

# Rivalry, Instability, and the Probability of International Conflict<sup>1</sup>

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This article addresses the effect of political instability and domestic conflict on the probability of militarized interstate disputes. Existing research on the subject has produced inconsistent findings. I hypothesize that the effect of political instability on international disputes is conditional on states' involvement in civil conflict. More specifically, I argue that while political instability provides leaders with the *willingness* to use force, civil war creates the necessary *opportunities* for initiating conflict abroad. A directed-dyad analysis of international rivals for the 1816–2000 time period shows that instability coupled with civil war increases the probability of militarized interstate dispute initiation among rival states. Results are consistent for alternative indicators of political instability and civil war.

**KEYWORDS:** civil war, international conflict; interstate disputes; political instability; rivalry

What is the relationship between political instability, civil war, and international conflict? Studies on the relationship between domestic turmoil and interstate conflict have produced inconsistent results, and research has frequently failed to distinguish between nonviolent and violent challenges to the state and their effect on international conflict. It is the goal of this article to delineate and clarify mechanisms linking political instability, violent domestic conflict, and interstate disputes.

The events leading up to the Indian–Pakistani War of 1971, ultimately resulting in the breakup of Pakistan, nicely underline the complex interrelationship between political instability, civil conflict, and international disputes. In 1969, Pakistan's new military regime carried out the first open legislative elections in its history. While the legal framework authorized a continuing discretionary role for the military leadership, seats in the legislature would be determined on the basis of popular vote and be followed by the drafting of a new constitution (Marwah, 1979). Yet the December 1970 election results created tensions between the Western and Eastern

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parts of Pakistan when the East Pakistani Awami League secured more than 50% of seats in the legislature (LaPorte, 1972). Subsequent wrangling between the People's Party (representing the West) and the Awami League over the drafting of the constitution stalled over the establishment of a looser federal arrangement, especially as it related to the transfer of monetary resources between West and East Pakistan (Marwah, 1979). Unable to come to an agreement, the army decided to use force to put down the attempt by East Pakistanis to assert their electoral mandate. The crackdown in East Pakistan began in March 1971 with the goals of eliminating the Awami League and forcibly re-imposing the military regime's authority (Marwah, 1979).

Meanwhile, Pakistan's rival India observed these events with great interest. Previous disputes between India and Pakistan over the unresolved issue of Kashmir had brought East Pakistan to India's attention as it considered it "an ultimate territorial hostage against a change in Kashmir not to India's liking" (Marwah, 1979: 556). When the East Pakistani party emerged victorious, the Indian leadership was hopeful that a more open regime representing both parts of Pakistan would promote better relations. Initially, the Indian government limited its response to condemning the military's use of force in East Pakistan and granting refuge to members of the Awami League. Yet when the violent crackdown intensified over the course of 1971, India responded with covert military pressure by training East Pakistani forces in Indian training camps.<sup>2</sup> In November 1971, Indian troops made their first major incursion into East Pakistan, and full-scale war broke out in December 1971. India's army easily defeated the Pakistani military, and East Pakistan emerged as the independent country of Bangladesh.

The discussion of events above suggests some important insights into the relationship between political instability, violent domestic conflict, and interstate conflict. First, it shows how political instability can contribute to violence at the domestic level. Pakistan's military regime initiated elections, but when the outcome benefited previously excluded groups and threatened the military's influence over authority, the regime used force to eliminate its challengers. Second, and more importantly for the focus of this article, the events show how elites faced with political and violent threats to their stay in power may subsequently experience the internationalization of these conflicts. In the above example, Pakistan's long-lasting hostile relationship with India meant that its rival had obvious interests in the outcome of this internal dispute. While India initially provided only covert support for anti-government groups, spillover effects caused by large numbers of refugees provided the Indian government with the reasoning for subsequent military intervention on the side of the rebels.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately resulting in the disintegration of Pakistan's territory, the above events suggest that challenges to the state have important consequences for relations between states.

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<sup>2</sup> Marwah (1979) estimates that 40–50,000 guerillas were trained in Indian camps.

<sup>3</sup> Refugee flows are estimated to have exceeded 6 million people by the end of 1971 (LaPorte, 1972). However, India initially invited refugees from East Pakistan (Sisson and Rose, 1991).

Consequently, this article develops an argument that combines insight discovered in previous research on political instability, violent domestic conflict, and interstate violence.<sup>4</sup> I focus the analysis on international rivalry as it represents an environment rich in opportunities for the externalization of conflict or intervention by rival states. The argument expects that states at once faced with political and violent challenges to their power are more likely to experience international conflict with their rivals. More specifically, the article argues that while political challenges provide leaders with the *willingness* to use force abroad, simultaneous violent challenges to the state create the *opportunity* to externalize domestic disputes (Most and Starr, 1989). For example, rebel groups fighting the government frequently establish bases in neighboring states, and such bases can provide embattled leaders with the necessary opportunities to initiate disputes abroad. The article proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the literature on the relationship between internal and external conflict. I then develop the theoretical argument, which analyzes the relationship between instability, domestic conflict, and international conflict in a rivalry environment. The subsequent section presents the research design and empirical results and is followed by a conclusion.

## **The Internal–External Conflict Linkage**

Explanations of the relationship between domestic turmoil (whether violent or nonviolent) and international disputes have largely focused on diversionary or opportunistic motives of political leaders. In the diversionary argument, leaders have incentives to use force abroad when faced with domestic turmoil because of their desire to remain in power.<sup>5</sup> In arguments on opportunism, other states take advantage of the temporary weakness of leaders suffering from challenges to their power by attacking them. One problem with research on the internal–external conflict linkage is that authors frequently make similar arguments with regard to nonviolent and

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<sup>4</sup> Political instability is defined here as changes in states' institutional structure. Although a measure focusing on behavioral aspects of instability might provide for interesting comparisons, data on protests and strikes are not available for the pre-1945 period. Instability is operationalized as a fluctuation in executive constraints scores of 2 or greater in a three-year period. While this measure does not provide information on the actual events triggering instability, it is commonly used in the literature (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006). Data for this variable come from the Polity IV project. Robustness tests for a behavioral indicator of political instability produce similar results to the institutional measure and are presented in Table 3. Violent domestic conflict is defined as civil war and operationalized using Correlates of War (COW) data on intrastate wars. Finally, interstate violence is defined as the use of force in a militarized interstate dispute with data from the MID 3.2 dataset. Empirical measures are described in more detail in the research design. I also conduct several robustness tests with different operationalizations of these concepts.

