

The End of Hierarchy and the Global Outbreak of Civil War

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Abstract

In contrast to the many studies of civil war onset that take a country-level or region-level approach, this paper provides a systemic theory of civil conflict. I argue that the retrenchment of great powers who have underwritten political institutions across the globe generates commitment problems within the polities they formerly supported. Using data from two time periods, before and after decolonization, I demonstrate that shocks to individual great powers' economic growth rates generate waves of civil conflict throughout the polities they control. This effect persists during both periods. Causal mediation analysis rules out the possibility of an indirect effect of great power economic growth mediated by subordinate polity economic conditions. The link between the end of hierarchy and civil conflict explains why civil wars are often clustered both temporally and spatially.

This paper is motivated by two puzzles. First, why does the global rate of civil war tend to cluster over time? As Fearon and Laitin (2003) note, the global average rate of civil war onset was highest in the 1940s (4.6 per 100 country-years) and the 1950s (2.2 per 100 country-years). The violence rate of the 1990s closely follows these two decades, with 2 onsets per 100 country years. Second, why does the onset of civil war tend to correlate spatially? For instance, during the 1950s there were no onsets of civil conflict claiming more than 1,000 victims annually in sub-Saharan Africa; the 1960s saw three of these conflicts, more than any other region that decade. Traditional “spillover” effects often cannot explain these patterns. It is unlikely, for instance, that spillover explains the onset of conflict in Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, and Sudan, all located more than 1,000 miles apart from each other. These two patterns – temporal and spatial correlation in the global onset of civil war – are puzzling for the most prevalent approach to the study of civil conflict, which sees civil war as a primarily domestic phenomenon.

I argue that a common mechanism explains these two patterns. Specifically, I link the onset of civil conflict to the end of international hierarchies. International hierarchies are networks of political relationships that structure relations *between* two states and *within* one of the states. Historically the most common type of hierarchical relationship is an empire. In empires, powerful countries – which I refer to in this paper as “dominant states” – formally and legally controlled the political institutions of weaker polities, which I refer to as “subordinate states.” More recently, and especially since the 1950s and 1960s, international hierarchy has become less formal, with dominant states seeking to indirectly control politics within subordinate states. Oftentimes one of the most obvious effects of an international hierarchical relationship is the support by a dominant state of a particular type of regime within subordinate states. Because these regimes rely on the support of dominant states, the disappearance of hierarchy can have

dramatic implications for their stability.

The retrenchment of great powers, as during decolonization after World War II and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, unleashes sudden shifts in the distribution of domestic power within former members of an international hierarchy. Regimes that formerly enjoyed a security guarantee on the part of a powerful patron face a commitment problem: repress their populations, or negotiate in the future from a weakened position. The sudden loss in power implied by the departure of an international guarantor generates incentives for civil war in states where externally-supported regimes hold power. Through the use of a formal model, I more clearly explicate the dilemma faced by these regimes, and establish clear conditions under which the end of hierarchy can lead to conflict.

Because networks of hierarchies tend to collapse quickly, and because many subordinate states within a single hierarchy are in the same region, the collapse of hierarchies can explain both of the patterns outlined above. For example, in 1950 the United Kingdom claimed sovereignty over twenty overseas colonies; fifteen years later that number had fallen by 80% to four. The collapse of France's colonial empire was even more dramatic: from 14 colonies in 1959 to just one three years later. Moreover, these colonies were geographically concentrated. Of the twenty territories held by the French after 1816, sixteen were in Africa; the United Kingdom likewise maintained many African colonies. Notable exceptions to both patterns were in South Asia, where India, Malaysia, and Indochina all experienced civil conflict shortly after independence. If the collapse of hierarchy can indeed be linked to civil war, it would constitute a powerful explanation for the two trends identified at the outset.

This paper proceeds in four parts. In the next section, I review the literature on the international sources of civil conflict. I argue that scholars have overlooked how the exit – as opposed

to the entry – of international actors can shape the onset of civil conflict. I then present a theoretical discussion arguing that the disappearance of great powers from domestic politics can generate commitment problems and incentives for civil conflict. Next, I undertake a series of statistical tests which outline the relationship between hierarchical collapse and civil war onset. Finally, I close by discussing the relevance of the project for systemic studies of political phenomena, as well as how the conflict-inducing effects of hierarchy can be avoided.

The Internationalization of Civil War

Many prominent studies of civil war onset analyze the country-level explanations for domestic violence. Scholars increasingly view the onset, conduct, and termination of civil war as an international process, yet much of this literature casts the international sources of civil conflict as a narrowly regional phenomenon. Gleditsch (2007) finds that regional democracy, conflict patterns, and trade ties all operate to determine the risk of civil conflict within states. Neighboring countries can raise the likelihood of civil conflict either by acting as a destabilizing source of refugees (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006) or by providing a safe haven for rebel groups (Salehyan 2007).

But rather than through an appeal to contagion or uncontrollable cross-border flows, external participation in civil war can also be understood as a strategic issue. The threat of intervention can shape the terms over which a civil war is fought (Werner 2000), the extent of violence permissible in the *absence* of intervention (Cetinyan 2002), and patterns of cooperation between potential combatants (Gleditsch and Beardsley 2004). The hope of a favorable intervention may actually generate incentives for some groups to incite conflict when they oth-

erwise would have no reason to do so (Kuperman 2008), and the realization of this intervention can prolong the fighting once it has actually begun (Cunningham 2010).

The question of why civil wars tend to cluster in both time and space is unsettled, though many believe that the answer is linked to a logic of external intervention. Kathman (2010) finds evidence that states intervene in their neighbors' civil wars in an attempt to prevent the fighting from spilling within their own borders. By this reckoning, spatial correlation between the incidence of civil conflict is determined not by common characteristics shared by the states experiencing violence, but by a strategic calculation that fighting outside one's borders is preferable to fighting within. Buhaug and Gleditsch (2008) find little support for this view, however. They argue instead that spatial clustering is driven by support of co-ethnics across state boundaries rather than an explicit fear of conflict spillover.

Previous research on the international sources of civil conflict primarily focuses on how third party support shapes the supply side of rebellion. For example, Kalyvas and Balcells (2010) argue that during the Cold War, superpower support operated to produce a technology of rebel "insurgency" by supplying material support, revolutionary ideology, and operational military doctrine. For Kalyvas and Balcells, the Cold War shaped not the temporal distribution of civil conflict but rather the way in which civil conflict was fought over time.

