



The Puzzle of Interstate War, Part I: Conflict as Bargaining

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POLI 150

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Today's Class

- How to Read Academic Articles
- Conflict as Bargaining



Components of an academic article:

- Abstract
- Literature Review
- Theory/Hypotheses
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

These elements are present in many articles you will read for this class.



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- **Results:** What they found.
- **Discussion:** Summary, potential weaknesses and future research directions.



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- **Discussion:** Often useful as a summary of key findings.



Central Question

Given the massive costs of war, why do states fight?



Key Terms

- War
- Interstate War
- Crisis Bargaining
- Status Quo



Battle of Stalingrad





Battle of Stalingrad



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Battle-of-Stalingrad>



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- This seems like a terrible way to settle disputes.



Class Activity

Define “war” without looking at the next slide!



What is War Anyway?

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- Most IR definitions of war are built on or just use this definition.



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Note that this definition excludes these kinds of violence.



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- Not the only type of war...
 - Civil/intra-state wars, non-state wars, extra-state wars
- But it is the type we're focusing on for this part of the course.



Interstate War Statistics

FIGURE 3.1 *The Percentage of States Involved in Interstate War per Year, 1820–2017*

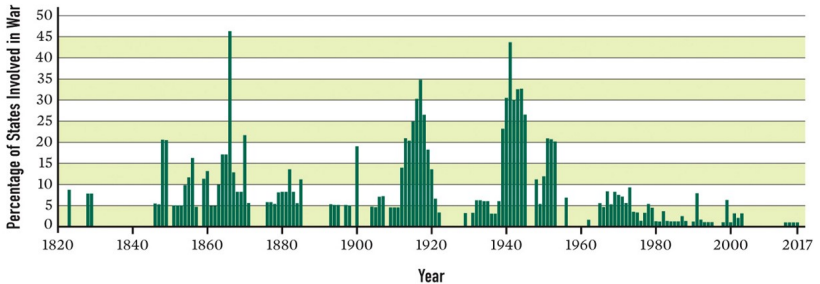
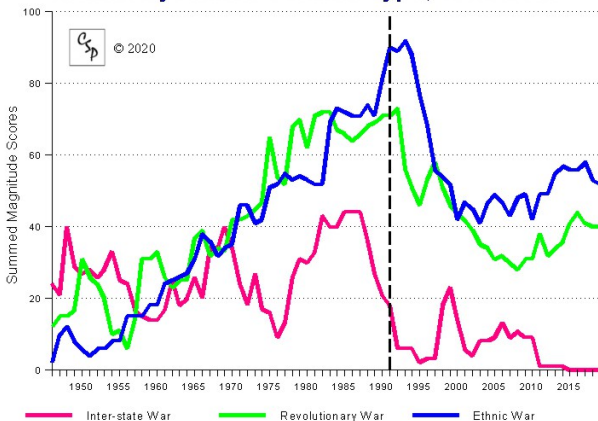


Figure source: Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816–2007* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010).
Updated to 2017 by author.



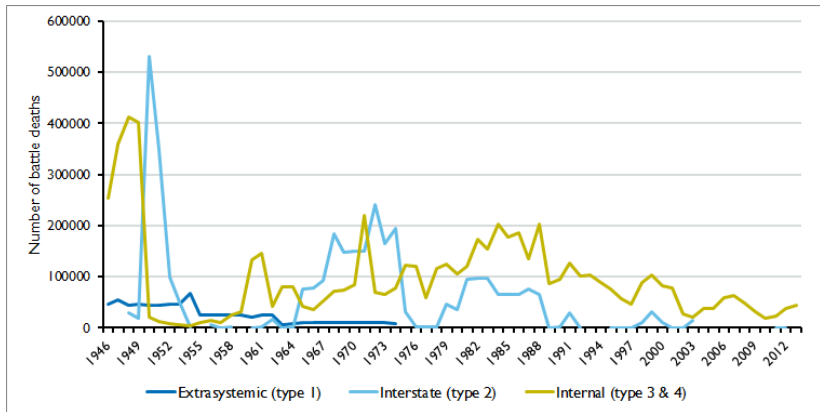
Interstate War Statistics

Trends by Armed Conflict Type, 1946-2019





Interstate War Statistics





Interstate War Stated Reasons

- Territory



Interstate War Stated Reasons

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- National policy



Interstate War Stated Reasons

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- Conflicting *interests* are necessary, but not sufficient to explain war, as many states have differing interests but few go to war.



