

Crisis Bargaining and Domestic Opposition

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The Puzzle

- Democracies sometimes fight long, unwinnable wars
- Can we explain this without resort to personality defects?



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The Model

- Some **foreign** state issues **ultimatum** to a **democratic** state
- Domestic opposition publicly advocates either peace or war
- Government either accepts ultimatum or goes to war
- If war, and if opposition initially advocated war, at some point can advocate quitting or continuing to fight
- Government eventually chooses between quitting (short war) and continuing to fight (long war)
- Settlements government can impose on foreign state vary by length of fighting (short versus long)

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Key Assumptions

- Foreign state cares only about **distributive** outcome, **costs**
- Actors w/in demo care about same, plus electoral implications
- When government's behavior differs from that advocated by opposition, foreign policy weighs more heavily in future elect
- Good outcomes help and bad outcomes hurt government more when this happens
- Opposition strictly prefers outcomes favorable to “national interest” to unfavorable ones
- Electoral concerns thus of secondary importance
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Primary Results

- Conditions under which opposition **advocates war**, then **advocates quitting**, and government (if relatively resolved) will fight a **long war** it knows will **end unfavorably**
- Occurs when costs of war for dem are relatively low
- Outcome worse for voters than pre-war status quo
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Conclusion

- Democratic governance itself may promote long, politically divisive wars that end unfavorably