The foregoing studies thus conceive of the effect of external intervention on civil war as bolstering the fortunes of some party to the conflict, generally as a detriment to another.¹ In other words, the expectation of intervention increases one actor's utility for war above what it would otherwise be. But as Werner (2000) notes, this expectation also shapes the types of

¹This strictly distributive effect is not necessarily an implication of intervention. Non-biased interveners can seek to impose costs on belligerents in an effort to make peace (Fortna 2004), though the viability of this strategy is bounded by the congruence of the peace terms with military power (Werner and Yuen 2005).

deals struck in peacetime. Because the expectation of external intervention in war helps determine the terms of peaceful political settlements, the elimination of this expectation implies a renegotiation of the prevailing institutional structures within a state. When the promise of intervention disappears suddenly, the rapidity of institutional change implied by this shift can generate incentives for conflict. In the following section, I review commitment problem logic and outline how this mechanism for war explains the onset of civil war at the end of hierarchical relationships.

Hierarchy and Commitment Problems

As Powell (2006) outlines, a commitment problem arises when an actor expects his or her adversary to grow much stronger in the near future. Faced with this dilemma, the actor anticipating an adverse shift in circumstances may wish to fight a war today rather than bargain in the future from a weakened position. Given this logic, consider a leader of a regime that has been underwritten by a friendly great power. This external patron has provided economic and military aid, perhaps even directly intervening to bolster its preferred group should the latter's hold on office appear tenuous. But due to either war, recession, or domestic politics, great powers do not extend security guarantees forever. Approaching the end of these relationships, leaders of externally-supported regimes face an internationally-induced domestic commitment problem: fight now with externally-provided resources, or negotiate later without them. Put differently, the presence or absence of an external power introduces a discontinuity in the mapping of domestic resources to bargaining power.

The effect of the departure of an international patron does not have to be instantaneous.

For example, Kono and Montinola (2009) find that autocrats are able to stockpile aid over time. This suggests that leaders losing an external patron may enjoy a brief period following this loss in which they still enjoy a domestic advantage. Nevertheless, the loss of such a third party is likely one of the largest exogenous shocks to power a government might suffer.

Temporary shocks to domestic power are an increasingly common mechanism for explaining civil war onset. Nielsen et al. (2011) argue that the sudden disappearance of foreign aid can cause opposition groups to rise up against a temporarily weakened government. However, well-timed aid can also *alleviate* other types of exogenous shocks to a government's power, thereby reducing the chance of civil conflict (Savun and Tirone 2012). Governments are often at a loss for how to resolve such a shock in power peacefully: Dal Bó and Powell (2009) argue that while a power-sharing arrangement could alleviate conflict in the short-term, because the opposition cannot promise not to exploit their strengthened position in the future, the government cannot extend the offer.

Commitment problem logic is acutely binding given the totalistic nature of domestic political institutions. Walter (1997) argues that the reason civil wars so rarely end in a negotiated settlement is that actors are afraid to disarm, knowing that once they do so their opponent has no reason to abide by the terms of the agreement. In fact, the condition that Walter (1997) locates as critical to solving this barrier – the presence of a third-party guarantor (p. 336) – is precisely what is at issue for a government facing the disappearance of its external patron. This dynamic, Fearon (1998) argues, was at play throughout Eastern Europe following the end of the Cold War. Here, he notes that the disappearance of Communist central governments removed a force that had worked to enforce peace between ethnic groups. In the new domestic milieu, ethnic majorities and minorities – neither of which had previously held power – were forced to

negotiate with each other over the formation of a new government. In the Eastern European cases, majority groups could not promise not to repress minority groups following the institutionalization of democratic politics. Therefore in Eastern Europe, a specific constellation of forces existed that posed a problem for newly independent domestic polities.

But the generative logic behind the spread of post-hierarchical civil conflict is much broader than the Eastern European examples suggest. In the cases Fearon discusses, political grievances broke along ethnic lines that provided groups with pre-existing loci of organization independent of the previous government. But these cases beg a prior question. What explains the peacefulness of the communist exit from power? In no sense was this a preordained outcome. Groups within a state who previously enjoyed external support from a patron state – as did Communists within Eastern Europe during the Cold War – face a dilemma as their patron departs. Should they brave politics without their patron state? Or attempt to head off their loss in power by suppressing their domestic opponents? In the following section, I briefly elaborate upon how hierarchy can shape domestic politics. I then integrate these mechanisms into a model of domestic political competition and examine how they can shape incentives for repression and civil conflict at the end of hierarchical relationships.

Hierarchy and Domestic Bargaining

Before turning to a theoretical model of hierarchical collapse, we need to first elaborate how precisely international hierarchy shapes domestic bargaining. By “hierarchy,” I mean asymmetric relationships that structure political interactions between two states and within one of them. This definition therefore clearly encompasses imperial relations such as those described

by Doyle: “relationship[s]...in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society” (Doyle 1986, p. 45). But this definition also allows for an analysis of informal hierarchies, like those constructed by the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War. Using terminology I adopt for the rest of this paper, Lake (2009) argues that hierarchical relationships exist between “dominant” and “subordinate” states, and are contractual arrangements in which subordinate states allow dominant states a measure of authority over their domestic politics in return for the provision of political order. What is important for the purposes of this paper is that hierarchy shapes the bounds of domestic political competition within subordinate states.

Hierarchy can shape political competition within subordinate states in at least two ways. First, dominant states often provide resources to subordinate state regimes. During the early Cold War, for instance, the United States deployed two enormous programs of foreign aid. In Latin America, the Alliance for Progress sent over \$20 billion in aid during the 1960s. This program was designed to bolster standards of living in the hope that local communist movements would be weakened. The linkage between aid and domestic politics was even clearer in Western Europe, where Marshall Plan aid was understood by local actors to be contingent on the exclusion of communist actors from power: the announcement of Marshall Plan aid led to the dismissal of Communist ministers from governments in Belgium, Luxembourg, and Italy. Across Western Europe, centrist governments warned that a key cost of opposing their programs would be the loss of the U.S. grants on which domestic political stability depended (Eichengreen 2008, p. 67). In Eastern Europe, members of the Warsaw Pact benefited from heavily subsidized trade with the Soviet Union in which the latter “exported primarily subsidized goods and imported primarily overpriced goods” (Stone 1996, p. 5).

