

# Conflict by Design

## Institutions, Incumbent Security, and Conflict Initiation\*

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### Abstract

Recent years have seen a growth in interest in whether and how domestic democratic institutions influence the likelihood of international conflict initiation. Scholars have generated numerous results demonstrating how the most common democratic institutions – electoral systems, executive-parliamentary relations, single-party or coalition governments – influence the likelihood of cross-border belligerence. Employing government-level data from 1402 governments in 100 countries between 1945 and 2002, we demonstrate that the effect of institutions depend on only two distinct mechanisms. Institutions that increase the government's share of parliamentary seats increase the hazard of conflict initiation while those institutions that increase the number of decision makers, decrease international initiation. Moreover, we demonstrate that these effects are nonlinear and vary by level of democracy.

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Do domestic institutions matter for international politics? Copious evidence underscoring the democratic peace answers this question in the affirmative. Less intellectual certainty, however, greets the question of what features of democracies underly these results. Recent studies have begun to investigate just what characteristics of democracies account for differences in international aggression between autocracies and democracies and, indeed, between different types of democracies. Do, for example, proportional or majoritarian electoral institutions, single-party or coalition governments, or presidential or parliamentary regimes reduce the probability that a government initiates an international conflict? Implicit in these questions is a more fundamental query about mechanism: How do those institutions that indeed influence conflict behavior modify the incentives and, hence, behavior of the actors who can initiate conflict? Until now, institutional studies of international conflict behavior have focused on the primary institutional categories that occur in democracies, leaving a considerable gap in inference between institutional effects and actor behavior. We address this omission.

Consider a study, say, that demonstrates that single-party majority governments are more conflict prone than other constellations. We have learned a fact without a cause. Are such governments more conflict prone because they do not depend on the acquiescence of coalition partners or because they have a majority? How would the likelihood of belligerence change if we combined such a single-party majority government with other institutions that decreased the electoral security of the government or necessitated more actors in decision-making? What would we expect if we altered the size of the majority? Or the number of coalition partners? Without measures that more closely connect institutions to a mechanism, institutional research offer poor explanation and equally poor prediction.

In this paper, we identify two mechanisms that connect institutions to conflict initiation and we argue that the numerous institutional effects identified in

previous research are accounted for by one or both of them. First, we argue and demonstrate, consistent with the “peace through insecurity” argument (Chiozza and Goemans, 2003), that those institutions that increase the government’s share of parliamentary seats – and hence the government’s security in office – increase the likelihood of conflict initiation. Second, we also demonstrate, controlling for the size of a majority and consistent with veto players arguments of policy formation (Tsebelis, 1995, e.g.), that the likelihood of conflict initiations declines as the number of coalition members increases. We argue, in short, that any combination of institutions that (a) reduces the government’s share in the legislature and (b) increases the number of decision makers in government will decrease the likelihood of a government initiating an international conflict. Where these effects conflict, we expect indeterminate results. Moreover, the magnitude and, indeed, presence of these effects are conditional on the degree of democracy in a given country and the magnitude of a government’s seat share and coalition size. Where institutions are weak – such as in less consolidated democracies – they should exhibit weaker effects on incumbent security and, consequently, conflict initiation. Where a parliamentary majority or coalition size is already large a marginal increase should have a diminished effect.

Understanding the underlying mechanisms of how institutions influence the onset of cross-border disputes is not only key to understanding which combinations of institutions have what effects but it also enables international relations scholars to draw on a richer set of comparative institutional knowledge. If institutions are a distal constraint on conflict that first must influence the proximate constraints of government security (i.e., parliamentary majority) and/or the number of veto players (i.e., parties in the coalition), then the extensive research in comparative politics on how institutions influence coalition building and the decisiveness of

electoral outcomes becomes immediately relevant for understanding international conflict (Laver and Schofield, 1998; Tsebelis, 2002).