<sup>5</sup> Research on diversionary uses of force has identified internal strife (both violent and nonviolent), regime change, a poorly performing economy, and electoral periods as instances of domestic turmoil. Given the focus of this article, analyses addressing regime change and violent internal strife will be discussed here.

violent challenges to the state. Some research focuses on nonviolent contestation, whereas other studies distinguish between violent and nonviolent challenges, and yet a third strand of research focuses on violent conflict only. However, theoretical explanations for the expected effect of these challenges on international conflict are frequently similar in that they focus on diversion or opportunistic motives for internationalization.

Empirical support for the diversionary hypothesis remains inconclusive. While early cross-national studies of the diversionary argument mostly failed to find empirical support (e.g. Rummel, 1983), more recent research has found some support for the diversionary use of force. Analyzing the effect of political instability by investigating the effect of democratization or movement to authoritarianism, Mansfield and Snyder (2002, 2005) argue that political liberalization creates a climate in which threatened elites appeal to nationalist sentiment and use force abroad to divert the public's attention from the contestation of power in the domestic sphere. Mansfield and Snyder (2002, 2005) find empirical support for the diversionary behavior of democratizing states.<sup>6</sup> Goemans (2008) finds that leaders who expect to be removed from office through a coup or other unconstitutional methods have incentives to engage in diversionary behavior. Yet since such irregular removals from office frequently involve the use of force, this finding does not allow distinguishing between violent and nonviolent challenges to the state and how they might differently affect the internationalization of disputes.

While the above studies focus on the impact of change between different types of regimes, others have looked at domestic turmoil more generally. An early study by Ward and Widmaier (1982) distinguishes between nonviolent and violent protests against the state but finds that domestic turmoil only increases the risk of internationalization for powerful states. Dassel and Reinhardt (1999) argue that the hypothesized effect of domestic strife on conflict abroad should only hold for certain types of problems, specifically domestic strife that threatens the military. Since contestation of core political institutions calls into question the military's organizational interests, it may use force abroad to resolve domestic difficulties. The authors find strong support for this argument using several operationalizations of contested institutions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> However, later empirical studies by Thompson and Tucker (1997), Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000), and Enterline (1998) produced results contradicting Mansfield and Snyder's (2002) findings. In addition, work by Smith (1996) questions the ability of democratic leaders to engage in diversion (which may or may not extend to leaders in democratizing countries). While democratic leaders may indeed have greater incentives to use force abroad in order to strengthen their electoral position, the transparency of their regimes sends a clear signal to opponents who in turn will "make themselves unavailable as targets by avoiding controversial policies" (Clark, 2003: 1017). In line with this argument, Miller (1999) demonstrates that authoritarian leaders are more likely to use force abroad. Similarly, Mitchell and Prins (2004) find that non-democratic leaders in international rivalry are more likely to initiate conflict when facing domestic problems.

<sup>7</sup> However, as Davies (2002) points out, their work can be questioned on theoretical and empirical grounds. On a theoretical level, Davies argues that the military cannot veto the use of force in all states. A methodological criticism arises from the use of a monadic research design, making it impossible to take into account strategic interaction between states.

Davies (2002) uses directed-dyad analysis to study the relationship between domestic strife and international dispute initiation. Davies's (2002) study is of particular interest for this analysis since he examines the effects of both violent and nonviolent internal strife. Distinguishing between these two types and various interactions between strife and additional independent variables, Davies (2002) finds that violent strife increases the probability of conflict initiation abroad, whereas nonviolent conflict reduces it. However, Davies's (2002) interpretation of findings is problematic on a methodological level since he interprets the constitutive terms for violent and nonviolent strife as if they were unconditional marginal effects.

Aside from diversionary arguments, instability could also result in opportunistic attacks by states taking advantage of the government's weakness. Enterline (1998) finds that newly authoritarian regimes are more likely to become the targets of attacks (while also being more aggressive than other types of regimes). Davies (2002) discovers that violent strife increases the probability of being targeted by other states, but that nonviolent strife has no effect on the likelihood of targeting.<sup>8</sup> Since states undergoing violent strife are also more likely to initiate conflict abroad, he suggests that this finding may indicate preemptive motives in leaders who believe they will be attacked in the future (Davies, 2002: 687). Yet an equally intuitive explanation would be that actors having an interest in the outcome of the conflict (such as rivals) might intervene into the conflict in order to achieve a favorable outcome.

Recent research by Gleditsch et al. (2008) looks at the relationship between violent domestic and international conflict and develops arguments that question the emphasis on diversion and opportunism in earlier studies. Gleditsch et al. (2008) suggest two broad mechanisms for a civil war–conflict linkage.<sup>9</sup> First, civil war within a state can result in the externalization of the conflict to neighboring states. Gleditsch et al. (2008) mention several possible paths for such externalization. For example, if members of the rebel group hide in sanctuaries across national borders, states engaged in civil war may target rebels in neighboring states. Research by Salehyan

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<sup>8</sup> Again, caution is warranted with regard to interpreting this result since Davies (2002) includes interaction terms between different types of strife and other variables but interprets constitutive terms as if they were unconditional effects.

<sup>9</sup> Gleditsch et al. (2008) discuss two additional mechanisms suggesting a relationship between the two types of conflict, namely diversion and opportunism (Gleditsch et al., 2008: 5–6). Diversion is similar to externalization in that it leads to the initiation of conflict abroad by the state experiencing civil war. However, unlike externalization it is not directly related to the insurgency. Opportunism, like intervention, would result in an increased probability of attack from the outside for the state experiencing civil war, but is distinct from intervention in that the issues at stake are unrelated to the civil war. The authors classify MIDs (militarized interstate disputes) that coincided with civil wars into the categories of intervention, externalization, spillover, diversion, and opportunism. However, the extent to which these distinctions can be upheld is questionable. For example, attacks from rival states, while not necessarily directly related to the civil war, could nevertheless have a strong indirect impact on the evolution or outcome of the conflict. A territorial dispute initiated by a rival during civil war may result in the diversion of crucial military resources away from the insurgency, thus potentially altering the balance of power between government and insurgents.