Second, dominant states can coerce domestic political actors within subordinate states that they would prefer not see come to power. For example, during the early 20th century, the United States established a hierarchical institution governing Cuba in the form of the Platt Amendment to the 1901 Army Appropriations Bill. This amendment specified seven conditions that must be fulfilled before the United States would withdraw its troops from Cuba following the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. These conditions implied a threat by the United States to intervene directly in Cuban politics if certain conditions were not met. This threat was very effective: Cuban president Gerardo Machado wrote that “[t]he spectre of intervention was of such potency that no one ever dared to oppose it” (Perez 1991, p. 228). In Eastern Europe, it was the withdrawal of the threat of Soviet intervention – which had explicitly underwritten especially the Eastern European regimes – that catalyzed regime change throughout the former Soviet sphere. Brown (1991) writes that the belief among the East European political elite that “[t]he tanks would no longer roll” caused the nearly instantaneous collapse of the Warsaw Pact governments (p. 37).

Hierarchy can therefore shape domestic political competition in two ways. First, by providing resources to friendly groups within other states, dominant states allow these groups an increased measure of domestic stability. Second, by promising to coerce unfriendly groups should they take power, dominant states help to underwrite regime strength with the threat of violence. In the following section, I develop and analyze a model that combines these two insights and examines their implications for the end of hierarchy.

A Model of Hierarchy Collapse

Suppose that a group Friendly towards a dominant state, F , currently holds power in a state. Its political adversary is an Unfriendly group, U . These two groups are negotiating over control of a government over two periods. In the first, hierarchy exists, with two implications for domestic politics. First, F receives some externally provided resources v , which it is able to use on domestic repression, as I explain below. Second, the dominant state exerts a coercive threat against U should it come to office. If U wins office in the first period, it obtains the value of government γ , less a cost imposed by the dominant state, $-k$. This cost k corresponds to the expectation of punishment from the dominant state should the Unfriendly group take power – in terms of the examples from earlier, the expectation of U.S. intervention in Latin America or Soviet tanks in Eastern Europe.

In the second period, these payoffs shift as hierarchy disappears. I model this as an exogenous shock. The influence of the dominant state simply disappears. This might come about for many reasons. Perhaps the state has lost a war that renders it unable to impose costs on political groups within subordinate states, or perhaps activist groups within the dominant state have demanded a reallocation of resources from costly foreign subsidization to welfare spending at home. For this reason, I do not explicitly include the dominant state in the model. This aids in simplifying the formal analysis, but it also seems a reasonable assumption: a desire to maintain hierarchy is not always sufficient to do so. Whatever the reason, F no longer receives externally-provided resources, and U no longer is coerced should it obtain office.

To manage this shifted environment, I allow F to repress its domestic opponent. The game therefore proceeds as follows. In the first period, F chooses some level of repression $r_1 \in [0, \gamma +$

ν]; in the second, it may also choose to repress U , but has access to only $r_2 \in [0, \gamma]$. In other words, F can spend some (or all) of the resources it receives from holding office on repressing U . Repression works by decreasing the chances that U takes office if it decides to challenge F . Therefore U 's challenge for office succeeds with probability $(1 - er_1)(1 - p)$ in the first period, and probability $[1 - e(r_1 + r_2)](1 - p)$ in the second, where $e \in [0, 1]$ measures the effectiveness of repression.²

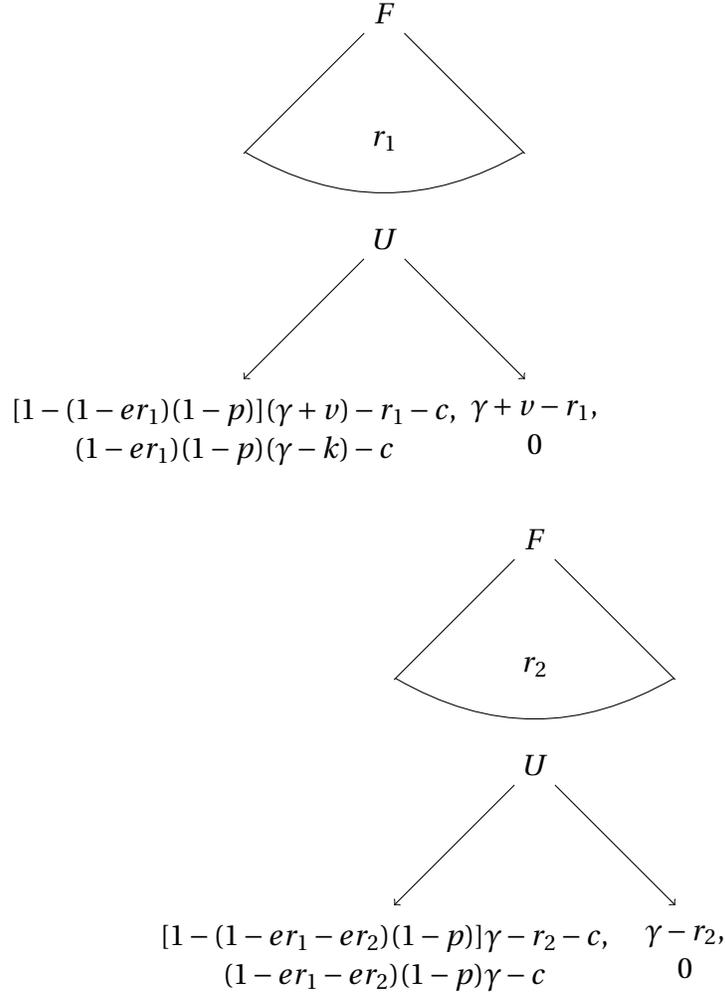
Following F 's choice of repression in each period, U decides whether or not to challenge for office. If it challenges and fails, I assume U is eliminated.³ If in the first period U decides not to challenge F , play proceeds to the second period where U may again challenge F following the latter's choice of repression level. To account for the possibility that the two actors value the future less than the present, I assume that they discount the future by $\delta \in (0, 1)$. In the analysis below, I restrict my attention to Subgame Perfect Equilibria (SPE).

Before presenting the results of the model formally, I briefly walk through the logic informally. The core dilemma for F is simple. In the second period, she becomes less able to repress U in two ways. First, and most directly, she will possess fewer resources, as its stock declines from $\gamma + \nu$ to γ . Second, U will place a higher value on winning office in the second period, because he will no longer pay the costs of coercion, $-k$, should he win. The removal of hierarchical coercion creates a dilemma for F . In the first period, F relies on hierarchical coercion to deter a challenge from U . The effect of hierarchical coercion in this period is therefore to lower the amount of direct repression that F must undertake. The loss of hierarchical coercion in the second period means that, all else equal, F prefers to increase repression in the first round,

²Technically I also assume that $r_1 \leq 1$ and $r_2 \leq 1 - r_1$ so that the probability that U wins office is bounded below at zero.

