surprising, especially with Montenegro, which has strong historic ties to Serbia and where ethnic Serbs account for a notable share of the population.[24] The US government pressured both Montenegro and North Macedonia to recognize Kosovo during March–August 2008 (Kursani, 2017: 737).[25] Montenegro's then prime minister, Milo Djukanovic, publicly acknowledged that Western actors influenced Montenegro's stance toward Kosovo's status.

Between 2018 and 2020, 12 countries rescinded their recognition of Kosovo (*Economist*, 2020). While these retractions have been analyzed in greater detail elsewhere (Visoka, 2020), de-recognitions are beyond the scope of

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[22] Neighboring countries may be systematically more interested in the dispute (Weidmann, Kuse & Gleditsch, 2010).
[23] Source: http://www.kosovothanksyou.com/ (accessed 24 January 2019).

[24] North Macedonia and Montenegro had republic status within SFRJ.
[25] Kursani (2017) also discusses the domestic politics (e.g. ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia and ethnic Serbs in Montenegro) of recognition decisions.
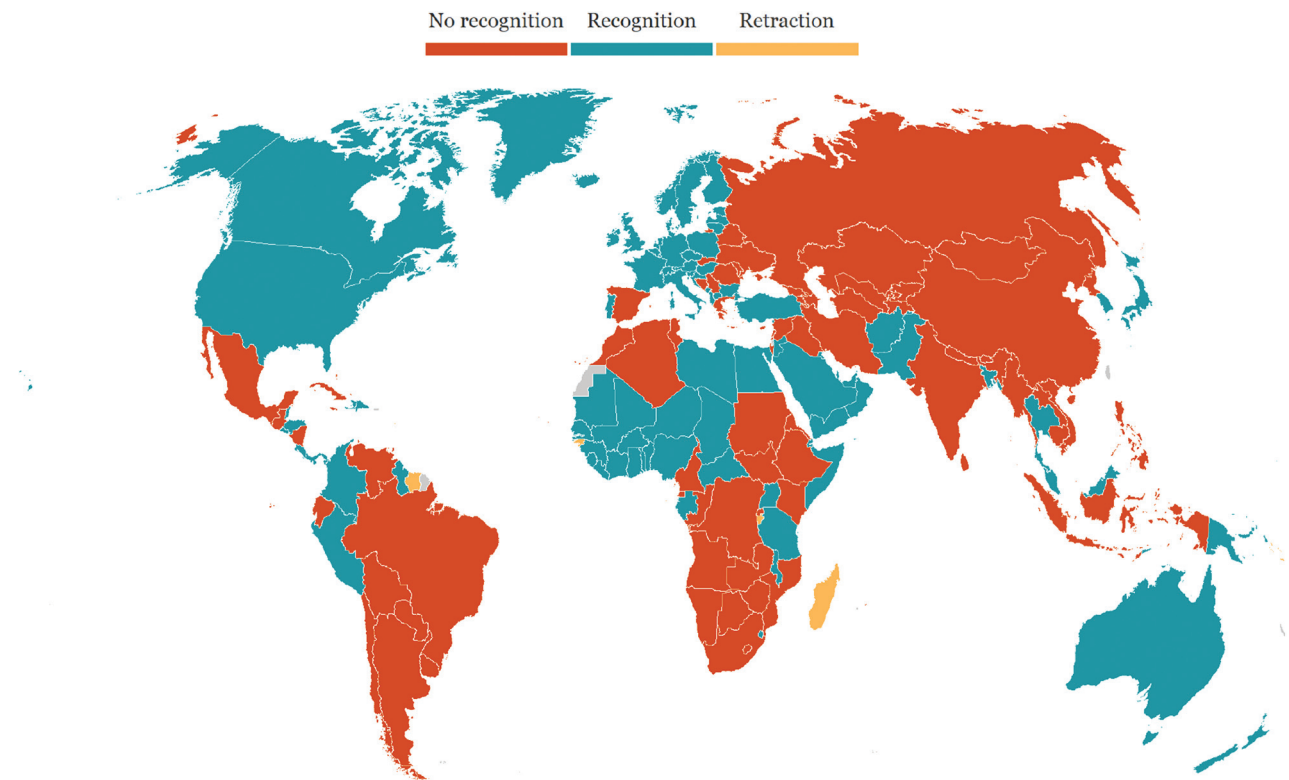
Figure 2b. International recognition of Kosovo (February 2008–February 2018)

