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Introduction

Why does the US intervene in foreign conflicts? The US has regularly decided to intervene in conflicts over the last several decades. Their decision to do so is costly for everyone involved including the foreign countries and US citizens. Understanding why and when this occurs is an important discussion within global politics. I propose a new theory where it is the media that is able to influence a president to intervene in certain conflicts by directing public pressure onto him.

To test this, I have collected data from the Correlates of War project datasets and from the LexisNexis article database. My dependent variable is whether the US has intervened in a conflict and comes from the Correlates of War intra and interstate war list and their Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset. My independent variable is the number of articles written about the conflict and is collected from the LexisNexis database using different search strings. I test this using logistic regression. I also use a bootstrapped logistic regression and a permutation test.

In the logistic regression model, the articles variable is shown to be significant below the 0.05 threshold with a positive coefficient. It is also shown to be significant in the bootstrapped model as well as the permutation test. These results provide support for my hypothesis and theory.

Literature Review

A widespread question in global politics and international relations is why the US and other countries choose to get involved in international conflicts. Literature has explored many avenues to this question and has proposed answers such as political reasons, cultural reasons, and economic reasons. A growing body of literature has also begun on inaction costs. This section will connect these two bodies to explore how they are connected.

Inaction Costs

Inaction costs describe the cost of failing to take action in a situation. Literature has explored what inaction costs are for countries and individuals across several avenues including public health, climate change, and family challenges (UN environment programme, Yarmin et al. 2013, Limaye et al. 2020, FXB Center 2013). There is minimal literature, outside of climate change, that has concerned itself with personal presidential inaction costs, or the costs that a president would incur for failing to act on a global situation.

One consideration that has been made is the costs that presidents face from public when the use when the government does not act and the president has to instead. It was shown that individuals held negative views of a president after this was the case. Contrary to this, presidents may prefer to not act on certain situations. Love and Garg show that when it comes to enacting their policy goals, it is far easier for a president to adopt a strategy of inaction instead of battling congress and public opinion.

US Involvement in Conflicts

Literature has first considered overall why third parties choose to involve themselves in external conflicts. Motivations for joining conflicts found have included security-driven, pragmatic considerations, and homophily between joiners and disputants (Corbetta 2010). Additionally, social alignment or misalignment between the parties in the conflict is equally important for joining. Third-party involvement has also been found to be regionally motivated with countries involving themselves in middle-eastern conflicts at a higher rate (Moller and Oberg 2009). Gleditsch and Beardsley 2004 explore third-party actors in exclusively central American conflicts. They find that when there are multiple domestic adversaries, third parties choose to vary their support across them. They also find that the consistency of rebel groups affects the level of support that third parties choose to give.

We can narrow this research to exclusively why the United States choose to get involved in conflicts. The rise in US power also saw a rise in their conflict intervention (Aubone 2013). An explanation for this rise can partly be explained by the proximity of these conflicts to the US as most were in Latin America (Boot 2002, Gent 2010). Another part of this motivation was initially to keep traditional European powers outside of the Americas and then later to curb the rise of Communism (Aubone 2013). A final motivating factor for the US during the Cold War era was the discovery of Soviet missile bases in Cuba which defended their use of intervening in conflicts to prevent Communism (Aubone 2013).

Media Influence

The final dimension to consider for our question is what influence the media can extend upon a president and/or congress. Edwardes III and Wood 1999 find that most of the time the President reacts strongly to fluctuations in media attention on world events. Balabanova 2017 expands on this notion and comments on how the 24/7 news cycle creates a “do something”

effect for policy leaders. They conclude that the media has become a powerful wing of policymaking in its own right and has the ability to influence the decisions of leaders within foreign policy.

Theory

While literature has considered why the US intervenes in conflicts and how the media has influence on a president, it has not combined these two. It is then necessary to consider how these concepts might be connected theoretically. This next section is focused on discussing this theory and proposing my hypothesis for this question.