³This is not critical to the conclusions drawn, but it is critical to the aesthetics of the mathematics.

Figure 1: A Model of Hierarchy Collapse, Repression, and Civil War



while she still enjoys both the benefit of hierarchical coercion and resource transfers v . The first result of the end of hierarchy is thus to increase repression. But in many cases this backfires: when repression is highly effective, U cannot afford to wait until the second period to challenge the government. While the end of hierarchy pressures F to repress U while she still can, this repression in turn incentivizes U to strike before it is completely demobilized. Hierarchical collapse therefore sets off a cycle of repression and mobilization, generating acute incentives for civil conflict.

The first step in examining the relationship between the end of hierarchy, repression, and

leader turnover is to define what we might call the “baseline” level of repression in both rounds.

Beginning at the end of the game, we can see that U will challenge F in the second period if

$$[1 - e(r_1 + r_2)](1 - p)\gamma - c > 0, \quad (1)$$

or when $r_2 < r_2^* \equiv \frac{1 - r_1 - \frac{c}{\gamma(1-p)}}{e}$. Following an identical calculation in the first period, it is easy to see that $r_1^* = \frac{1 - \frac{c}{(1-p)[(\gamma-k)+\delta\gamma]}}{e}$.

One problem for F is immediately apparent from an examination of r_1^* and r_2^* . The more she relies on a coercive threat from her dominant ally in the first period of the game, the less she represses in this period; and the less she represses in this period, the more she must repress in the second. Recall that the coercive threat, denoted by k in r_1^* , represents the value “taken away” from U should he seize power in the first round. In the first round, F is relatively less reliant on repression because she knows U is relatively unwilling to challenge for office in view of the dominant state’s expected coercive response. But because this cost disappears with hierarchy, F is forced to compensate in the second round through increased repression if she wants to maintain her hold on office.

We can easily see when F will run out of resources in the second round by comparing the baseline level of repression, r_2^* , to the resources available to F in the second round. In other words, when $r_2^* > \gamma$, F will not have enough resources to repress as much as she would like to following the end of hierarchy. This is true whenever

$$k > \bar{k} \equiv \gamma(1 + \delta) - \frac{\frac{c}{1-p}}{\gamma e + \frac{c}{\gamma(1-p)}}. \quad (2)$$

Intuitively, it is those states that rely heavily on hierarchical coercion that are in the tightest bind following the end of hierarchy.⁴ These states must increase their repression more than those that relied solely on domestic repression. Given this constraint, we can now state the first result from the model.⁵

Proposition 1. *If hierarchical coercion is relatively low, the following strategies constitute a subgame perfect equilibrium. F sets $r_1 = r_1^*$ and $r_2 = \max\{r_2^*, 0\}$. U challenges in round 1 if $r_1 < r_1^*$ and in round 2 if $r_2 < r_2^*$.*

Two insights from the model are important for understanding the relationship between the end of hierarchy, repression, and conflict. First, repression in the first and second periods are substitutes for each other. In other words, the more F represses in the first round, the less she will need to repress in the second. This is a straightforward implication of the assumption that the effect of repression is cumulative. Second, in the first round – but *only* in the first round – hierarchical coercion acts as a substitute for repression. Here, U is unwilling to challenge for office because he expects coerced by the dominant state should he do so. Hierarchical coercion, k , therefore decreases the equilibrium level of repression in the first round, but at the cost of increasing it in the second.

What about those states that rely heavily on hierarchical coercion in the first round? Here, leaders following the end of hierarchy are forced into a vice. Hierarchical coercion allowed them to lower repression while it still existed, but after its removal they are forced to dramatically ramp up repression at the precise time their stock of resources has declined (following the re-

⁴A more general, but mathematically equivalent, formulation of the effect of k is to say that hierarchical coercion decreases from period 1 to period 2 from k to $k - a$, and that the constraint in Equation 2 is binding so long as $k - a > \bar{k}$. The case analyzed here is simply the boundary case for which $a = k$.

⁵See Appendix for all proofs.

removal of v). This section examines those cases in which, following the end of hierarchy, F does not have enough resources to secure her tenure. Or, put formally, in this section I examine repressive behavior for the set of cases in which $r_2^* > \gamma$ (or, equivalently, $k > \bar{k}$). Let r_1^* and r_2^* be defined as above, and let \bar{r}_1 be the level of repression that will deter U in the second round, even if $r_2^* > \gamma$. Working backwards from the end of the game, we can easily derive the \bar{r}_1 necessary to ensure post-hierarchy leader stability. Suppose that in the second round, F is willing to devote the entirety of her resources to repressing U (as she must, if $k > \bar{k}$). Then the extra resources necessary in the first round must make U indifferent between remaining in the opposition and challenging F . These resources must satisfy the inequality

$$0 \geq (1 - er_1 - \gamma)(1 - p)\gamma - c, \quad (3)$$

which is solved by $r_1 \geq \bar{r}_1 \equiv \frac{1 - e\gamma - \frac{c}{\gamma(1-p)}}{e}$. In other words, by increasing repression from r_1^* to \bar{r}_1 , F can, in principle, secure her tenure throughout the second round.

Finally, we can also pin down the conditions under which F 's extra repression will be successful. Under some conditions, even increasing repression does not afford F a guarantee that she can avoid conflict. Specifically, if $\bar{r}_1 > \gamma + v$, F will be unable to repress "enough more" in the first round to ensure her survival in the second. This condition holds if

$$e < \bar{e} \equiv \frac{1 - \frac{c}{\gamma(1-p)}}{2\gamma + v}. \quad (4)$$

When this is true, no amount of possible repression will be able to deter U 's challenge. We can now begin to see the vice tighten on F . If repression is not effective enough – *and* if the

loss of hierarchy entails a necessity to increase repression in the first round – F is unable to avoid a challenge. Here, the loss of a hierarchical security guarantee means that higher levels of repression are necessary in the second period; but the lack of effectiveness of this repression means that this repression cannot fully cow the opposition.