The contribution of this paper, however, is not limited to the identification of political mechanisms. Although isolating mechanisms rather than inferring causal mechanisms from observationally equivalent institutional results is our primary purpose – we base our analysis on the most extensive and, we argue, most appropriate dataset yet employed for the analysis of institutional influences on conflict behavior. We run multiple-failure Cox hazard analyses on 1402 governments in 100 countries that have had at least one democratically elected government between 1945 and the end of 2002. Because the sample includes many governments that only qualify as democratic under the loosest definition, we also run all models on both consolidated and unconsolidated democracies. We posit and find that most institutional effects wane as democracy weakens but, interestingly, some results are surprisingly persistent.

## Previous Literature

The democratic peace is the most visible and robust finding in the academic study of international relations. But what is it about democracy that keeps democratic countries from fighting each other, but not non-democracies? What is it about the nature of democracy that discourages conflict involvement? A number of scholars suggest theoretical foundations such as peace-loving norms (Doyle 1986), greater political accountability as a result of institutional checks-and-balances or public debates (Morgan and Campbell 1991; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992) and the ability to generate audience costs and therefore convey credible signals regarding its true intentions (Smith 1992; Fearon 1994; Schultz 1999).

These studies are monadic because they treat complex circumstances in which democratic leaders find themselves as a kind of black box.

Apart from the simple dichotomous division of democracy vs. non-democracy, scholarly attention has been paid to variations within democratic political processes, and their impacts on a policymaker's disposition to start international disputes. A large number of studies have examined the domestic political factors that contribute to the determinants of foreign policy, in particular the likelihood of engaging in external disputes (Prins and Sprecher, 1999; Auerswald, 2000; Ireland and Gartner, 2001; Reiter and Tillman, 2002; Leblang and Chan, 2003; Palmer, London and Regan, N.d.; Clark and Nordstrom, 2005). Also more recently, (Brule 2006; Kaarbo and Beasley 2008; Ferejohn and Rosenbluth 2008; Koch 2009).

One set of scholars have turned to variations in formal criteria of constitutions such as executive-legislative relations or electoral systems. For example, Leblang and Chan (2003) argue that institutional differences among established democracies explain their war involvement. In particular, they show that a proportional representation electoral system is conducive to involvement in interstate disputes. Auerswald (1999) argues that strong presidential governments are more war-prone than weak presidential governments or majority parliamentary governments. The institutional line of democratic peace research, however, begs an answer to the following question. Previous studies have taught us that political institutions provide an incumbent policymaker with important rules of the game. While a given electoral system and government formation certainly work as constraints to foreign policymaking, these rules are in general stable over time in each country. Not surprisingly, we observe in most cases cross-national variations in terms of electoral system and the type of government formation. This implies that our understanding of determinants of conflict onset is limited when we focus only on these institutions. For example, foreign policymakers in the US are constrained

by their formal institutions such as first-past-the-post elections and an independent executive (president) free of dependence on parliamentary confidence. At the same time, the US presidents show ample variations in terms of frequency and strength of involvement in foreign affairs. Hence, the question: If the institutional variables no longer vary within the US system over time, what explains variations in conflict behaviors of different administrations?

A partial answer to this question comes from a newer line of research that draws from studies of coalition dynamics in comparative politics (Shugart and Carey, 1992; Laver and Schofield, 1998; Tsebelis, 2002). Not surprisingly, coalition dynamics, in contrast to institutions that rarely vary over time in a given country, are function of complicated day-to-day political process including election results, and therefore we can explain temporal variations in each country. As is the case with formal political institutions, however, we also expect that we expect that measures of the government's power in the legislature and the number of coalition partners in government will weaken as the importance of institutions weakens. Where appeals to or threats of extra-constitutional measures are credible, power in constitutionally established bodies matters less. Extant literature has shown that international conflicts are more likely when a government consists of a single-party majority (Clark and Nordstrom 2005), multiple-party coalition (Prins and Sprecher 1999), or right-wing parties (Palmer, London, and Regan 2004). Moreover, unified governments (Clark 2000) or strong public consent (Reiter and Tillman 2002) also contribute to conflict involvement, whereas minority governments are averse to foreign belligerence (Ireland and Gartner 2001; Clark and Nordstrom 2005). Finally, Koch (2009) finds that left governments tend to have shorter conflicts.