Inaction Costs

The first part of this theory involves inaction costs. Inaction costs, as previously defined, are the costs that an individual face for failing to act on a situation. For this argument, a president will face inaction costs for failing to act on a foreign conflict. This reality makes logical sense. Firstly, there are substantial costs that a president can face from the public. This includes losing congressional support, his/her party losing midterm elections, and he/she losing a reelection campaign. These costs are enough for an individual to join a conflict. Consider George Bush after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. There was substantial pressure from the public to do something which involved him joining preexisting conflicts in the middle east and his public support soared. Another example of this is from George H. W. Bush in the Gulf war. After Iraq's decision to invade Kuwait there was substantial out roar from the international community. This was eventually enough for Bush to deploy troops to this area (Kahn Academy).

Media Influence

The next part of the theory is that the media is able to inflict these costs onto the president. While I previously mentioned it is individual voters who are most likely inflicting the costs, it is the media that is directing this. As mentioned previously in the literature section, presidents react strongly to the media's coverage of world events (Edwardes III and Wood 1999). In addition, Balabanova 2017 described the "do something effect" that 24/7 media causes. This literature

then suggests that the media can direct individuals to inflict inaction costs on presidents as otherwise Presidents would not pay attention or react to the media as they have been found to do. From this theory, we can come to our hypothesis

H1: As the media coverage of a foreign conflict increases, the likelihood that a president intervenes in it also increases.

There are several counter-arguments that can come about from this theory. Firstly, literature has proposed several other reasons why countries join foreign conflicts. These include social reasons, regional reasons, and the type and number of rebel groups (Corbetta 2010, Gleditsch and Beardsley 2004, Moller and Oberg 2009). There could also be inverse or confounding effects for my hypothesis. Perhaps a president expressing interest in a conflict causes the media to cover it more. Or, some conflicts that are of large global political significance cause both media coverage and the likelihood of intervention to increase. Finally, if a president is in their final term they may be substantially less concerned with inaction costs as they do not need to worry about reelection.

Methods

To test this theory, I draw data from two sources, the LexisNexis Database and the Correlates of War project. My first two datasets come from the Correlates of War (COW) which first has a dataset that includes all interstate and intrastate conflicts up until 2007. Next, I will use their Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) dataset. This data includes all instances where one or more states, threaten, display, or use force against one or more other states. My next source of data is from the LexisNexis database which includes journals articles written since 1980. I will use an API that will pull articles written about conflicts from the New York Times and Associated Press.

My dependent variable is whether the US intervened in a conflict and comes from Correlates of War and the MID data. I first used COW to provide the list of conflicts to include in the study. There have been 106 total foreign conflicts from 1980 – 2007. Using the MID data, I can then see if there was any US intervention during the length of the war which is coded as 1 for intervention and 0 if not.

My independent variable is the number of articles written about a conflict and is drawn from LexisNexis. For each conflict, I construct a search string that will query the database and return the relevant articles. The first part of the string was every country that was involved in the conflict. The second part of the string used an or statement for the terms war and conflict. While this search string did show to include relevant articles, it was impossible to check every article and there is a possibility of some irrelevant articles being included as well as missing some articles of interest. I searched for articles within the first three months of the start date. There is no relevant literature to look at in terms of how long of a time frame to search for. It is important to get a long enough window where there is time for articles to be written and pressure be put on

a president to intervene while also search for too long where we include articles written after an intervention has occurred.

I include two control variables in my model, log of net trade with the US and whether the country was on the UN Security Council. Trade is used to indicate how strong of a relationship the US has with the country and comes from the COW data. It is measured as the total exports and total imports the US has with a country added together. The log is then taken of this value to help control for the significant scale this variable has. UN security council is used to show how geopolitically important the country is and is hand coded from the United Nations website. It is measured so that 1 indicates the country was on the security council in the year the conflict started and 0 indicates they were not.