There is a final twist to this story, however. F benefits greatly in principle from being able to repress her opponent for two periods before facing a challenge – after all, better to face a weakened, repressed opponent in the future than a strong one today. But nothing in the model says that U *has to* wait for the second period to revolt. In fact it might be profitable not to do so if he must suffer repression in the interim. We can check to see whether U prefers to wait by comparing his first period utility for a challenge with his second period utility for the same. Formally, U prefers to fight in the first period rather than waiting for the second if

$$(1 - er_1)(1 - p)[(\gamma - k) + \delta\gamma] - c > 0 + \delta[(1 - er_1 - e\gamma)(1 - p)\gamma - c], \quad (5)$$

or when

$$e > \underline{e} \equiv \frac{\gamma - k - \frac{c(1-\delta)}{1-p}}{r_1^*(\gamma - k) - \delta\gamma^2}. \quad (6)$$

In this case, repression is so effective that it generates a commitment problem for U . If U waits to challenge the government until the second period, he will have surrendered a better chance at actually succeeding. The increased repression, triggered by the disappearance of hierarchical coercion, generates incentives for conflict. The main result for the model then, is as follows:

Proposition 2. *If hierarchical coercion is high and repression effectiveness is moderately high, the following strategies constitute a subgame perfect equilibrium. F sets $r_1 = \gamma + v$ and $r_2 = \gamma$. U*

challenges in round 1.

The constraints on the effectiveness of repression are likely to be easily met in practice. Substantively, in order for the end of hierarchy to generate conflict, three conditions must be met: first, leaders believe that a loss of an external security guarantee will cause them to face a domestic challenge after the departure of a great power patron. Second, these leaders believe that repressing their political opponents will provide a better chance of retaining office, and in the extreme, the ability to eliminate their opponents entirely. Finally, these domestic political opponents believe that they are better off fighting their leaders before they have been repressed for multiple years.

Several brief examples may serve to illustrate the effect of the disappearance of hierarchy on domestic politics within subordinate states. The second world war held grave implications for the projection of British power abroad. One geographical arena in which this fact held particular weight was British Malaya. During the war, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had operated as a source of anti-Japanese guerrilla resistance with support from the British. After the war, however, the MCP hewed away from their wartime allies and towards ideological compatriots in China and the Soviet Union. With independence a near-term promise from the British, the MCP – its wartime Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army now reconstituted as the Malayan People’s Anti-British Army – began to organize against British rule on the island. The British high commission in Malaya, Sir Edward Gent, responded by declaring a state of emergency. The British army deployed a two-phase plan that would first restore law and order on the island before proceeding to “liquidate the guerrilla bands” (Grob-Fitzgibbon 2011, p. 110). In this instance an expected shift in power away from the British government *and* the emergence

of a virulently anti-British political organization sufficed to generate a violent insurgency.

As the British were to Malaya, so were the Soviet regimes in the newly independent imperial sub-units. In the regimes that make up the post-Soviet states, the Communist parties that had operated as arms of the central regime continued to exist in one form or another within the new states. The civil war in Tajikistan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union serves as one clear example of the end of the Soviet empire leading to civil war. The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic had been ruled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in close collaboration with a clan-based Uzbek group from the Khojent region. The promise of elections – which the Khojent minority was sure to lose – led the government to seize the initiative while it could. The 1990 parliamentary elections were held under a “state of emergency,” and in an echo of British machinations in Africa, opposition leaders were jailed under trumped up charges of coup-plotting. By 1992, Safarali Kenjaev, the leader of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, had organized the Popular Front of Tajikistan to solidify Khojent control of post-communist electoral politics. The Popular Front campaign of what was essentially ethnic cleansing of the Tajik population resulted in approximately 50,000 deaths and 500,000 refugees from 1992 to 1994 (Juraeva 1996, pp. 259-269). As in Malaya, the existence of groups that were sure to defeat the ruling minority in competitive elections sufficed to generate a cycle of repression and then conflict. While these cases are illustrative and perhaps suggestive of the broader pattern indicated by the theoretical model, in the next section I put the hypotheses outlined above to a more systematic test.

Empirical Tests: Hierarchy and Civil War

The previous section analyzed a theoretical model that outlined the relationship between the end of hierarchical relationships and political conflict within small states. I argued that by removing a source of external support, the end of interstate hierarchies can generate commitment problems within these weaker states: formerly-supported regimes seek to repress their domestic opponents before the latter become too strong. In some cases, this repression fails, and conflict results.

The dependent variable of interest is political conflict. In the theoretical model, this conflict occurs within the formerly-subordinate polity that is leaving a hierarchical relationship. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this section is the subordinate polity. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, these subordinate polities were independent states. But much of interstate hierarchy took the form of colonial empires. This historical fact creates a problem for the datasets that international relations scholars typically use, which only code key characteristics of political units once they become independent. These datasets leave analysts unable to systematically examine political violence within colonial subunits.

I take a two-pronged empirical approach to the problem of data availability described above. First, using a dataset developed by Andreas Wimmer and Brian Min, which codes political characteristics of pre-independence colonial polities, I take a rough cut at the hypotheses generated by the model. These data provide supportive evidence that the theoretical model describes patterns of political violence in the colonial period. Second, I examine the relationship between post-independence hierarchy and political violence within new states.

Colonialism and Civil Conflict

Since the Wimmer and Min data are not widely-used by political scientists, I first describe their coding procedure in more detail. Wimmer and Min “depart from the standard country-year data set to collect and code data for fixed geographic units” (Wimmer and Min 2006, p. 877). In doing so they are able to “hold a spatial unit constant and observe over time how it is governed, whether by an empire, a modern nation-state, or some other form of polity” (Wimmer and Min 2006, p. 878). To fix their units, they use the global territorial partition from 2001, and extend this backwards in time. For instance, the polity of India contains observations dating back to 1816 (when the dataset begins), but prior to 1947 it is coded not as an independent state but as a British colony. Conflicts are coded as occurring within the polity rather than as “extra-systemic wars,” as they are in the Correlates of War data. These conflicts can be either intra-polity (as in the 1857 Indian rebellion) or inter-polity (as in Iraq’s participation in the first world war). The data therefore encompass the entire geographic partition of the globe, and provide information on a range of independent variables going back to 1816. For the models below, the observations used are comprised of all non-independent polities and cover the time period 1821 to 1990.⁶

The dependent variable in the first test is the onset of an intra-polity civil war. These conflicts constitute a “[f]ight between groups, at least one of which represents the central government [of the polity], over domestic power relations, degree of autonomy of provinces or ethnic groups, tax burden, [or] dynastic succession” (Wimmer and Min 2006, p. 880).

The theoretical model above generated a key hypothesis that can be tested using statistical analysis. To clarify, this hypothesis is:

⁶The results in this section are unchanged if the post-World War II time period is excluded.