this article. As an empirical matter, the main results do not change when these cases are excluded or recoded, and would require a more complicated model that would result in some loss of interpretability. Recent retractions could indicate a decline of US influence globally or a declining US interest to counteract them and promote Kosovo's independence.

Method

We estimate a Cox non-proportional-hazards (PH) regression model for time-to-event data with time-varying covariates (Fisher & Lin, 1999).[26] Time-varying covariates are essential to properly assessing our theory, which focuses on both arms sales and FDI that vary over time, not only in their values but also in their effects. Moreover, the proportionality hazard (PH) assumption is violated when effects are not constant over time, and our analysis shows that this assumption is violated. For these reasons, we estimate a Cox non-PH

regression where the hazard ratio remains the primary measure of the average effect, but it is interacted with the natural logarithm of time (in our case, number of months since the unilateral declaration of independence), which relaxes the PH assumption and enables us to assess the effect on recognition at different time intervals.

Following Box-Steffensmeier & Jones (2004: 136), we correct for the non-proportional hazard by including an interaction between natural logarithm of time and each covariate in violation of the PH assumption. If the interaction term coefficient is positive, then the initial effect of the coefficient term on recognition magnifies over time. If the interaction term is negative, then the passing of time decreases the effect of the constitutive coefficient on recognition.[27] The relative size and sign of the interaction and constitutive term coefficients indicate *the rate* at which a covariate's effect shifts over time. A small interaction coefficient relative to the constitutive coefficient indicates slow change, whereas a large interaction coefficient relative to the constitutive coefficient points to rapid change.

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[26] The main assumption is that the effect of a time-varying covariate on the survival probability at time t depends on the value of this covariate at that same time t (or, if specified, the lagged value of t). We use Cox PH with time-varying covariates to account for variables that change over time such as arms sales and FDI.