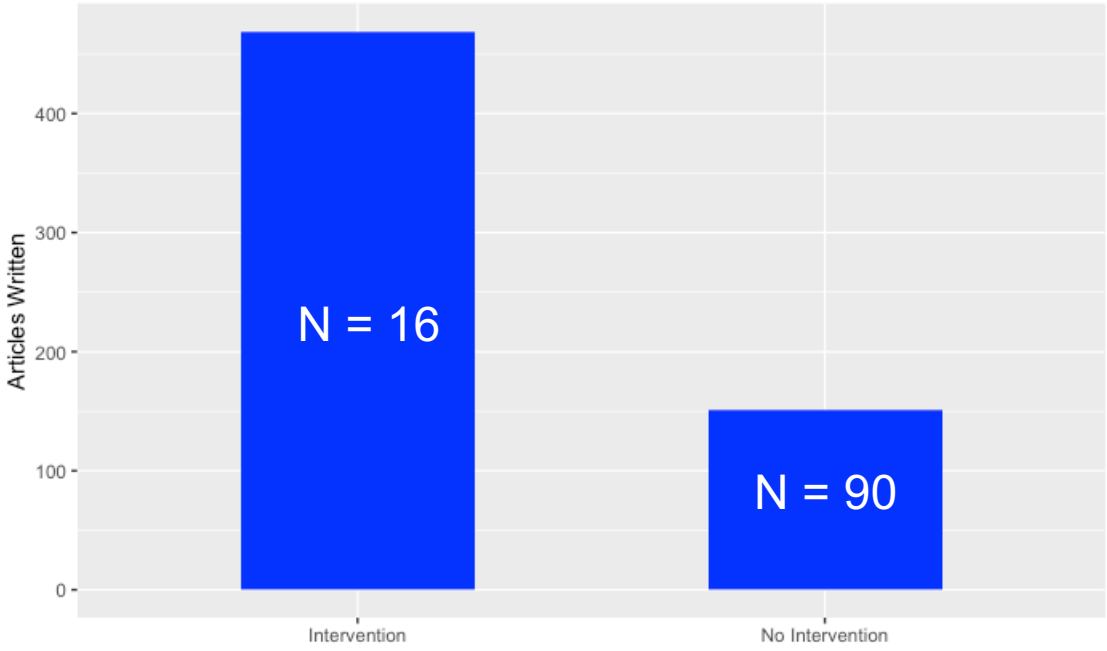

Figure 1: Distribution of dependent variable

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the dependent variable and shows how many articles they have on average. We can see that on average conflicts with intervention are resulting in more articles than when there is no intervention. We can also see that the data is heavily distributed to there being no intervention which accounts for 84.9% of the cases. This could cause problems in my analysis where there are not enough positive outcomes to accurately model the data.

For my model, I use a logistic regression, inferential approach. Logistic regression is appropriate when the dependent variable is binary. It will show the probability of there being a US intervention given values of the independent variable and controls. An inferential approach was chosen over a machine learning one due to the nature of my data where there is only 106 data points and 16 positive outcomes. Because of the small amount of data, I also decide to test this model with a bootstrapped logit regression and a permutation test. Bootstrapping is an approach where we resample the data by thousands of iterations and fit the model on each sample. Permutation test is done by randomly permuting the data and calculating the likelihood ratio for each permutation. A p-value is then generated for the number of times the likelihood ratio is above the ratio on the original data. Both methods are powerful when there is a small amount of data.

Results

	Dependent Variable
	US Intervention
	Logit
	Model 1
Articles	0.0026091**
	0.0008489
Net Trade	-0.2757925
	0.106143
Security Council	2.0726208**
	2.0726208
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***0.01	

Model 1: Logistic Regression Results

Model 1 shows the results of the logistic regression results. We can see that the articles variable is significant below the 0.05 threshold with a positive coefficient. These results show that there is evidence to support the hypothesis that the number of articles written has a relationship with US intervention in a conflict.