Hypothesis 1. *The expected disappearance of hierarchy increases the likelihood of civil conflict within subordinate states.*

In order to capture subordinate regime expectations about future hierarchical power projection, I utilize historical information on economic development from the Maddison Project. After matching great power economic data with the imperial powers from the Wimmer and Min data, I code a variable SHOCK that takes a value of 1 if a great power's annual economic growth is more than one standard deviation below the sample mean in either the current year or the previous year.⁷ The variable takes the value zero otherwise. The logic behind this coding procedure is simple: polities should expect that in years following economic shocks, great powers should be less able to engage in conflict to support their regimes. The shock variable seems to capture well changes in the material components of power projection that great powers might use to police their colonies. In the three years following a GDP shock, great powers' composite national capability scores (CINC) decrease by an average of 12%. Regimes that rely on colonial repression to backstop domestic challenges against them would do well, then, to condition their behavior on these large shocks to great power economic growth. For both this and the following empirical test, the SHOCK variable captures actors' expectations about the future of hierarchical relations.

The primary expectation for the first test is that colonial polities whose ruling state experiences a shock to its GDP will be more likely to experience the onset of an intra-polity civil conflict. I also include a number of control variables that previous studies have identified as related to civil conflict in the post-colonial period.

⁷In practical terms, this means this means the variable takes a value of 1 if the country's year-over-year growth is less than -4.5%.

First, I include a number of variables that measure economic conditions within the subordinate polity. Wimmer and Min collected data on GDP levels and growth rates, also from the Maddison Project, which provides coverage for many pre-independence colonies. They also include a variable for the level of oil production within a given territory. I include these three measures as control variables, as well as the logged population of each territory in question. I also include a measure that counts the number of ongoing civil conflicts in territories adjacent to each territorial unit. Finally, to control for the possibility that shocks to colonial powers' GDP are simply proxying for global economic conditions, I include a variable that measures the average GDP growth for all great powers in a given year.

My estimation strategy utilizes logistic regression in which the outcome variable is the onset of civil war, as described earlier. In this section I present three models. First, I present a baseline model in which I only include the imperial GDP shock variable. Second, I present a fuller model with several control variables; and finally, I present a model with territorial unit fixed effects. The results are presented in Table 1. First, the results for the control variables are primarily mixed. Only total population is consistently significant. In all three models, territories with larger populations appear to have a greater probability of experiencing a civil war onset. Conversely, during this time period GDP growth seems to be positively associated with the onset of civil conflict. While this contradicts the usual relationship between economic growth and civil conflict, it is easy to imagine that such a relationship might be altered in an era in which political independence is on the line.

Turning to the primary variable of interest, shocks to colonial powers' gross domestic product have a consistently positive effect on the likelihood of civil conflict. This effect persists regardless of model specification or the use of fixed effects. The effect of colonial state GDP

Table 1: Dominant State Shocks and Civil War Onset During Colonialism

	(1) Civil War Onset	(2) Civil War Onset	(3) Civil War Onset
Civil War Onset			
Imperial GDP Shock	0.839* (0.328)	1.780*** (0.333)	1.455** (0.472)
GDP Growth		7.253** (2.313)	6.455 (4.397)
GDP per capita		-0.000 (0.000)	-0.003* (0.001)
Colonial Population (Logged)		0.377*** (0.079)	3.426** (1.148)
Oil Production per capita		-1.949 (2.263)	1.272 (4.064)
Neighboring Civil Conflicts		0.088 (0.454)	0.342 (0.403)
% Mountainous		0.360 (0.202)	
Constant	-5.411*** (0.231)	-9.610*** (1.084)	
Observations	9811	4389	1869

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Clustered by polity.

shocks is substantively enormous: territories whose colonial power experienced a GDP shock in the previous year are 4.6 times more likely to experience a civil war onset ($Pr = 0.023$) than other territories ($Pr = 0.005$).

Post-Independence Hierarchy and Civil Conflict

The primary shortcoming of the first test is that the Wimmer and Min data provide only a limited ability to control for various confounding variables, especially variables that are not mea-

sured at the unit level. As a second test, I leverage the wider availability of data in the post-WWII period to test the main hypothesis again. Even though formal hierarchical relationships ended with the independence of many states in the postwar period, informal relationships of influence between former colonial powers and their erstwhile colonies persisted. For instance, many West African countries retained the franc as their currency for a number of years, and France has intervened several times to restore favorable leadership in its colonial sphere. In the British sphere, Grob-Fitzgibbon (2011) writes that “the British government developed a concerted imperial strategy designed to secure the colonies for the Commonwealth in an orderly transfer of power while maintaining British influence...in this endeavor the government met with considerable success” (p. 3). The much later case of post-Soviet independence provides numerous (and, as of 2016, ongoing) instances of continued Russian influence.

We can leverage these “quasi-colonial” relationships to undertake a more systematic test of the hypotheses from earlier. How long these relationships persist after independence is a reasonable question. For the analysis below, I use a 5-year cut-off. In other words, the observations below consist of all former subordinate states that become independent after 1945, with annual observations for years t through $t + 5$ of their independence.⁸ The formulation of this test then relies on a bet: that the effect of hierarchy on domestic politics does not immediately disappear when independence is granted, and that the processes shaping intra-hierarchy relations persist for at least some time after formal independence. The observations in these tests are comprised of all independent former colonies in the first five years of their independence, and cover the time period 1951 to 2004.

⁸The results are substantively robust to using cutpoints at $t+6$, $t+7$, $t+8$, $t+9$, and $t+10$, though the significance of the primary variables of interest begins to weaken around $t + 8$.

The dependent variable in this second test is whether or not a country experiences a civil war onset in a given year or not. I code this variable dichotomously using the internal conflict variable from Gleditsch et al. (2002). I collapse the variable so that it takes the value 1 if a country is recorded as experiencing an internal conflict with at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year t but not in year $t - 1$.⁹

The primary independent variable of interest in this model, as earlier, is the GDP shock variable. If the expectations of the theoretical model are correct, the GDP shock should exert a positive effect on the chances of a civil war onset – as in the previous models. To account for potential alternative explanations, I include a number of control variables in a series of models. As before, the first, sparsest, model includes only the hierarchical shock variable. The results for this model are included in Column 1 of Table 2. The second model includes a battery of control variables that are strictly internal to the state in question: a marker for whether or not the country experienced a violent independence process (Hensel 2014), the country's Polity score, its GDP level, its GDP growth rate, and its population. These results are in Column 2. Finally, Column 3 also presents results from a fuller model that includes several variables capturing a state's external relations: the average level of a country's neighbors' Polity scores, and the proportion of a country's neighbors currently experiencing civil conflict. I also include a variable measuring the global average rate of GDP growth, to ensure that hierarchical GDP shocks are not simply measuring global recessions. Finally, I also control for a state's reliance on international trade, in order to rule out the possibility that ex-hierarchical GDP shocks are not simply proxying for a state's reliance on trade. For all three models, standard errors are clustered on the

⁹Results are robust to the use of a dependent variable for which civil war is coded as occurring at the lower level of 25 battle deaths per year.