(2008) finds evidence for the claim that rebel sanctuaries across borders increase the likelihood of international conflict. Furthermore, refugee flows and subsequent humanitarian crises can create spillover effects and conflict between states (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006).

Second, civil wars receive a transnational dimension when states intervene into ongoing internal conflicts, as exemplified in the extensive literature on third-party interventions (Carment and Rowlands, 1998; Regan, 2002; Balch-Lindsay and Enterline, 2000). There are several reasons for third parties to develop an interest in ongoing conflicts. First, civil wars involving transnational ethnic groups have been shown to increase the probability of intervention (Carment and James, 1996; Davis and Moore, 1997; Mishali-Ram, 2006). Second, preexisting rivalries between states provide another explanation for foreign intervention. Rivals may intervene on the side of the rebels to weaken their opponent and drain its resources, but also to help remove a government seen as hostile to their aims. Research by Findley and Teo (2006) finds support for this mechanism by demonstrating that rivals usually intervene on the side of the opposition. Furthermore, Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski (2005) show that intervention by rival states prolongs the duration of civil war.

Research presented by Gleditsch et al. (2008) is helpful in that it more clearly delineates the causal processes linking internal and external conflict. Furthermore, their findings are consistent with earlier research by Davies (2002) on the effect of violent strife on the probability of international disputes. However, evidence is mixed with regard to the effect of nonviolent contestation or political instability on external conflict, with some studies finding a relationship yet others showing no effect on international conflict. The literature, while in some instances distinguishing between nonviolent and violent contestation, fails to consider whether the effect of these two types of turmoil may differently affect the probability of international conflict. It is possible that the inconsistent findings on domestic turmoil and conflict between states are a result of the failure to distinguish between violent and nonviolent threats to the state. The next section develops a theoretical argument that helps explain these inconsistent findings. More specifically, I expect that violent conflict increases the risk of international conflict independently, but that the effect of nonviolent challenges on international disputes is conditional on states' involvement in civil war.

## **Political Instability and Conflict in the Rivalry Environment**

This article reconciles inconsistencies in research on political instability, civil conflict, and international conflict. The argument focuses on international rivalry for two reasons. First, as Mitchell and Prins (2004) point out, states differ in the extent to which they can manipulate foreign policies. States can have friendly or belligerent relations with other actors, and the state of external affairs has important consequences on opportunities for diversionary or opportunistic behavior. International rivalry thus presents an environment rich with opportunities for the externalization of conflict by leaders or interventions by rivals exploiting temporary weakness. While relationships between domestic instability and international conflict could be studied by including all dyads over a specific time span, focusing

the analysis on international rivalry seems particularly useful. The hostile nature of rival relationships produces an environment characterized by fear, mistrust, and sometimes even hatred, thus providing ample opportunity for the initiation of international disputes. Second, it is likely that these competitive relationships create domestic incentives for leaders in rival relationships that differ from the ones experienced by states in nonrival settings. Domestic audiences in rival states may punish leaders for being too cooperative, producing incentives for embattled leaders to maintain or escalate an already contentious relationship (Colaresi, 2004).

The theoretical argument developed in more detail below expects that violent and nonviolent challenges to the state have different effects on the probability of international conflict. In line with earlier research, I expect that violent domestic conflict directly increases the risk of interstate disputes. However, nonviolent challenges to the state, or political instability more generally, are unlikely to have an independent effect on international conflict. While political instability can create incentives for leaders to divert from challenges to their authority (or entice elites in rival states to take advantage of such weakness), leaders are unlikely to act on such greater willingness unless an actual issue or disagreement with rival states creates the opportunity to do so. A simultaneous violent challenge to the government can produce precisely these opportunities. Since domestic conflict frequently involves spillover effects such as refugee flows or the creation of rebel bases in rival states, I argue that political instability increases the probability of international conflict only in combination with violent challenges to the state. Put differently, instability is expected to exacerbate the effect of civil war on international conflict.

Work by Gleditsch et al. (2008) provides important insights with regard to the expected effects of civil war, or violent challenges to the state, on international conflict. Gleditsch et al. emphasize externalization and intervention as mechanisms linking the domestic and interstate conflicts. I expect that both of these mechanisms are likely to play a role in a rivalry environment. First, externalization occurs when states carry out attacks against rebel sanctuaries in neighboring states (Gleditsch et al., 2008: 8). I expect that such externalization is particularly likely to occur when such sanctuaries are located in rival states, since preexisting tensions will provide reasons for an exacerbation of hostilities to rival states.

With regard to intervention, Gleditsch et al. (2008: 6–7) provide two especially convincing explanations for rival intervention into civil wars. First, rivals may support rebel groups in civil wars in order to weaken their adversary and shift the balance of power in the rivalry relationship. Second, rivals may intervene on the side of the insurgency to remove a government they perceive as hostile. Research on third-party interventions by Findley and Teo (2006) supports this expectation, showing that rivals frequently intervene on the side of the opposition. Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski (2005), furthermore, demonstrate that high probabilities of rival intervention can prolong the duration of civil wars for states in rivalry. Furthermore, their empirical analysis shows that almost 50% of all civil war interventions involve rival states (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2005: 352). Rivals of a state weakened by civil violence, therefore, are particularly interested in intervening on behalf of the opposition, as it can increase their bargaining position within the rivalry and

change the balance of power to their favor. The following two hypotheses summarize expectations developed above.<sup>10</sup>

*H1:* States experiencing civil war are more likely to initiate the use of force against rival states.

*H2:* States experiencing civil war are more likely to be targeted by rival states.

Arguments outlined in previous work suggest that political instability—nonviolent challenges to the state—creates incentives for both diversionary behavior by the destabilized state and opportunistic attacks from a rival state, which can then lead to international conflict. However, evidence on this link between instability and interstate disputes is mixed, and I argue here that instability (nonviolent challenges to the state) is unlikely to directly affect the probability of international disputes. While I do not dispute that instability can increase leaders' willingness to engage in diversionary or opportunistic behavior, willingness alone is not enough to trigger international disputes. This is because such motivations do not provide leaders with an opportunity, or actual issue, that would justify the use of force abroad. In this light, political instability creates the *willingness* to use force, whereas violent conflict produces the *opportunity* to engage in international conflict (Most and Starr, 1989). I will now describe how instability and civil war together create the willingness and opportunity to use force and thus contribute to the probability of international conflict initiation and targeting, respectively.