All of these papers have made important contributions to the domestic institutional and political determinants of international conflict. Nevertheless, a careful

reader is left wondering *why* these types of institutions, coalitions and partisanship influence the likelihood of conflict initiation. Elman (2000, p.125) already underscored this shortcoming, noting that "structure alone does not account for war propensities—we need to specify actors' preferences before structure can tell us anything." Despite an extensive and growing literature on the domestic determinants of war and peace, our understanding remains incomplete because there are few studies that posit and test underlying mechanisms that link structural institutions, political outcomes and consequent behaviors of policymakers. This paper hopes to address this omission.

## Method and Data

We analyze how variations within domestic political systems affect the government incumbent's propensity to start an international conflict. Our data set includes 1402 cabinets in 100 countries ranging from 1945 to 2002. Unlike country-level data sets that have been used in a number of previous studies (Maoz and Russett 1993; Prins and Sprecher 1999; Reiter and Tillman 2002; Clark and Nordstrom 2005), we focus on a new government-level data set with all conflict information in each government and without institutional restrictions. Since governments are the relevant actors and their features are important covariates, the government level of analysis is the most appropriate. Extant duration studies in this area (Ireland and Gartner 2001; Koch 2009) also rely on the government-level analysis. Our data set expands beyond that of Ireland and Gartner (2001), arguably the best dataset for this topic, in that (1) we impose no restrictions on the kind of executive, including both parliamentary, presidential and mixed democracies, (2) we consider the entire set of international crises initiated by each government, not just duration only up to the first initiation of a conflict and (3) we include

governments from more countries (100 instead of 18) but over fewer years (1945-2002 instead of 1918 - 1990).

The dependent variable is the time that a government has gone without initiating a conflict. That is, we use the length of time in days from either a formation of government or a previous conflict initiation to either its next conflict initiation (failure), or the end of government (censored). Because a government can engage in multiple conflicts as an initiator, our number of observations becomes 1819, which is greater than the number of cabinets. Duration date data are taken from the combination of (1) Global Database of Political Institutions and Economic Performance (Cheibub and Kalandrakis 2004) for the government duration information and (2) the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) project (Bennet and Stam 2000; Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996) for the conflict initiation information. It is notable that our data are based on the comprehensive set of governments in 100 countries between 1945 and 2002, and not based on the sub-sample of governments that actually experienced international disputes. The number of countries drops to 100 once we exclude those without polity data. The fact that our data set does not select on dispute cases provides us with a distinctive advantage over previous studies that are possibly subject to selection problem.<sup>1</sup>

To model the determinants of conflict initiation, we use explanatory variables that measure major constraints/incentives for a government leader from domestic and international perspectives. For the domestic variables, we rely again on Global Database of Political Institutions and Economic Performance (Cheibub and Kalandrakis 2004), while the source of data is the MID project (Bennet and Stam 2000; Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996) for other variables. Most importantly for the purpose of this study, we investigate two conceptually different constraints/incentives

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<sup>1</sup>Koch (2009) addresses this problem by (1) running a separate regression of dispute onset using “a random sample of all non dispute dyad months involving the 20 countries under investigation,” and (2) including the predicted probability of dispute onset as a regressor in duration analysis.

from domestic political perspectives. Specifically, we distinguish domestic political security mechanisms from domestic institutional constraints. As discussed above, we expect that foreign policy decisions should be affected by the careful consideration of political security, or domestic coalition constraints, because they have direct implications for the extent to which a government leader can safely pursue risky policies such as international disputes. We also expect that these coalitional effects are expected to be salient compared to almost non-varying institutional factors in explaining the likelihood of initiating conflicts.