[27] This does not necessarily imply that the effect fades over time, but that time may overwhelm the initial effect (Licht, 2011: 235).
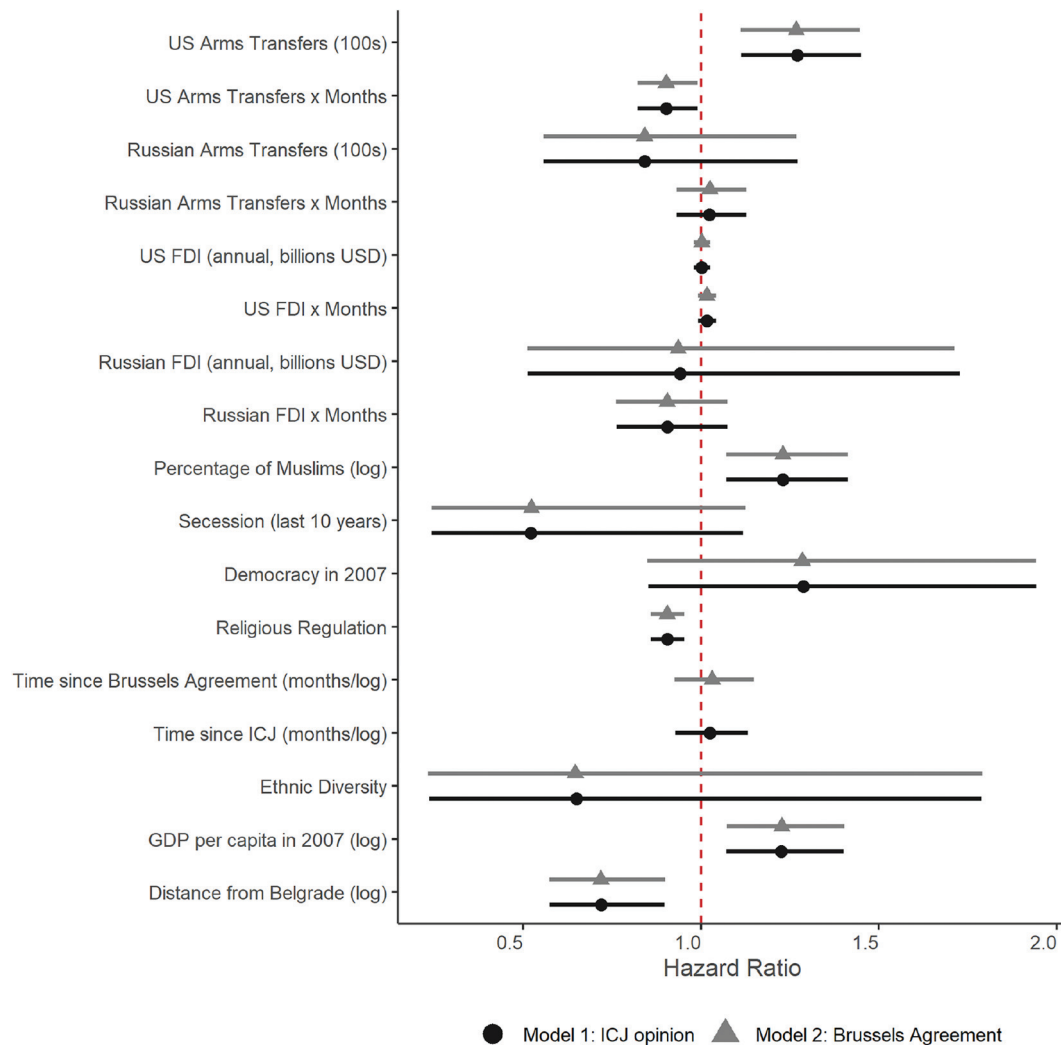
Figure 3. Full models of recognition
Presented is the Cox non-proportional hazard model with point mean estimates and 95% confidence intervals. The vertical dashed line is the line of no effect.

Licht (2011) further suggests that interpreting the results of this model based solely on the exponentiated coefficients for the constitutive term and interaction term of the time-varying covariates is insufficient. We therefore also display and discuss the marginal effects for the main time-varying covariates using 1,000 simulations for each model.

Analysis and discussion

Figure 3 displays the model results. Consistent with expectations, US arms sales are associated with an increasing hazard of recognition (and significantly expedite recognitions). Some of the major US weapons importers – such as Australia, UK, Canada, Italy, and Norway – recognized Kosovo within the first year after the declaration of independence; others, like Kuwait, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates quickly followed suit. The passing of time decreases the effect of US arms transfers on a country's recognition timing. However, given that the interaction term is smaller than the arms transfers coefficient, this change is relatively slow. By contrast, Russian arms sales are negatively related to the speed of recognition, as expected, and this effect actually increases over time, but it is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

We also find a small positive effect of US investment on a country's decision to recognize Kosovo. For any given month, a one-unit increase in US investment increases the hazard of recognizing Kosovo by around 1%. However, unlike US arms sales, this effect is insufficiently informative. Likewise, we find a negative but not

statistically meaningful effect of Russian investment on the hazard of recognition. Although the direction of these economic effects is consistent with our expectations, we find little support that countries with economic ties to either the United States or Russia are different from countries without such ties regarding the timing of recognition.[28]

Next, we assess several alternative theories. While the estimated effect is negative, having a domestic secessionist threat in the last ten years does not substantially reduce the hazard of recognition, contrary to expectations. Models with secessionism within the last five and 20 years yielded similar results.[29] Democracies are somewhat more likely to recognize Kosovo early, but the effect is not discernable from zero. Meanwhile, a stricter religious regulation is associated with a lower probability of recognition – consistent with previous work on recognition and religion. We also find that countries with large Muslim populations are more likely to recognize Kosovo and to do so quickly.[30] Even though both the religious regulation and the share of Muslim population are associated with a higher likelihood of recognition, it must be acknowledged that several large majority-Muslim countries like Indonesia and Iran have not recognized Kosovo. We also examined whether two landmark events, the 2011 ICJ advisory opinion and the 2013 Brussels agreement, influenced prospective recognitions. Both coefficients are slightly positive, indicating that they marginally increased the likelihood of recognition in the aftermath, but neither effect is distinguishable from zero.