Table 2: Dominant State Shocks and Civil War Onset in the Post-Colonial Period

	(1) Civil War Onset	(2) Civil War Onset	(3) Civil War Onset
Civil War Onset			
Hierarchical GDP Shock	1.465* (0.641)	2.155* (0.949)	3.153*** (0.802)
Violent Independence		2.407 (1.284)	2.378 (2.061)
Polity IV		0.015 (0.058)	-0.211*** (0.055)
GDP Growth per capita		-11.532 (5.940)	-10.945 (7.955)
GDP per capita		-0.251 (0.189)	-0.680** (0.216)
Population		0.011 (0.006)	0.012* (0.005)
Neighboring Democracies			0.358*** (0.088)
Neighboring Civil Conflicts			1.754 (1.926)
Global GDP Growth			-74.263 (45.851)
Trade/GDP			6.979 (3.839)
Constant	-4.556*** (0.469)	-6.149*** (1.068)	-4.623 (3.389)
Observations	692	330	277

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Clustered by country.

country of observation.

As is clear from an inspection of the three models in Table 2, the GDP shock variable is significant and strongly positive in each iteration. As in the first set of models, the empirical data tend to support the main hypothesis derived from the theoretical model. In all three post-

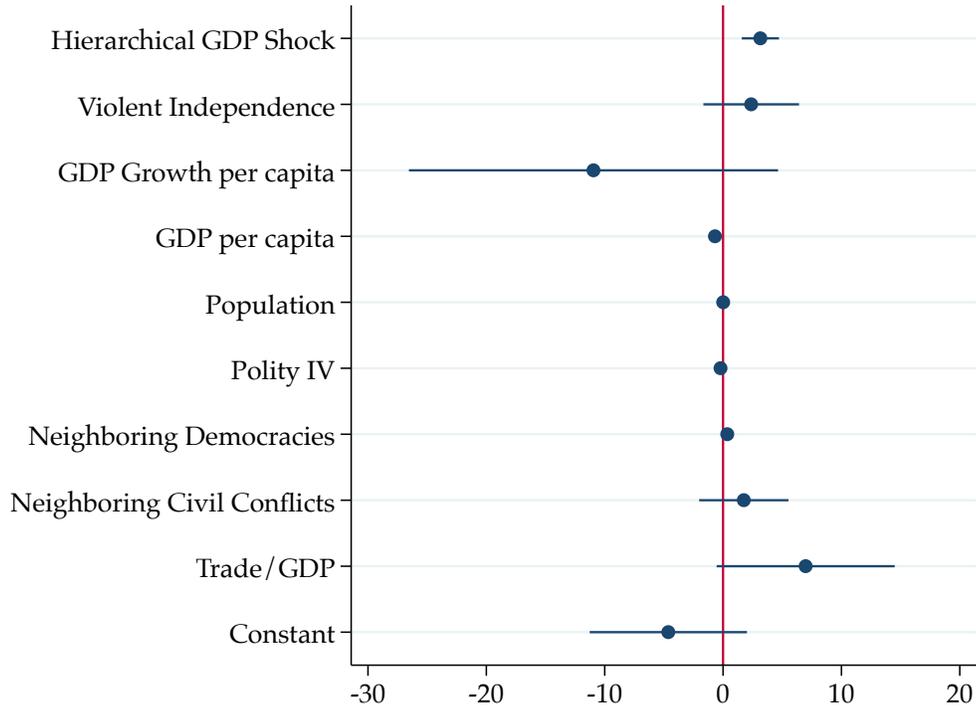
independence models, the effect of GDP shocks in ex-colonial rulers leads to a significantly increased risk of civil war onset. This result essentially replicates the finding from the colonial era. In both time periods, there is a strong correlation between economic crisis in dominant states and civil conflict in subordinate states. This relationship persists after controlling for both subordinate state growth and global economic conditions.

In order to more clearly interpret the results, I plot the marginal effects of the variables from Model 3 in Figure 2. Because the standard error associated with the point estimate of the effect of global GDP growth is so large, I omit it here for ease of presentation. As is clear, the hierarchical shock variable performs well in comparison to other potential explanatory variables. In fact only state reliance on trade exceeds the effect of a GDP shock to a former hierarchical partner. This marginal effect translates into a large shift in predicted probability: states without ex-hierarchical GDP shocks experience a civil conflict with probability 0.008, but this jumps to 0.65 upon economic slowdown in former hierarchical members. This effect is slightly larger than the change implied by a standard deviation change in Polity score from below to above the sample mean, which reduces the probability of civil war onset from 0.044 to 0.007.

Economic Growth and Causal Mediation

In considering the evidence from the previous section, there is a potential source of contamination in the estimates that might give cause for worry. One reasonable concern is that GDP shocks to ex-colonial rulers are inducing recessions within subordinate states, which in turn causes the onset of civil conflict. This is particularly troubling because the effect of subordinate state GDP growth on civil conflict onset is negatively signed, indicating that high levels of sub-

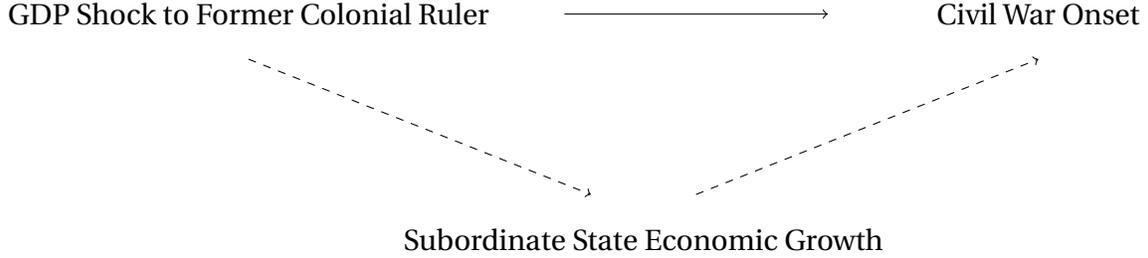
Figure 2: Hierarchical Shocks and Civil War Onset



ordinate state economic growth during this period may help avert civil war. If this is the case, perhaps GDP shocks are influencing civil conflict onset, but only through a mediation variable, economic growth. According to this alternative causal story, the pattern predicted by the theoretical model would be identified in the data, but for the wrong reason. Figure 3 outlines this potential causal pathway (dashed lines) in comparison to the one posited in the theoretical model above (solid line).