Our main independent variables of coalition security operationalize the degree of government security based on two aspects: (1) coalition size in the legislature and (2) the number of parties in the coalition. First, *Government share* is a continuous variable that calculates the share of parliament's seats held by governing parties as a measure of government security in the legislature. As the value of *Government share* increases, the cost of securing a government decreases, and hence the power of governing parties in the legislature should increase. Thus, we expect *Government share* to be positively associated with hazard ratio of conflict initiation. *Government share* has a mean value of 0.48 with a standard deviation of 0.25. Second, *Government parties* counts the number of political parties in government. Governments that consist of more parties imply that strong consensus is required for a leader in government to conduct conflict policies that are typically expensive and controversial as well than governments with less parties. This reasoning leads to our expectation that *Government parties* should decrease the hazard rate of failure. *Government parties* ranges from one to 10 with mean of 2.137 and standard deviation of 1.557. We argue that these coalition-related variables are key determinants of international crisis even when we control various institutional constraints that each government usually takes as given. In fact, institutions exert influence on conflict behavior primarily by influencing these variables. Finally,

we examine curvilinear effects of *Government share* and *Government parties* by squaring them and putting the squared terms on the right hand side of the regression equation. We expect that marginal benefit to incumbent security from another government seat in parliament diminishes as the the governments share increases beyond a majority. Likewise for the number of parties in a coalition: the constraining effect of an additional party should decrease with each party added.

We also create a series of dummy variables as additional measures for the concept of government security. *Single party majority* indicates whether a government is a single party majority. *Minority government* is a dummy variable for the governing parties that do not have a majority of seats in the parliament. *Caretaker government* takes a value of one if a government is set up for temporary purposes. *Minimum winning coalition* is equal to one if a government forms a minimum winning coalition, i.e., a government coalition contains no surplus members. The median values of the four variables are zero, zero, zero, and one, respectively. The incumbent security is expected to rise when a government is a single party majority or minimum winning coalition, but not when a government is a minority government or a caretaker. A number of other studies have used such variables and we include them here for the sake of comparison. We maintain, however, that their theoretical value is limited by their inability to distinguish between various causal mechanisms. For example, an effect from the government's share of parliament or from the number of parties in a coalition would be observationally equivalent when examining the coefficient on *Single party majority*.

The second group of domestic politics variables code for constitutional features of political systems. In particular, we focus on two formal institutions: government forms and electoral systems. Since different constitutions present different constraints/incentives to politicians, many political outcomes often can be better understood when alternative constitutions are taken into consideration. *Presiden-*

*tialism* is a dummy variable that has a value of one if the type of government is presidential system and zero otherwise. *Proportional representation* is a dummy variable for governments that employ proportional representation in their electoral system. While the median value of *Presidentialism* is zero, the median value of *Proportional representation* is one, i.e., non-presidential forms of government with proportional representation electoral system.

We expect that hawkish foreign policies are more likely when governments are in the most stable positions. Since election dates are fixed by constitution in presidential system, governments in presidential system are less constrained than those in parliamentary system where election timing is endogenous. Thus, *Presidentialism* is expected to be related positively with conflict initiation, and hence the hazard rate is expected to increase when *Presidentialism* is equal to one. We do note that presidential systems can host more veto players than parliamentary systems, however, so our expectation is weak.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, electoral system can also affect cross-border belligerence, possibly via Duverger's law that provides us with a causal link from an electoral system of proportional representation to a multi-party system. Thus, *Proportional representation* is expected to have a negative association with conflict onset as intra-party agreements are necessary for foreign policies, thereby decreasing the hazard rate of failure. This effect, however, is likely due to omitted variable bias: Where the number of parties in government is explicitly included in a model, we expect *Proportional representation* to have no effect.

Finally, we include several control variables: *Military expenses*, *S score*, and three regional indicators, *America*, *Europe*, and *Africa*. *Military expenses* considers how a government was ready for international dispute in terms of military

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<sup>2</sup>Foreign policy is often the explicit domain of presidents in presidential and semi-presidential systems. Nevertheless, foreign entanglement can prove costly to a president who needs the cooperation of veto-players in other policy dimensions.

investments. We use a logged measure of the annual military expenditure in the initiator government, drawn from the drawn from the Correlates of War project (Singer and Small 1996). *Military expenses* ranges from 3.829 to 19.530 with mean 13.474 and standard deviation 2.626. *S score* measures foreign policy similarity between system leader and a government, which ranges between -0.039 and one with mean 0.511 and standard deviation 0.225.