Following Licht's advice to examine the substantive effects of covariates that include zero, we create 1,000 simulations based on the full model for FDI and arms transfers over the first 12 months to show the relative hazard of different levels of these covariates on recognition. Figure 4 examines the effect of US and Russian arms transfers using this approach based on three cutoffs.

On average, importers of US weapons are more likely to recognize Kosovo by roughly 26% for every additional 100 units transferred. However, this effect diminishes over time such that it drops to 10% by the fourth month, and at the end of the first year there is no longer any effect. This suggests that the USA was successful at persuading its closest military allies and clients to promptly recognize Kosovo, but this stimulus was sapped by the end of the first year. Russian arms exports have had a negative and smaller impact on recognition. For countries that purchased 100 units from Moscow, the hazard of recognizing Kosovo is lower by 15% in the first two months after the declaration of independence. Russian influence quickly erodes by the fourth month to 10%, although it does not completely disappear even at the end of the year. In other words, the effect of Russian arms sales is smaller but slightly longer-lasting than the effect of US arms sales on the recognition decisions of importing countries.

Figure 5 displays the substantial effects of US and Russian FDI on recognition, which vary considerably over the first year for different cutoffs. Although these effects were not distinguishable from zero on 'average' (Figure 3), it is clear from this graph that the relative hazard is in the envisaged direction, and that it is statistically meaningful for very large values.[31]

Recipients of low levels of US FDI are *not* more likely to favor recognition, but countries that receive more than USD 100 million are much more likely over time to recognize. Most notable examples of countries that received a few hundred million dollars in US FDI annually and recognized Kosovo include key US partners in the EU (Germany, France, Italy, the Benelux countries), Asia-Pacific (Australia, Japan, and South Korea), Latin America (Colombia), Middle East (Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey) as well as the Gulf countries, and Pakistan. At USD 100 million, the relative hazard starts at a very low level and increases quickly over time, which means that countries receiving this level of US investments start with a low chance of recognizing but the effect of FDI increases quickly over time. Between the fifth and eighth months, the hazard of recognition doubles.

In the case of Russian FDI, we see a similar pattern in reverse. Recipients of USD 100 million have a hazard that decreases from 0.99 at the outset to 0.97 by the end of the year, indicating that countries with large amounts of Russian FDI are slightly less likely to recognize Kosovo at the outset, and that this effect increases over time (rendering recognition less and less likely). However, for countries that receive less Russian FDI, there is no substantial effect and no change over time. Table II summarizes these results as they relate to the theories of recognition.

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[28] Except, as we show in Figure 5, for very large values of FDI.

[29] Figures A4 and A5 (Online appendix).

[30] We also estimated two alternative specifications in which we exclude these covariates separately (see Online appendix, Figure A7), and find that the main covariates preserve their direction and significance.