With regard to the initiation of disputes by embattled leaders, I expect that political instability in the absence of actual issues that provide an opportunity to use force will not increase the probability of conflict. Yet in cases where political turmoil occurs in combination with a violent challenge to the state, these violent challenges create exactly the willingness and opportunity necessary to initiate force abroad. For example, when Colombia's president Uribe faced a series of scandals and domestic challenges in 2007 in addition to the long-lasting civil war, the existence of rebel bases in neighboring Ecuador presented him with an opportunity to authorize cross-border incursions and simultaneously divert attention from domestic problems. Public opinion polls show that his approval ratings increased in the aftermath of the incursion.<sup>11</sup>

While it is likely that the political weakness of rival leaders produces motivations for rival states to take advantage of such weakness and intervene to support a more benevolent successor, I again claim that such willingness alone will not suffice to trigger the use of force. It will be difficult for rival states to intervene without an event, or actual opportunity, that justifies such action. However, if a simultaneous violent

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<sup>10</sup> Gleditsch et al. (2008) distinguish between intervention and opportunism as separate mechanisms, yet this distinction might be problematic in a rivalry environment. States in rivalry have conflicting interests over one or more issues that result in a lasting and hostile relationship. Thus, we would expect that the use of force by rivals is designed to impact the underlying relationship even if not directly related to the civil war.

<sup>11</sup> "Popularity of Colombia's president hits record high." March 13, 2008, Bogota, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN13286328>.



challenge to the state imposes negative externalities to the rival state, it can provide the pretext for military action against the rival leader. Civil war frequently imposes costs such as refugee flows, stray fire, or damage of cross-border infrastructure on neighboring states (Gleditsch et al., 2008: 487). Moreover, given that the rival leadership is weakened by coinciding violent and nonviolent challenges, it will increase opponents' expectations on the probability of successfully weakening its rival. The initial example describing the domestic conflict arising in the aftermath of Pakistan's election in 1970 nicely underlines this dynamic. India, Pakistan's longtime rival, followed the destabilizing events with great interest, but did not get militarily involved in the conflict until massive refugee flows provided it with a justification for military intervention.

A possible objection to the argument developed here is that political instability could simply be a characteristic or by-product of civil war. Some argue that civil war per definition implies the absence of clear authority over government, and thus instability must always be present when civil war occurs (Harff, 2003; Esty et al., 1998). Yet this argument neglects the fact that civil wars frequently are not total wars over control of the entire territory. Research on civil wars has shown that the percentage of a state's area that is subject to fighting varies tremendously across different civil wars. Analyzing several civil wars with detailed location data, Raleigh and Hegre (2010) find that the average area covered by fighting is 41% of a country's territory and that the most intense fighting is over an even smaller area of the country.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that the presence of civil war is equal to the absence of government authority. In addition, many civil wars last for years or even decades. Fearon (2004), for example, shows that the mean and median duration of civil wars are 11.4 and 7.4 years, respectively. The risk of a militarized interstate dispute is presumably not constant over the entire duration of such a conflict but varies over time. The presence of political instability, then, can explain when leaders decide to externalize conflict or the timing of foreign leaders' decisions to target an adversary.<sup>13</sup>

Taken together, the above discussion suggests that political instability exacerbates the effect of civil war on interstate disputes. In order to account for a possible interactive relationship between instability, domestic conflict, and international conflict, the final two hypotheses expect that political instability *combined* with civil war increases the probability of the initiation of conflict and the likelihood of attacks by rival states.<sup>14</sup> Rather than having an independent effect on interstate disputes, instability is expected to contribute to international conflict only in combination with

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note this is true for civil wars over control of territory *and* government. For example, the average area of territory experiencing rebel activity in the Ugandan civil war—a war fought over control of the government—was 44%.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the two concepts do not necessarily coincide empirically. Empirical results based on the operationalization of civil war and political instability used in this article show that 7.7% of cases in the data experienced civil war, compared to 9.4% of cases experiencing instability, yet only 1.1% of cases were simultaneously affected by both phenomena.

<sup>14</sup> One might object that the relationship between instability, civil war, and international conflict is indirect rather than interactive. Political instability would thus affect international

civil war. Hypotheses 3 and 4, therefore, investigate whether the effect of instability is conditional on states' civil war involvement.

*H3:* States experiencing political instability and civil war are more likely to initiate the use of force against rival states.

*H4:* States experiencing political instability and civil war are more likely to be targeted by rival states.

## **Research Design**

### ***Data***

Thompson's (2001) list of strategic rivalries is used to construct a directed-dyad dataset for all rival states for the time period under analysis. Thompson reports 173 rivalries for the 1816–2000 time frame.<sup>15</sup> Directed dyads for rivalries are coded in two directions. For example, the rivalry between Afghanistan and Iran includes one observation for each year of the Afghanistan–Iran rivalry and another observation for each year of the Iran–Afghanistan rivalry. Thompson's list of rivalries differs from other operationalizations of the rivalry concept. More specifically, Thompson (2001: 557) defines rivalry “as a perceptual categorizing process in which actors identify which states are sufficiently threatening competitors to qualify as enemies”. Thompson's emphasis on the perception of threat between states is useful since it does not limit the analysis to dyads experiencing a certain number of militarized disputes. This is especially important for this analysis since the dependent variable is the probability of a militarized interstate dispute. The dataset includes 14,584 directed-dyad years.<sup>16</sup>

A logistic regression model is used to estimate the relationship between dependent and independent variables. To account for temporal dependence, a peace years

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conflict only through its effect on civil war. The civil war literature has developed theoretical arguments and empirical findings that support this claim, indicating that political instability increases the likelihood of civil war in several studies (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Hegre et al., 2001; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006). Moreover, King et al. (1994: 173–174) warn that the inclusion of intervening variables—variables that are in part a consequence of a causal variable—can mask the effect of the antecedent variable. To ensure that the inclusion of civil war variables does not hide the effect of instability on international conflict, I estimated separate models with the instability and civil war indicators. Results are presented in Table 1 and show that coefficients for the instability variables were not significant, thus alleviating the methodological concerns raised in King et al. (1994). While this does not resolve possible tensions between the arguments proposed here and theoretical claims expecting a relationship between instability and civil war, re-estimating the models at a minimum suggests that statistical findings are not biased as a result. I thank one anonymous referee for raising this issue.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson reports a larger number than other lists on international rivalry, which is due to differences in operationalization. See Diehl and Goertz (2000) for an overview of other operationalizations.