To test our hypotheses on the effects of incumbent security and formal institutions on the likelihood of conflict initiation, we employ multiple failure Cox duration analysis. The Cox model assumes proportional hazard, i.e., different observations in an independent variable affect the hazard functions in a proportional way over time. Unlike Weibull regression, the Cox model has no a priori distributional straitjacket for the underlying hazard function, which implies a greater flexibility especially when a researcher has uncertainty regarding the prior beliefs about the baseline hazard. While the baseline hazard is not directly estimated, our interest is to estimate coefficients of the above-mentioned regressors, in terms of which duration times until conflict onset is parameterized. Taking coalitional ( $X$ ), institutional ( $Z$ ) and other ( $U$ ) factors into account, our hazard rate is:

$$h(t) = h_0(t) \exp(X\beta + Z\gamma + U\nu),$$

where  $h_0(t)$  is a baseline hazard that remains unspecified,

$X = \{Government\ share, Government\ share^2, Government\ parties, Government\ parties^2, Minimum\ winning\ coalition, Caretaker\ government, Single\ party\ majority, Minority\ government\}$

$Z = \{Presidentialism, Proportional\ representation\}$

$U = \{Military\ expenses, S\ score, America, Europe, Africa\}$ .

## Data Analysis

We estimate four models: Model 1 shows our baseline specification with political institutional variables but without variables that measure coalition security. Model 2 comes with our main explanatory variables, *Government share* and *Government parties* to assess how much the level of incumbent security serves as a key mechanism for a decision to involve in foreign disputes. Model 3 uses alternative measures that operationalize the concept of the incumbent security to check whether our findings remain robust. Finally, Model 4 extends our findings in Model 2 to examine the non-linear effects of our main regressors on involvement in foreign conflicts.

The results of the Cox regression for the determinants of conflict initiation, are presented in the following four tables. The coefficients displayed in each Table denote the effect of the independent variables on the hazard of failure, i.e., decision to start international conflict. Therefore, positive coefficients mean that, as the value of a regressor increases, the risk of a government initiating a MID increases, and hence expected time until conflict initiation decreases. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses beneath the coefficients. The significance of variables is found by two-tailed tests.

We vary the model specification using the standard Polity scores such that three results are reported in the table: Full sample, non-consolidated democracies ( $\text{Polity} \leq 7$ ), and consolidated democracies ( $\text{Polity} \geq 8$ ).<sup>3</sup> The reason that we run separate Cox regressions using sub-samples is that it is reasonable to expect from a vast literature on democratic peace that the extent to which political institutions shape the incumbent's incentive to decide belligerent policies is not the same between democratic and non-democratic regimes. Less established democracies have less to the rule of law and political power is exerted and constrained less through

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<sup>3</sup>Our results remained robust when we tried other cut-points than Polity 8.

	FullSample	Nonconsolidated	Consolidated
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Presidentialism</i>	.062 (.188)	-.251 (.399)	.074 (.219)
<i>Proportional representation</i>	-.346 (.181)*	.537 (.346)	-.509 (.232)**
<i>Military expenses</i>	.240 (.036)***	.275 (.079)***	.234 (.049)***
<i>S score</i>	.263 (1.409)	-3.252 (2.271)	.872 (1.919)
<i>America</i>	.446 (.630)	1.452 (1.035)	.210 (.827)
<i>Europe</i>	-.308 (.203)	-.284 (.350)	-.276 (.286)
<i>Africa</i>	-1.010 (.561)*	-1.076 (.679)	-1.755 (.955)*
N	1819	454	1365
$\chi^2$	94.632	31.169	107.209
*** = $p < 0.01$ , ** = $p < 0.05$ , * = $p < 0.1$			

Table 1: Multiple Failure Cox Regression for the Duration until Conflict Initiation: Institutions Only (Model 1). Nonconsolidated democracies are those with a polity score less than 8; those with an 8 or above are considered consolidated democracies.

formal political institutions. Thus, we expect that institutional constraints, if they matter at all, have a more salient impact on foreign policy decision-making in established democracies than in non-democracies. Likewise, in states where armed coups are a real possibility, coalitional constraints should also matter less. Indeed, in the least democratic of our democratic governments, parliament itself may have only a weak, short-lived, or illusory grip on power.