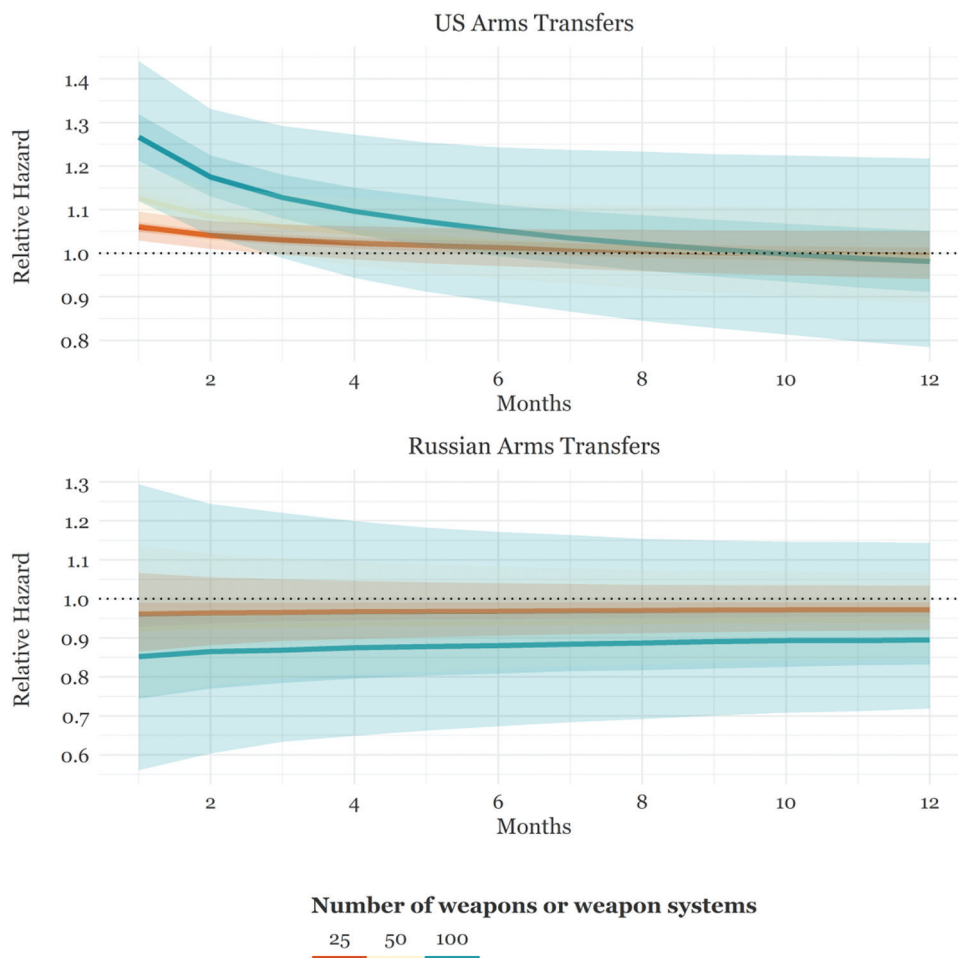[31] We choose ten times higher cutoffs for US FDI to reflect the empirical distribution.

Figure 4. Relative hazard of arms transfers over first 12 months of Model 1

Relative hazard is the ratio of the hazard at time *t* to the baseline hazard, whereby 1 indicates no effect (dotted line). Different lines show relative hazard ratio for selected cutoffs. The area of corresponding color indicates 95% confidence intervals.

We also consider several alternative model specifications. Since many EU and NATO countries promptly extended recognition, we include binary indicators for NATO and EU membership (Online appendix, Figure A6). Model 9 shows that EU and NATO membership is positively associated with recognition, and that the core results hold: the interaction effect of US arms transfers and time is significant and in the expected direction, and US FDI and Russian arms/FDI show no effect.[32]

Beyond the EU and NATO, shared political preferences with the United States could lead countries to recognize Kosovo. Some countries may adopt foreign policies closer to that of the USA because they are exposed to US influence, while others may prefer

recognition because they already have a common foreign policy with the USA. We address this possibility by including a measure of foreign policy convergence (S-score) (Chiba, Johnson & Leeds, 2015). As Figure A9 (Online appendix) shows, the S-score is in the envisioned direction (countries with more similar foreign policies to the USA are more likely to recognize and to do so sooner), but it nevertheless fails to reach conventional significance levels. We also considered alternative measures of democracy using V-Dem's scaled score for electoral democracy and liberal democracy (Coppedge et al., 2020). Models 12 and 13 in Figure A8 in the Online appendix show that including these alternative measures, which are both in the expected direction but fall just shy of conventional significance levels, does not alter the core results from the main model.