<sup>16</sup> The smaller number of cases in the statistical results is a function of missing cases on some of the independent variables.

variable and natural cubic splines are included in all models (Beck et al., 1998). Robust standard errors are used to account for clustering on rival dyads.

### ***Dependent Variable***

The dependent variable in this analysis is the probability of militarized interstate dispute (MID) initiation. Data for MIDs come from the Correlates of War 2 MID 3.2 dataset, and MIDs are defined as militarized disputes between sovereign states below and at the threshold of war.<sup>17</sup> The MID data provide information on the severity of disputes. Only disputes involving the use of force are included in the results presented below. I also estimated a model that included all MIDs, regardless of severity, and the results were unchanged. The MID data identify which state in a dispute first took codeable military action, and I code these states as the initiators of a dispute. Ghosn et al. (2004: 138–140), however, emphasize that the term “initiator” should be used with great caution, since the first codeable act cannot be equated with identifying the state that is responsible for the conflict.

### ***Independent Variables<sup>18</sup>***

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, two independent variables measure whether each participant in a rivalry dyad experienced civil war. Data for civil wars come from the Correlates of War project.<sup>19</sup> Civil wars are defined as conflicts between a state and one or more non-state actors with a minimum death count of 1,000 battle-related deaths over the course of the conflict. Since I am interested in the effect of civil war on interstate conflict, the variable is coded 1 for states with ongoing civil war, 0 otherwise. Civil wars could result in externalization or intervention for the whole duration of the conflict, not just the year of civil war onset. Separate variables for the initiator and the target of each dyad are created. It is expected that civil war occurrence increases the probability of dispute initiation and attack. To ensure that results are not influenced by the civil war measure utilized in this analysis, I conduct robustness checks with data on armed civil conflicts from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Gleditsch et al., 2002). Results for the alternative civil war measure are presented in Table 3.

To test the final two hypotheses, I first create variables measuring the presence of political instability for each member of a rivalry dyad. This variable measures whether each country in a rivalry dyad experienced changes equal to or greater than 2 in its executive constraints score in the past 3 years.<sup>20</sup> There are two differences between this instability measure and the variable used in Fearon and Laitin (2003). First, since the focus of this study is to investigate whether instability and civil war influence the risk of international conflict separately or only in combination with civil war, it is important to ensure that the instability variable is distinct from a measure of violence. First, I code periods of foreign interruption (–66), interregnum (–77),

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<sup>17</sup> Data in <http://cow2.la.psu.edu/COW2%20Data/MIDs/MID3.html>.

<sup>18</sup> To avoid endogeneity problems, independent variables are lagged by one year.

<sup>19</sup> Data are available at <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> Data come from the Polity IV project, available online at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

and transition (–88) as missing. Cases of foreign interruption are excluded from the analysis because such instances may be included in the coding of MIDs. Cases of interregnum and transition are coded as missing because of likely contamination of these observations with the occurrence of internal violence, which would make it impossible to distinguish between the effects of nonviolent and violent challenges to the state. The creators of the Polity data warn that these periods “are especially prone to the outbreak of political violence” (Polity IV Project).<sup>21</sup> Second, rather than using the composite Polity score, I use only the component measuring the degree of constraints on the chief executive to construct this variable. Research by Vreeland (2008) has shown that several components of the composite polity score are related to the occurrence of civil war. According to Vreeland (2008), civil war or other forms of political violence do not enter this component in any of its categories.<sup>22</sup> The executive constraints component captures “the extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives, whether individuals or collectivities” and ranges from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating greater constraints (Marshall and Jaggers, 2005). To create the instability measure, I first calculated whether states experienced changes in executive constraints over the last three years, which produced values ranging from –6 to +6. I then transformed these values into a dichotomous measure of instability. A value of 1 indicates the presence of political instability, and a value of 0 indicates no change for each member of a rivalry dyad. Two separate variables are created, one for the initiator of a dispute, another for the target of a dispute.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, I create interaction terms between the measures for instability and the variables measuring an ongoing civil war. Since both of the constitutive terms of this measure are dichotomous, the interaction term takes the values 0 or 1. I again create a separate measure for the initiator and the target in each rivalry dyad. I anticipate that the presence of instability *combined* with the occurrence of civil war increases the probability of initiating the use of force and being targeted by a rival.

Several control variables known to affect the initiation of militarized interstate disputes are added to the model. First, to investigate whether power symmetry leads to lower probability of conflict among states, I measure the capability ratio for each dyad. CINC scores are used to construct this variable.<sup>23</sup> I take the natural logarithm of the ratio of the CINC score of the stronger dyad member to the weaker member’s

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<sup>21</sup> Robustness tests in which periods of interregnum (–77) and transition (–88) are coded as instances of instability are presented in Table 4.

<sup>22</sup> Factor analysis on the polity index by Gleditsch and Ward (1997) has shown that the executive constraints component accounts for the most variation in the composite score of all components, thus making it a good choice.

<sup>23</sup> The CINC score is a composite measure of the COW national capabilities index as developed by Singer et al. (1972). This is an index of a state’s proportion of total system capabilities in six areas: the country’s iron/steel production, the country’s urban population, the country’s total population, the country’s total military expenditures, the country’s total military personnel, and the country’s total amount of energy production.

capabilities index. Research suggests that power asymmetries increase the probability of international conflict. Second, alliances are thought to form as responses to external security threats and are aimed at increasing their members' power relative to other states. It is expected that for the duration of an alliance, allies should engage in more cooperative behavior than non-allied countries and therefore have lower rates of conflict onset. The variable was constructed using data on formal alliance membership from the Correlates of War project (Gibler and Sarkees, 2004).<sup>24</sup> Third, I control for the effect of contiguity. Evidence strongly suggests that contiguous states are more likely to experience the onset of interstate disputes (Vasquez, 1993). Data for contiguity come from the Correlates of War project.<sup>25</sup> This variable is coded 1 when dyads are jointly contiguous by land, 0 otherwise. A final control variable indicates whether both members of a dyad are democracies. Data for this variable come from the Polity IV project. A dyad is coded as jointly democratic if both members score 6 or higher on the composite polity score.