Table 1 displays the regression results based on our baseline specification, i.e., model with institutions only. Turning first to the full sample result, the most important finding in Table 1 is that while *President* fails to pass statistical significance in all three specifications, *Proportional representation* is negatively related to the hazard of conflict initiation at the 10% significance level. Consistent with previous studies on institutions and war (Leblang and Chan 2003), this implies that PR electoral system is on average more likely to dampen conflict involvement

than non-PR systems. PR is less conflict prone than the single member district system of electing legislators because PR leads to coalitional multi-party politics where broad consensus that overcomes heterogenous interests serves as constraints on conflict involvement. If PR's effect is indeed due to such omitted variable bias, we would expect it to lose statistical significance once an explicit control for multiparty government is added to the model in the next table. But first consider the subsamples. When we run the regression for the democratic sub-sample, this negative linkage between PR and the hazard of conflict initiation emerges stronger than in the full sample case, i.e., *Proportional representation* reaches the 5% level of statistical significance. However, the effect of PR disappears when we only consider non-democratic sub-sample. Because constitutional provisions for checks and balances will not be taken seriously in authoritarian regimes, a PR system may not work as an important constraint against dispute initiation.

Table 1 also show that the two control variables, *Military expenses* and *Africa*, are statistically significant. As military investment increases, the risk of conflict involvement increases and expected time without such a belligerent policy decreases.

Table 2 adds to Model 1 in Table 1 variables that operationalize the concept of incumbent security in both government (*Government parties*) and legislature (*Government share*). We include two other variables, *Minimum winning coalition* and *Caretaker government*.

The first thing to note in Table 2 is that, controlling for the effect of institutions, the two political mechanisms receive statistical significance at 1% level with expected directions. Moreover, *Government share* and *Government parties* turn out to be significant in all three specifications whether we use full, nonconsolidated, or consolidated democratic samples. As predicted above, PR also loses its significance once an explicit measure of coalition government, *Government parties*,

	FullSample	Nonconsolidated	Consolidated
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Government share</i>	1.617 (.358)***	2.094 (.548)***	1.650 (.481)***
<i>Government parties</i>	-.216 (.051)***	-.277 (.121)**	-.184 (.057)***
<i>Minimum winning coalition</i>	.374 (.222)*	.163 (.382)	.583 (.280)**
<i>Caretaker government</i>	-2.681 (.907)***	-1.619 (.632)**	-36.154 (.281)***
<i>Presidentialism</i>	.235 (.179)	-.288 (.427)	.241 (.218)
<i>Proportional representation</i>	-.185 (.183)	.538 (.388)	-.204 (.225)
<i>Military expenses</i>	.261 (.035)***	.286 (.081)***	.260 (.047)***
<i>S score</i>	-.518 (1.284)	-4.317 (2.141)**	.340 (1.741)
<i>America</i>	.452 (.544)	1.634 (1.068)	.111 (.712)
<i>Europe</i>	-.312 (.209)	-.122 (.349)	-.412 (.278)
<i>Africa</i>	-1.134 (.560)**	-1.159 (.655)*	-2.065 (.890)**
N	1819	454	1365
$\chi^2$	155.098	79.56	18514.37

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ , \* =  $p < 0.1$

Table 2: Multiple Failure Cox Regression for the Duration until Conflict Initiation: Institutions & Incumbent Security Measures (Model 2)

is included. This bolsters the suspicion that PR's earlier effect was simply due to model mis-specification. *Government share* increases the risk of dispute initiation as the incumbent's concern about political survival decreases. *Government parties*, on the other hand, discourages foreign conflict involvement since an incumbent is more susceptible to polarized or fractionalized politics in governments with larger numbers of members, and hence s/he needs to be cautious in undertaking often expensive foreign conflicts.