Since the UK and France were also among the UNSC supporters of Kosovo's independence (Ker-Lindsay,

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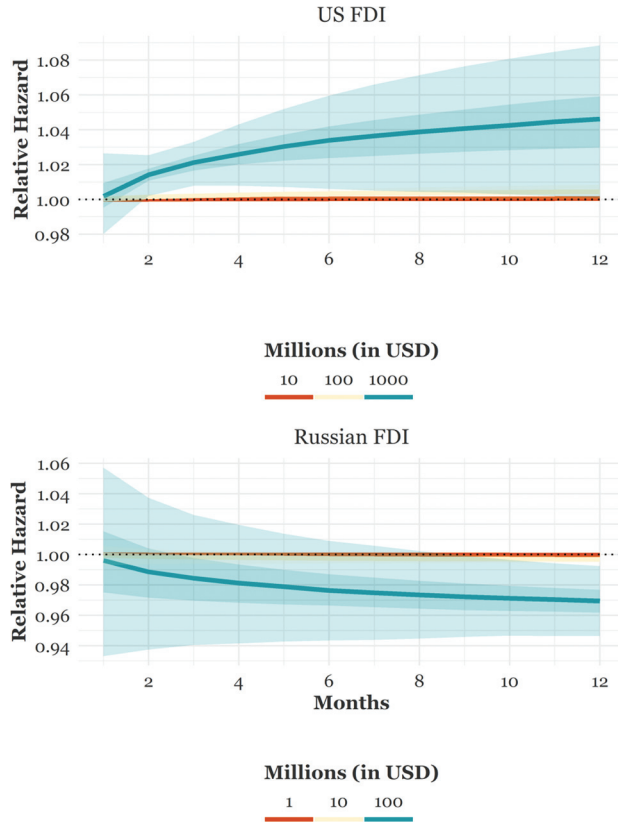[32] When EU and NATO variables are included separately, the results hold.

Figure 5. Relative hazard of FDI over first 12 months of Model 1

Relative hazard is the ratio of the hazard at time *t* to the baseline hazard, whereby 1 indicates no effect (dotted line). Different lines show relative hazard ratio for selected cutoffs. The area of corresponding color indicates 95% confidence intervals.

Table II. Summary of results

ARGUMENT	RESULT
MILITARY AND ECONOMIC LEVERAGE	• US arms transfers: *Supported*; effect diminishes quickly over time • Russian arms transfers: *Supported* only for high values of arms; effect diminishes slowly over time • US FDI: *Supported* only for high values of FDI; effect strengthens over time • Russian FDI: *Supported* only for high values of FDI; effect strengthens over time
SECESSION	• Not supported
DEMOCRACY	• Not supported
RELIGIOUS REGULATION	• Supported
MUSLIM POPULATION	• Supported
CRITICAL EVENTS	• Not supported

2012: 118), we also considered whether and, if so, to what extent their security ties influenced the recognition of Kosovo. We find that British arms sales are associated with significantly speeding up recognition, whereas we find no effect of French arms transfers. Figure A2 in the Online appendix shows that importers of British weapons were more likely to recognize Kosovo by nearly 250% for every additional 100 units transferred in the first month. This profound effect decreases to 100% in the second month after the unilateral declaration of independence and vanishes almost entirely after six months. While British arms have fewer customers than their US and French counterparts and the quantity of British arms sales appears to be comparatively smaller (see Figure A3 in the Online appendix), receiving British arms may have influenced a narrow audience of its core allies to support Kosovo's independence. The effect of British arms sales is larger but shorter lasting than the effect of US arms sales on the recognition decisions of importing countries.

Washington's and Moscow's impact on the recognition decisions of other countries regarding Kosovo is clearly asymmetrical. While the USA played a central role in supporting the push for Kosovo's independence, and has influenced many NATO and non-NATO allies recognizers,[33] Russian influence is only one of many factors influencing countries not to recognize Kosovo; these factors include domestic factors and the lack of home state consent from Serbia, which numerous countries have cited as a reason for not extending recognition.

Conclusion

Theoretical and empirical work on the international recognition of aspiring states is still relatively sparse, even though recognition plays a fundamental role in shaping whether new states emerge and the outcome of secessionist conflicts.[34] We propose a theory that emphasizes the

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[33] There are 25 NATO members, and at least 15 major non-NATO allies and partners that have recognized Kosovo. The non-NATO allies include Afghanistan, Australia, Bahrain, Egypt, Japan, Kuwait, Morocco, New Zealand, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Thailand, and United Arab Emirates (NATO, 2012).