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- International system lacks *institutions* that can reliably settle disputes and enforce peace (anarchy), but this only permits war without explaining its occurrence.
- However, this environment does permit the *interaction* of bargaining.



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- **Crisis bargaining** occurs when at least one state seeks to influence this bargaining by using or threatening force.

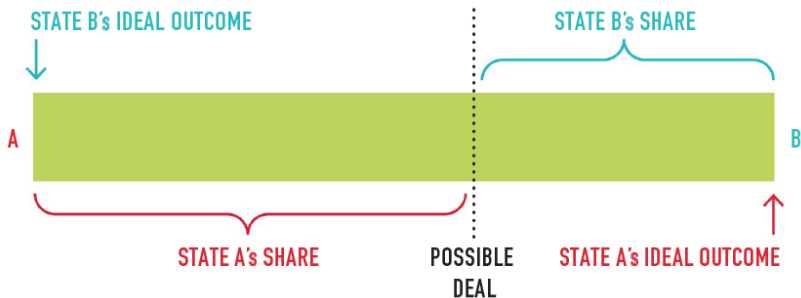


Crisis Bargaining

- Due to this anarchic system, war is a possible outcome whenever states are trying to divide some good (e.g. territory, policy, regime) in a zero-sum interaction.
- **Crisis bargaining** occurs when at least one state seeks to influence this bargaining by using or threatening force.
- Two things determine which deals are acceptable to belligerents during crisis bargaining: the **costs** and **likely outcome** of war.

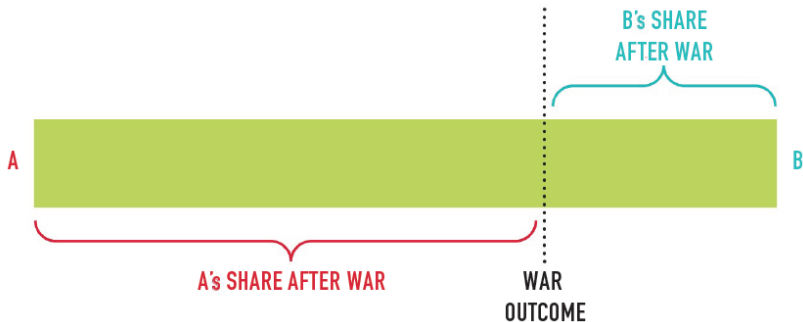


Bargaining Model





Expected War Outcome





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War is Costly!

- However, the outcome is not the whole story.
- War is costly both in terms of military losses and broader destruction of infrastructure and populations.
- We can conceptualize these costs as a negative value, decreasing the total utility a state gets from a war outcome.



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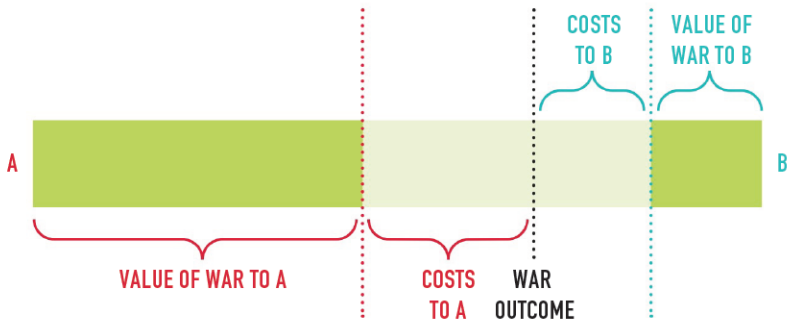


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- State A's utility is $U(x) = x - c$
- State B's utility is $U(x) = 1 - x - c$
- These utility functions ensure that the bargaining situation is accurately represented.



War is Costly!





Bargaining Range





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Bargaining Range Implications

- The existence of the **bargaining range** implies a fundamental puzzle of war.
- Given the existence of a bargaining range, there is always some deal that both sides would prefer to war.
- Why do states choose war, given the existence of both the costs of war and the existence of a deal that both sides prefer to war?



Alternative (Failed) Reasons for War

- Anarchy/security dilemma



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None of these explain why war occurs, given the presence of a bargaining range.



Bargaining Model

So, how does the bargaining model explain war? Stay tuned...