### **Results**

The first three models in Table 1 present logistic regression results for the instability and civil war variables in the initiator and target but exclude the interactions. Berry et al. (2010) point out that independent variables in logit models can interact even in the absence of interaction terms, and I therefore present a model including only the instability variables (model 1), the civil war variables (model 2), and both instability and civil war measures (model 3) before a model including the interaction terms between these measures (model 4).<sup>26</sup>

The first model includes only the variables for political instability in initiators and target states. The coefficients for the variables measuring instability in the initiator and target state fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The theoretical section argued that instability is not expected to independently affect the probability of MID initiation or targeting, which is confirmed in model 1. The second model includes only the civil war variables. Consistent with earlier research, civil war in both the initiator and the target increases the probability of MID initiation. The third model includes both the measures for the instability and the civil war variables and corroborates results in models 1 and 2. The instability variables are again insignificant, showing that they have no independent effect on the likelihood of MID initiation. Civil war in both the initiator and target increases the probability of MID onset, thus confirming the first two hypotheses. The coefficient for civil war in the initiator is positive and significant at the 90% confidence level ( $z = 1.78$ ), thus showing that states are more likely to initiate disputes abroad when facing violent domestic challenges. Substantively, the likelihood of MID initiation increases by 25% if the civil war measure is varied from 0 to 1. During periods of civil war, states are thus more likely to externalize disputes. Results also show that

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<sup>24</sup> Dyadic alliance data are available at <http://cow2.la.psu.edu/COW2%20Data/Alliances/alliance.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Data are available at <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> Diagnostic tests for models presented in Table 1 did not indicate problems with model specification, multicollinearity, or influential observations.

*Table 1.* Logistic Regression Results for the Probability of MID Initiation, 1816–2000

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>
Instability in Initiator	-0.116 (0.134)	–	-0.124 (0.134)	-0.287* (0.154)	-0.383** (0.169)
Instability in Target	0.097 (0.125)	–	0.089 (0.125)	0.054 (0.136)	0.005 (0.155)
Civil War in Initiator	–	0.221* (0.128)	0.228* (0.128)	0.079 (0.145)	0.296 (0.182)
Civil War in Target	–	0.281** (0.129)	0.280** (0.129)	0.232* (0.141)	0.252 (0.174)
Instability*Civil War in Initiator	–	–	–	0.892*** (0.327)	0.647* (0.362)
Instability*Civil War in Target	–	–	–	0.252 (0.348)	0.657* (0.383)
Relative Power	-0.002 (0.046)	-0.013 (0.046)	0.003 (0.047)	0.003 (0.047)	-0.128 (0.127)
Joint Alliance	-0.259** (0.110)	-0.281** (0.109)	-0.276** (0.110)	-0.279** (0.111)	0.306* (0.178)
Contiguity	0.597*** (0.112)	0.592*** (0.112)	0.587*** (0.112)	0.592*** (0.112)	0.608** (0.309)
Joint Democracy	0.346* (0.178)	0.331* (0.179)	0.330* (0.180)	0.310* (0.182)	0.201 (0.240)
N	12,362	12,490	12,362	12,362	9,393
Wald Chi	100.28	116.80	117.11	126.12	LR(chi)=37.0

Standard errors in parentheses and adjusted for clustering on each dyad in models 1–4. Coefficients for the peace year variable and splines are not reported. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$ .

civil war in the target state increases the risk of a militarized interstate dispute, thus confirming Hypothesis 2. The coefficient is significant and positive ( $z = 2.16$ ). In terms of a substantive effect, the probability of being targeted in a MID increases by 32% when the civil war variable is varied from 0 to 1 (and all other variables are held constant). States experiencing civil war are therefore more likely to be the target of interventions or opportunistic attacks by rival states. The finding is in line with earlier research showing that rivals frequently intervene into civil wars on the side of the rebels. By taking advantage of temporary weakness in an opponent, rival states can shift the balance of power to their favor or help eliminate a regime seen as hostile to their goals (Findley and Teo, 2006). The results thus confirm findings in Gleditsch et al.’s (2008) work, which finds strong support for diversionary and/or externalization behavior in states experiencing civil war.

The control variables perform mostly as expected. Results show no relationship between relative capabilities and dispute initiation. Joint alliance membership reduces the risk of dispute initiation whereas contiguity increases the probability of initiating international disputes. Interestingly, joint democracy is positive and significant (albeit weakly), suggesting that rival-dyads with democratic regimes are more likely to experience MIDs. One possible explanation for this finding is that

rivalries are primarily driven by the dynamics of autocratic states. Only a small number of rivalries in the data are jointly democratic, and the finding may thus be the result of outliers.

The final two hypotheses investigate whether the combined effect of instability and civil war increases the probability of international conflict. I argued that one possible explanation for inconsistent findings on the relationship between instability and international conflict could be that nonviolent challenges to a leader's authority alone do not create the opportunities necessary for the use of force against rival states. To account for this relationship, interaction terms between the instability and civil war variable for initiators and targets are included in the fourth model in Table 1. Model 4 includes an interaction term for political instability and civil war for initiating states. The coefficient is positive and significant ( $z = 2.72$ ) and the probability of MID initiation increases by 86.5% if constitutive terms and the interaction are varied from 0 to 1. However, as Berry et al. (2010) point out, a statistically significant interaction term is not sufficient for substantively meaningful interaction among independent variables in their influence on  $\Pr(Y)$ . I follow Berry et al.'s (2010) recommendation and use CLARIFY to estimate a second difference in the probability of MID initiation showing the change in the effect of civil war on MID initiation when political instability is present or absent (and other variables fixed at their means). Results produce a second difference of 0.055, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, with a confidence interval of (0.014, 0.111).<sup>27</sup> Empirical evidence therefore supports the contention that civil war and political instability interact in influencing the probability of MID initiation.

This evidence confirms Hypothesis 3, which expected that instability's effect on international conflict initiation is conditional upon states' experiencing civil war. Political instability, therefore, exacerbates the effect of civil war in initiating states. When leaders are faced with simultaneous nonviolent and violent challenges to their power, they are more likely to externalize conflicts and initiate against rivals. Hypothesis 4 is not supported. The coefficient for the interaction term in target states is positive but not significant. This suggests that experiencing instability and civil war does not increase the probability of being targeted by rival states.