The second thing to notice in Table 2 is that when coalition security variables are controlled for, no institutional variables are significant regardless of democracy level. Even when we restrict our sample to only established democracies, the two institutional features, *Proportional representation* and *Presidentialism*, fail to explain the variation in conflict initiation. While this is evidence against the proposition that electoral system (Leblang and Chan 2003) or government type (Reiter and Tillman 2002) is closely related to the likelihood of conflict onset, it is reasonable to conclude that the above-mentioned effects of institutions are dominated by the political mechanisms. The underlying mechanism through which political institutions constrain incumbents' propensity to initiate a crisis converges to the likelihood that a government survives and is not removed from office.

Table 2 also indicates that the presence of *Caretaker government* significantly decreases the hazard of crisis initiation in all cases, while *Minimum winning coalition* also significantly increases the likelihood that a government starts a crisis except in the non-consolidated democracies. The first of these findings is easily explained by our government security mechanism. The second finding, that minimum winning coalitions increase the hazard of conflict initiation, suggests that the effect of the number of parties in a coalition, *Government parties*, is more likely due to collective action problems than to security. Minimum winning coalitions are the least secure since the loss of a single member could topple the government,

	FullSample	Nonconsolidated	Consolidated
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Single party majority</i>	.690 (.241)***	1.088 (.523)**	.667 (.246)***
<i>Minority government</i>	-.442 (.214)**	-.902 (.402)**	-.368 (.230)
<i>Minimum winning coalition</i>	.427 (.240)*	.042 (.403)	.623 (.290)**
<i>Caretaker government</i>	-2.601 (.911)***	-1.511 (.565)***	-38.062 (.327)***
<i>Presidentialism</i>	.440 (.186)**	-.261 (.433)	.462 (.230)**
<i>Proportional representation</i>	-.188 (.184)	.496 (.399)	-.192 (.229)
<i>Military expenses</i>	.265 (.037)***	.342 (.081)***	.265 (.050)***
<i>S score</i>	-.423 (1.374)	-4.934 (1.912)***	.441 (1.866)
<i>America</i>	.264 (.589)	1.612 (.956)*	-.081 (.782)
<i>Europe</i>	-.313 (.210)	-.320 (.331)	-.386 (.290)
<i>Africa</i>	-1.209 (.559)**	-1.478 (.642)**	-2.167 (.884)**
N	1819	454	1365
$\chi^2$	152.242	71.493	15221.48

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ , \* =  $p < 0.1$

Table 3: Multiple Failure Cox Regression for the Duration until Conflict Initiation: Institutions & Alternative measures of Incumbent Security (Model 3)

yet they exhibit a higher hazard of conflict initiation. The number of parties in a coalition government therefore likely reduces the hazard of conflict not because governments with many members are likely surplus governments and secure but because the large number of veto players makes any policy deviations from the status quo difficult.

We test the robustness of our results in Table 3 by running the same regressions for both institutions and government security, but substituting alternative measures for *Government share* and *Government parties*. In their stead, we use two

dummy variables, *Single party majority* and *Minority government*. Findings in Table 3 clearly show that the idea of political security mechanisms is consistently working in all specifications. First, *Single party majority* is positive and statistically significant in all cases, indicating that the risk of starting a crisis rises when a single governing party dominates domestic political processes. This confirms our claim that coalition size in parliament and coalition fractionalization play a crucial role as constraints for crisis involvement. *Single party majority*, unlike the counterpart variables in Table 2 cannot determine which mechanism – incumbent security or veto-player gridlock – drive its results. Do single-party majority governments initiate more cross-border conflicts because their incumbents are secure (majority) or because they need not coordinate with other government members (single-party)? Less ambiguously, *Minority government* is negative and significant in the full sample and non-consolidated sub-sample, which implies that international conflicts are significantly discouraged as the risk of being removed from office increases due to the presence of minority government. Institution variables receive mixed results. One difference in Table 3 is that *Presidentialism* is positive and significant in the full sample and democratic sub-sample cases. However, *Proportional representation* remains insignificant as in the case of Table 2.