[34] In the longer term, recognition and secession influence party system polarization (Bustikova, 2020), ethnic bargaining (Jenne, 2007), and irredentism (Siroky & Hale, 2017).

role of great power competition and leverage on recognition. It suggests that great power competition, rather than other factors, is a key determinant of international recognition in cases of unilateral secession. However, the influence of great power competition and particular great power leverage on recognition is time-limited, and decays quite rapidly soon after the declaration of unilateral secession.

We offer evidence suggesting that, controlling for many factors, countries receiving large amounts of US arms sales are much more likely to recognize Kosovo, and to do so early, but this effect diminishes quickly over time and disappears by the end of the first year. Russian arms exports have a negative and smaller impact on recognition, but only for countries receiving large amounts of Russian arms. The effect also erodes over time, although it does not completely disappear even at the end of the year. When it comes to economic leverage, the analysis uncovers similar but more nuanced effects. Countries that receive large amounts of US FDI are much more likely to extend recognition over time, while smaller amounts have no effect. Countries receiving large amounts of Russian FDI are slightly less likely to recognize Kosovo at the outset, and this effect increases over time until it tapers off after three months. As with US FDI, smaller amounts of Russian FDI have no effect.

Our argument contributes to the literature by emphasizing great power competition in the context of unilateral secession. We further emphasize differences across great powers and explore mechanisms of great power influence. Great powers differ in terms of their access to resources and in terms of their position within hierarchical structures in international relations, which can render their influence on recognition decisions asymmetrical, as with Kosovo.

Unilateral secessions with many recognitions are highly unusual. Most go largely if not wholly unrecognized. Three historical exceptions come to mind, and they were also protracted affairs. Belgium unilaterally declared secession without home state consent in 1830, and the Dutch Republic refused to recognize the new state until 1839 with the signing of the Treaty of London, even though Austria, Britain, France, Russia, and Prussia all recognized it. Similarly, in the wake of World War 1, the first Dáil Éireann Ireland's independence as the Irish Free State in 1919, lobbying at the Paris Peace Conference, but there was no recognition, as none of the major world powers wished to irritate Britain, which did not consent to its unilateral declaration of independence. Not until the Republic of Ireland Bill in 1948 did the Republic of Ireland come into being,

become a full member of the UN in 1955. Bangladesh is a third case, which was already discussed; not only did Pakistan deny consent but China vehemently opposed it, and used its veto at the UNSC one of only two times in history.

While the cases of Belgium, Ireland, and Bangladesh were eventually resolved with universal recognition, there are other long-standing instances of unilateral secession (e.g. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), or of contested sovereignty (but not generally regarded as cases of unilateral secession) that have not achieved universal recognition after many decades (e.g. Palestine, Western Sahara); many unilateral secession attempts fail. Which way will Kosovo go? We expect that the factors emphasized by our article will in part influence the answer to that question. Absent Serbia's signature on a status agreement, great power competition over the recognition of Kosovo has not diminished more than a decade since the unilateral secession. But the extent to which great powers are interested in Kosovo could change, or their positions could be influenced by developments elsewhere, such as in the Caucuses or in Taiwan. A change in the degree of the US commitment to the Western liberal world order could also weaken coordination between proponents of Kosovo recognition. Finally, looking ahead, home state consent and great power influence may be interrelated insofar as Western powers seek to influence Serbia regarding the status of Kosovo as part of the process for Serbia to join the EU.

Mutual recognition is the cornerstone of sovereignty in the international system. Without extensive international recognition, aspiring states cannot enjoy the status and privileges reserved for states. Given the numerous active secessionist movements around the world, and a growing number of aspiring states with contested patterns of recognition, the results may apply more broadly than might appear at first glance – exactly how broadly is a question that will have to be determined by future research and world affairs.

Replication data

Acknowledgments

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