The final model presented in Table 1 employs a fixed-effects logit model rather than a standard estimator. The interaction for instability and civil war in initiators is again positive and weakly significant ( $z = 1.79$ ). Interestingly, results for the interaction term in the target are positive and significant in this model (albeit weakly at the 90% confidence level). This finding generates qualified support for the fourth hypothesis, indicating that states experiencing instability and civil war are more likely to be targeted by rival states. However, it is important to note that this result is not consistent across model specifications. Tables 2 and 3 present substantive effects of significant variables employed in Table 1.

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<sup>27</sup>  $[\Pr(\text{MID initiation})] = [\Pr(\text{MID initiation} \mid \text{civil war present, instability present}) - \Pr(\text{MID initiation} \mid \text{civil war absent, instability present})] - [\Pr(\text{MID initiation} \mid \text{civil war present, instability absent}) - \Pr(\text{MID initiation} \mid \text{civil war absent, instability absent})] = [(0.099 - 0.039) - (0.056 - 0.051)] = 0.055$ .

*Table 2. Predicted Probability of MID Initiation (Clarify)*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Civil War in Initiator=0	0.050	–
Civil War in Initiator=1	0.062	
Civil War in Target=0	0.050	–
Civil War in Target=1	0.065	
Instability*Civil War in Initiator=0	–	0.051
Instability*Civil War in Initiator=1		0.099
Joint Alliance=0	0.050	0.051
Joint Alliance=1	0.039	0.039
Contiguity=0	0.038	0.028
Contiguity=1	0.050	0.051
Joint Democracy=0	0.050	0.051
Joint Democracy=1	0.069	0.069

Entries show the probability of a militarized interstate dispute onset for discrete values of significant dichotomous variables, holding other independent variables at their means for continuous variables and modes for dichotomous indicators. Predicted probabilities for the interaction are calculated by varying the constitutive terms and the interaction from 0 to 1.

Table 2 presents the probability of dispute initiation for statistically significant variables in models 3 and 4. I used CLARIFY to calculate the probability of a militarized interstate dispute at various values of independent variables (Tomz et al., 2001). The probability of MID initiation increases from 0.05 to 0.062 for initiators experiencing civil wars. Target states experiencing civil war face a 0.065 probability of MID onset compared to a 0.05 risk in states not exposed to civil war. For the model including the interaction term, the probability of a MID initiation increases from 0.051 to 0.099 when states experience civil war and political instability simultaneously.

Table 3 again illustrates substantive effects of results presented in Table 2 but presents changes in the probability of MID initiation for all values of interest for the civil war and instability measures presented in model 4. The table shows that the presence of civil war in initiating states increases the probability of civil war, but only slightly (from 0.051 to 0.056). Yet when both civil war and instability are present in initiating states, the probability of MID initiation increases almost twofold, from 0.051 to 0.099.

### ***Robustness Tests***

I conduct several robustness tests to ensure that results are not influenced by the operationalization of variables employed. Results for robustness tests are presented in Table 4. The first two models present results in which the instability variables were recoded to include transition scores for interregnum (–77) and transition (–88) in the Polity data as instances of instability. Results for these models are very similar to those presented in Table 1 and show that instability alone does not increase the risk of militarized interstate disputes. The second model includes the interactions and



Table 3. Predicted Probability of MID Initiation, Model 4 in Table 2 (Clarify)

	Civil War	No Civil War
Political Instability	Pr(MID Initiator)=0.099 Pr(MID Target)=0.085	Pr(MID Initiator)=0.039 Pr(MID Target)=0.054
No Political Instability	Pr(MID Initiator)= 0.056 Pr(MID Target)=0.064	Pr(MID Initiator)=0.051 Pr(MID Target)= 0.051

shows that the combined effect of instability and civil war increases the likelihood of a MID in initiators.

Models 3 and 4 in Table 4 show results for alternative indicators of political instability. Results in Table 1 are based on changes in the institutional constraints placed on the decision-making power of chief executives. I argued in the theoretical section that such changes increase leaders' willingness to use force abroad because they are threatened in their position. Yet political instability could also be operationalized by collecting data on behavioral challenges to the state, such as protests and demonstrations. I create behavioral indicators of political instability based on data collected by Banks (1996). While the data focus mostly on violent domestic events such as riots, assassinations, and purges, Banks (1996) includes an indicator for peaceful demonstrations which seems particularly suited to operationalize the concept of nonviolent challenges to the state.<sup>28</sup> Data for peaceful demonstrations are available for the post-1945 period. I create a dummy variable coded 1 if one or more peaceful demonstrations occurred in a given country-year for initiator and target states, 0 otherwise.<sup>29</sup> Results show that the presence of peaceful demonstrations alone has no effect on the onset of a MID in initiators. However, the coefficient for demonstrations in target states is positive and weakly significant ( $z = 1.74$ ), suggesting that demonstrations can increase the probability of international conflict in the absence of civil war. Yet it is possible that the indicator for demonstrations contains instances of where such protests turned violent, which would explain this finding. Model 4 in Table 4 includes the interaction terms between the demonstration and civil war variables. Results are consistent with the earlier findings, showing that presence of behavioral instability and civil war increases the probability of MID initiation for initiators ( $z = 2.08$ ). I do not find a similar exacerbating effect for target states.

A second robustness test, presented in models 5 and 6 in Table 4, evaluates whether results hold for alternative measures of civil war. The UCDP armed conflict data use a lower battle-death threshold than the COW civil war measure, and it will thus be interesting to see whether results are confirmed using an alternative specification. Since the Uppsala armed conflict data are available only for the post-1946 period, the

<sup>28</sup> Demonstrations are defined in the coding manual as "any peaceful public gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature" (Banks, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Approximately 24% of country-years experienced peaceful demonstrations.