Table 4 displays the last set of results. We test whether *Government share* and *Government parties* have non-linear relationships with the hazard of crisis initiation. We square these two variables to control for the non-linearity of government security. This time we do not differentiate between the results in terms of the level of democracy. There are good theoretical reasons to expect that *Government share* and *Government parties* show concave relationships due to a standard diminishing marginal returns. For example, increasing one percent from 50 percent of seat share should be taken seriously because losing a single vote can cost a government a no-confidence vote. However, increasing one percent from 90 to 91 percent has

	FullSample1	FullSample2
	(1)	(2)
<i>Government share</i>	3.855 (1.034)***	3.012 (1.151)***
<i>Government share</i> <sup>2</sup>	-2.546 (1.173)**	-2.676 (1.311)**
<i>Government parties</i>	-.495 (.127)***	-.397 (.147)***
<i>Government parties</i> <sup>2</sup>	.038 (.014)***	.029 (.016)*
<i>Single party majority</i>		.241 (.273)
<i>Minority government</i>		-.421 (.260)
<i>Minimum winning coalition</i>	.188 (.231)	.219 (.233)
<i>Caretaker government</i>	-2.678 (.887)***	-2.665 (.887)***
<i>Presidentialism</i>	.272 (.181)	.377 (.188)**
<i>Proportional representation</i>	-.176 (.190)	-.137 (.193)
<i>Military expenses</i>	.240 (.036)***	.253 (.037)***
<i>S score</i>	-.538 (1.261)	-.672 (1.280)
<i>America</i>	.473 (.537)	.402 (.543)
<i>Europe</i>	-.276 (.218)	-.313 (.218)
<i>Africa</i>	-1.087 (.569)*	-1.165 (.574)**
N	1819	1819
$\chi^2$	171.71	180.746

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ , \* =  $p < 0.1$

Table 4: Multiple Failure Cox Regression for the Duration until Conflict Initiation: Institutions, Incumbent Security, and Non-linearity (Model 4)

almost no marginal benefit for political security because it is extremely unlikely to lose majority at that position. Similarly, a single-party government that has to add a coalition partner after an election can expect to be much more constrained; a 5-party coalition government that has to add a sixth member will experience a much smaller increase in constraint. They were likely nearly deadlocked before and will remain so with the sixth member. In short, there are diminishing marginal effect on the hazard of conflict initiation as the share of government seats and the number of coalition members increase.

Both *Government share*<sup>2</sup> and *Government parties*<sup>2</sup> show significant coefficients with negative and positive directions, respectively. We know from Table 2 that as a government's seat share increases and the number of parties in government decreases, the probability that conflict is initiated increases. What we learn in Table 4 is that both of these effects change at a declining rate.

Finally, the second result (FullSample2) in Table 4 adds the alternative measure of political security, *Single party majority* and *Minority government*, to the previous specification. Our main explanatory variables, *Government share* and *Government parties*, and their squared terms remain significant as they were. As opposed to Table 3, *Single party majority* and *Minority government* lose statistical significance in the full model. This suggests that *Single party majority* and *Minority government* have no effect on the hazard of conflict initiation beyond that captured by the government share and government party variables.

## Summary and Conclusion

Efforts to unpack the institutional origins of the democratic peace have made considerable progress. No longer do scholars present democracies as black boxes that influence cross-border conflict due to cooperative norms or broad traits attributed

to all democracies. It is now widely acknowledged that conflict propensity varies across types of institutions, political outcomes and, we hasten to add, levels of democracy. Until the present, the literature has only inferred mechanisms that might explain patterns in the institutional and coalitional data. In this paper, we argue and demonstrate that two simple mechanisms suffice to explain a plethora of effects attributed to structural and political institutions. Politically secure governments and politically unconstrained governments initiate international conflicts more frequently. This, we argue, is a lowest common denominator that can be reexpressed through a myriad of institutional and political arrangements that ultimately matter for international security only to the degree in which they influence how secure a government is and how many domestic actors it must persuade.

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