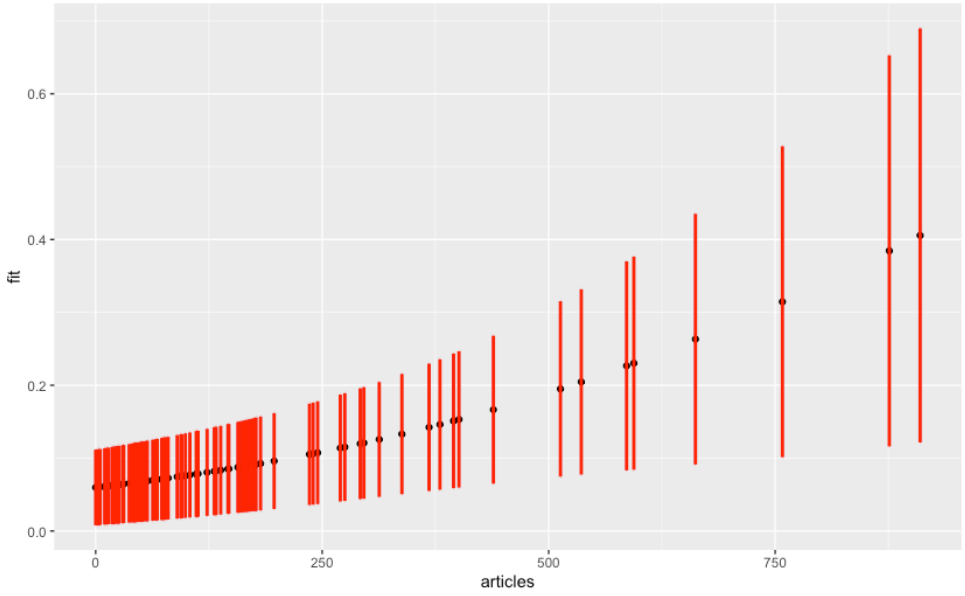

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of US intervention

Figure 2 shows the models predicted probability of there being a US intervention in a conflict when the controls are held at their mean values and the number of articles is varied. We can see that the model is predicting there to be an increase in the probability of intervention as the number of articles increases. We can also see, however, that the amount of error on these predictions is increasing and making it difficult to determine the full magnitude of this effect.

	Dependent Variable
	US Intervention
	Logit
	Model 2
Articles	0.00308851**
	0.001390
Net Trade	-0.263227
	0.131777
Security Council	1.18807408**
	0.592753
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***0.01	

Model 2: Bootstrapped logistic regression results

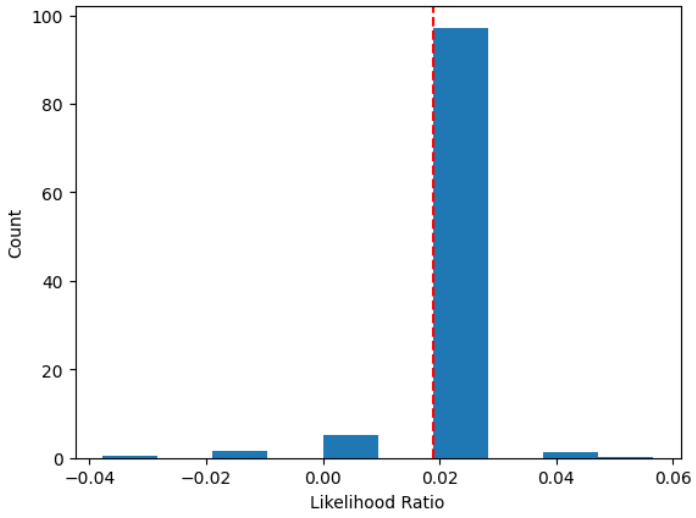

Figure 3: Permutation test results

Model 2 shows the results of the bootstrapped logistic regression. We can still see that the prior significance of the model holds and articles is still significant below the 0.05 threshold with a positive coefficient. These results suggest that the original model was accurate in its assumptions and there is a significance with this variable. Figure 3 further corroborates these results with a very low p-value < 0.001 again suggesting that there is a strong significant relationship with my model.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to determine why the US intervenes in certain conflicts and if the media can influence a president to do so. I hypothesized that the media does have an influence and that the number of articles written will have a positive relationship with US intervention. Overall, there is statistical significance in all my models which support this hypothesis.

Despite these strong findings, I believe there is reason to be skeptical of these results and this approach should be tested again in order to fully address the question. Collecting the article data was very time consuming as I had to construct a search string for each conflict and each search could take up to 15 minutes. Additionally, searches could only be done on weekends due to the LexisNexis subscription. Ideally, several search strings would be tested to collect the most relevant articles. Further approaches could be aimed at finding relevancy such as training a classifier to go through each article. Different time frames should also be tested to see what effect this has on the relationship. Lastly, more controls could be included in the model. I believe controlling for country geographic and demographic would help refine the model.

Overall, this paper presents an introduction into a new theory on why there is US intervention in foreign conflicts. New literature could result from my findings that could utilize new data past 2007 and address many of the limitations that this paper had.

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