Table 4. Robustness Tests, Alternative Specifications of Independent Variables and Politically Relevant Dyads

Variables	Model 1 Polity Transition Scores	Model 2 Polity Transition Scores	Model 3 Behavioral Instability	Model 4 Behavioral Instability	Model 5 UCDP Civil Wars	Model 6 UCDP Civil Wars	Model 7 Politically Relevant Dyads	Model 8 Politically Relevant Dyads
Instability in Initiator	-0.196 (0.122)	-0.295** (0.139)	-	-	-0.091 (0.155)	-0.212 (0.172)	0.139 (0.106)	0.191* (0.115)
Instability in Target	0.028 (0.114)	-0.032 (0.127)	-	-	0.016 (0.150)	0.044 (0.159)	0.176* (0.103)	0.158 (0.116)
Demonstrations in Initiator	-	-	0.147 (0.115)	0.061 (0.125)	-	-	-	-
Demonstrations in Target	-	-	0.199* (0.114)	0.148 (0.128)	-	-	-	-
Civil War in Initiator	0.241* (0.128)	0.121 (0.149)	0.323** (0.153)	0.152 (0.181)	-	-	0.549** (0.089)	0.583** (0.095)
Civil War in Target	0.281** (0.129)	0.190 (0.150)	0.144 (0.164)	0.008 (0.194)	-	-	0.504** (0.092)	0.493** (0.099)
UCDP Civil War in Initiator	-	-	-	-	0.308** (0.114)	0.274** (0.116)	-	-
UCDP Civil War in Target	-	-	-	-	0.307** (0.113)	0.316** (0.114)	-	-
Instability*Civil War in Initiator	-	0.541* (0.305)	-	-	-	0.700* (0.357)	-	-0.277 (0.277)

Table 4. (Continued)

Variables	Model 1 Polity Transition Scores	Model 2 Polity Transition Scores	Model 3 Behavioral Instability	Model 4 Behavioral Instability	Model 5 UCDP Civil Wars	Model 6 UCDP Civil Wars	Model 7 Politically Relevant Dyads	Model 8 Politically Relevant Dyads
Instability*Civil War in Target	-	0.367 (0.299)	-	-	-	-0.198 (0.430)	-	0.083 (0.256)
Demonstrations*Civil War in Initiator	-	-	-	0.709** (0.341)	-	-	-	-
Demonstrations*Civil War in Target	-	-	-	0.566 (0.392)	-	-	-	-
Relative Power	0.004 (0.047)	0.006 (0.046)	-0.070 (0.055)	-0.067 (0.055)	-0.009 (0.058)	-0.009 (0.058)	-0.191*** (0.021)	-0.191*** (0.021)
Joint Alliance	-0.272** (0.110)	-0.274** (0.110)	-0.818*** (0.124)	-0.847*** (0.124)	-0.795*** (0.126)	-0.801*** (0.126)	-0.399*** (0.077)	-0.399*** (0.077)
Contiguity	0.593*** (0.112)	0.596*** (0.112)	1.130*** (0.196)	1.131*** (0.197)	1.164*** (0.196)	1.161*** (0.196)	1.253*** (0.076)	1.253*** (0.076)
Joint Democracy	0.331* (0.179)	0.325* (0.179)	-0.108 (0.238)	-0.112 (0.238)	-0.061 (0.239)	-0.070 (0.240)	-0.676*** (0.115)	-0.676*** (0.115)
N	12,362	12,362	5,098	5,098	4,970	4,970	146,718	146,718
Wald Chi	119.10	124.72	93.89	101.85	97.85	101.20	1,249.53	1,251.49

Standard errors in parentheses and adjusted for clustering on each dyad. Coefficients for the peace year variable and splines are not reported.  
\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$ .

sample is significantly smaller. Results, however, are very similar to those presented in earlier models. I observe that instability has no direct effect on the probability of a MID, whereas armed intrastate conflict in both initiators and targets increases the likelihood of interstate disputes. Moreover, when interaction terms are included (model 6 in Table 4), findings in the earlier analysis are confirmed. The combined effect of civil war and instability increases the likelihood of dispute initiation ( $z = 1.96$ ), indicating again that instability exacerbates the effect of violent domestic conflict on international disputes. The interaction term for target states, however, is again insignificant, meaning that no such relationship is confirmed for interventions by rival states.

A final robustness test extends the analysis to a larger sample of states. I constructed a dataset for politically relevant dyads, thus including all pairs of states that are either contiguous or contain one major power. Results for politically relevant dyads are presented in models 7 and 8 and fail to show support for the main arguments put forward in this article. Model 7 presents the effect of civil war and instability without the interaction terms. Civil war in initiator and target states increases the risk of MID initiation. Model 8 includes the interaction terms yet neither interaction term attains statistical significance, thus not confirming the results in previous models. The results thus suggest that leaders' tendency to externalize conflict when facing both violent and nonviolent challenges to their power holds only for states in already hostile relationships. This finding is in line with earlier research demonstrating that states in rival relationships are subject to different domestic incentives than nonrival states. For example, Mitchell and Prins (2004) show that states experiencing domestic turmoil are more likely to initiate conflict abroad in settings of rivalry but not in nonrival settings. Research by Colaresi (2004) finds that cooperative leaders in rivalry are more likely to be deselected from power than leaders engaging in more conflictual behavior, but no such effect exists for leaders in nonrival settings. Rival leaders threatened by political instability, therefore, anticipate this expected punishment and externalize conflict abroad to avoid being ousted from power, yet no such effect is found for nonrival states.<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It was the goal of this article to explore the relationship between instability, civil conflict, and conflict between states. I argued in the theoretical section that instability may provide leaders with the willingness to initiate conflict abroad, but that issues arising because of simultaneous violent challenges create the necessary opportunity to do so. Findings show that instability and civil war jointly increase the probability of interstate conflict initiation and targeting, although results are less robust with regard to targeting. When the two concepts are analyzed separately, instability has

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<sup>30</sup>In addition, including all politically relevant dyads increases the size of the dataset to over 145,000 observations, but the data consequently contain a large number of pairs of states that never experience conflict. In the data for politically relevant dyads, only 1.2% of cases experience a militarized interstate dispute, compared to 4.7% in the rivalry dataset. Limiting the data to rivalries might thus better reflect variation in the extent to which states have the opportunity to engage in international conflict.

no independent effect on the probability of outside attacks, whereas the occurrence of civil war increases the probability of MID initiation and targeting by rival states regardless of whether instability is present. Taken together, evidence strongly suggests that political instability and civil war should be analyzed in combination rather than as separate events. The findings are robust to alternative specifications of the independent variables, showing that results hold for behavioral indicators of political instability and civil war measures with a lower battle-death threshold.

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