To rule out the causal pathway proposed immediately above, I utilize a causal mediation analysis. Casual mediation analysis, as outlined by Imai et al. (2011), provides a way to decompose the effects of multiple variables arranged along a causal pathway as illustrated in Figure 3. Suppose that we are concerned with the effects of both a treatment variable T , which takes values $t = 1$ and $t = 0$, and a mediating variable, $M \in \mathbb{R}$. In the analysis here, these represent

Figure 3: Hypothesized and Alternative Causal Pathways



the effects of a GDP shock in a former dominant state and subordinate state economic growth, respectively. Let $Y_i \in \{0, 1\}$ be an outcome variable that captures whether or not a country i experiences a civil war onset. We can write the indirect effects, or causal mediation effects, as

$$\delta_i(t) = Y_i(t, M_i(1)) - Y_i(t, M_i(0)), \quad (7)$$

for observation i and treatment status $t = 0, 1$. In words, the causal mediation effect is the effect of the mediating variable holding the treatment variable constant. In the current analysis, this means we are looking for the effect of subordinate state GDP growth, holding the effect of GDP shocks in former colonial powers constant. Likewise, we can write the direct effects of the treatment variable as

$$\zeta_i(t) = Y_i(1, M_i(t)) - Y_i(0, M_i(t)). \quad (8)$$

Whereas for the indirect effects we varied the mediating variable while holding the treatment variable constant, here we do precisely the opposite, varying the treatment variable (GDP shock) while holding the mediating variable (subordinate state GDP growth) constant.

Briefly, the model uses two steps to identify the direct and indirect effects. First, it fits a model in which the mediator is the dependent variable. The mediator model makes two pre-

Table 3: Mediation Analysis: Indirect Effect of GDP Shocks

	Estimate	95% Confidence Interval
Average Mediation Effect ($\delta_i(t)$)	0.0057505	[-0.0286428, .0540182]
Average Direct Effect ($\zeta_i(t)$)	0.0873521	[0.0328005, .1984793]
Percentage of Total Effect Mediated	0.067904%	[0.0243355%, .2038867%]

Note: Standard errors clustered by country. Control variables: violent independence, total trade, GDP per capita, neighboring civil conflicts, proportion of neighbors that are democracies, Polity IV.

dictions – in this case of subordinate state GDP growth – one with SHOCK = 1 and one with SHOCK = 0. Second, to identify the indirect effect, the model estimates the outcome equation – in which the dependent variable is civil war onset – using, in sequence, the two estimated values of the mediator from the first model. The indirect effect of the mediator is then the difference in the predicted outcome variable generated from the two predicted values of the mediator.¹⁰

If the theoretical expectations from earlier are correct, the effect of GDP shocks on civil war onset should be primarily, if not exclusively, through the direct effect mechanism. Relatively little causation should run through the indirect effect on subordinate state GDP growth. Put formally in terms of the mediation model, I expect that $\delta_i(t) = 0$ and $\zeta_i(t) > 0$. The substantive results of the models are presented in Table 3. As is clear, the indirect effect of GDP shocks – that is, the effect that is mediated by subordinate state economic growth – is minimal, and in fact not statistically distinguishable from zero. The direct effect, on the other hand, is larger and significant at the 95% level. The model suggests that even if there is a true mediation effect, it accounts for a relatively small proportion of the total effect of GDP shocks on civil war onset. In sum, the mediation analysis suggests that concerns of alternative causal pathways are not justified.

¹⁰For a more in-depth discussion, see Imai et al. (2011), especially pages 773-774.

Discussion and Conclusion

If the collapse of hierarchies leads to the onset of civil conflict, what can this relationship tell us about international politics? In this concluding section I consider several possibilities. First, systemic levels of civil conflict are produced in large part by the disappearance of great powers that have underwritten politics elsewhere. One great power – Britain, France, the Soviet Union – may have hierarchical relationships encompassing many regimes. Because the end of hierarchy generally comes quickly, these many hierarchical relationships will tend to end around the same time. Note, for instance, that twenty-one former British colonies became independent in the 1960s alone. In a single year, 1991, the Soviet Empire ended and twelve former Soviet republics attained independence. If these states are at an increased chance of experiencing civil conflict, it stands to reason that these global instances of hierarchical collapse will be especially prone to onsets of new civil conflicts. Studies of civil war that ignore the systemic sources of regime stability will be prone to miss these patterns.

Second, international relations scholars generally consider only one facet of the external intervention calculus. Many models of intervention analyze an interaction in which a third party contemplates inserting itself into some domestic dispute or negotiation to which it is not currently party (Gent 2008, Favretto 2009). No doubt these scenarios are many. But this paper highlights another possibility: some domestic negotiations already involve a third party, and therefore expectations about how likely that third party is to stay involved are key in determining the future course of domestic politics. A similar dilemma faced the United States in the mid-2000s as it contemplated withdrawal from the Iraq War, with Bush administration members claiming that firm deadlines for troop withdrawal would delay but ensure violence. The

argument in this paper suggests that on this point they may have been correct.

Third, hierarchies that rely heavily on interstate coercion are uniquely likely to generate waves of civil conflict. Recall that the crisis generated by the end of hierarchy was induced specifically by the threat of coercion deployed by the dominant state during hierarchy. When hierarchy is generated absent this threat, the end of hierarchy poses no unique threat to domestic politics. For colonial relationships like the ones analyzed in this paper, coercion was ubiquitous. Since formal hierarchical rule ended in the late twentieth century, hierarchy has taken a less overt form. The United States maintains hierarchical relationships all over the globe, but relatively few of these rely explicitly on the threat of the United States to intervene directly in politics. Instead, the U.S. hierarchy has been built around a nexus of institutions including the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and United Nations – what Ikenberry (2001) calls a “constitutional” order (p. 6). We might well expect the end of the U.S. hierarchy, when (or if) it comes, to be measurably more peaceful than the ones examined in this paper.

In conclusion, social scientists should take seriously the bilateral linkages between great powers and smaller states when attempting to understand politics within the latter. Because these ties can be severed quickly and between many states at once, the demise of great powers can provide enormous leverage towards understanding the systemic onset of phenomena like civil conflict. By no means is civil war the only hierarchically-generated phenomenon, however. Future studies would do well to examine how the end of hierarchy might shape democratization, interstate conflict onset, coup behavior, and economic growth. Put generally, any phenomenon that is a product of domestic bargaining should be influenced by the departure of a great power patron. This paper provides a framework for beginning to understand this process.

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