Term Limits, Leader Preferences, and Interstate Conflict

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Abstract

Drawing on the idea that electoral accountability is a source for peace, recent research claims term limits result in democratic leaders who are systematically more likely to initiate conflicts. This conclusion rests upon analyses that suffer from two issues. First, scholars have not considered how leaders' preferences or the strategic environment might condition the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict. Second, existing analyses rely on state-level data that cannot accurately identify whether a conflict is initiated by a term-limited or an electorally accountable incumbent in those years where both types of leaders served. Using a new, leader-year measure of term limits, we find that lame ducks are less likely to initiate conflicts than their electorally accountable counterparts, on average, and that this result holds among democratic leaders with dovish preferences but not democratic leaders with hawkish preferences.

The concept of electoral accountability is central to many explanations for how regime type influences states' behavior. While specific arguments vary, democracies are thought to behave differently than dictatorships because elections serve as a means by which citizens can hold elected officials accountable for their policy choices, thus preventing them from implementing policies that deviate from their constituents' preferences. Scholars have linked electoral accountability to cooperation in general (McGillivray and Smith 2000, Leeds 1999) and specific cooperative behaviors such as international trade (Mansfield, Milner and Rosendorff 2000, Guisinger 2009) and alliance reliability (Leeds 2003). The role of accountability arguably plays an even larger role in explanations of democracies' and dictatorships' conflict behavior, most notably institutional accounts of the democratic peace. Such theories argue democratic incumbents avoid costly interstate conflicts due to their desire to be re-elected by conflict-averse publics (e.g., Kant 1991, Russett and Oneal 2001). But how do democratic leaders behave when they are no longer constrained by the prospect of re-election?

Somewhat surprisingly, the issue of lame duck democratic leaders has been largely overlooked by international conflict scholars. The emerging literature on the effect of term limits argues the removal of electoral accountability provides democratic leaders with more discretion in pursuing costly foreign policies (e.g., Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder 2013). This reduction in constraints is thought to make democratic leaders who cannot be re-elected behave more like dictators than democratic leaders whose political futures can be extended in a future election (Haynes 2012, Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi 2014). Empirically, scholars find that democracies led by lame ducks generally are more likely to initiate conflicts than those led by electorally accountable incumbents.

The idea that democracies governed by lame ducks are more likely to initiate conflicts is intuitive, especially given institutional explanations of the democratic peace that focus on electoral accountability. However, the growing consensus on the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict is based on analyses that suffer from two issues. First, scholars have ignored how leaders' underlying preferences over the use of force and strategic behavior could condition the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation. Second, existing analyses rely on state-level measures of term limits that cannot identify whether a conflict was initiated by a lame duck or an electorally accountable leader in years where both served.

This article seeks to address these two shortcomings. First, we carefully consider how and why term limits might affect conflict initiation. A survey of research on how conflict processes

are influenced by electoral accountability, leader preferences, domestic political considerations, and strategic targets yields a variety of expectations regarding the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict initiation. Indeed, from a theoretical perspective, one can justify arguments that, on average, lame duck leaders should be more likely, less likely, or no more or less likely to initiate a conflict than incumbents who can run for re-election. Similarly, different research traditions alternatively suggest hawkish leaders should be more likely to initiate a conflict when they are lame ducks and that the probability of conflict initiation given a hawkish leader should be unaffected by the removal of electoral accountability. Second, we assess our theoretical expectations using a new, leader-year measure of term limits that covers all democratic leaders between 1960 and 2001. Our leader-year indicator of lame duck status eliminates the measurement error inherent with state-year or state-dyad-year observations in which a term limited leader and an electorally accountable leader served in the same year.

Our results call into question the growing consensus that term limits are associated with an increased probability of interstate conflict. Our analysis of the unconditional relationship between term limits and conflict initiation indicates that, on average, lame duck leaders are less likely to initiation a conflict than are electorally accountable incumbents. Assessing our conditional expectations requires a variable that measures leaders' underlying preferences over the use of force. This is notoriously difficult to do directly. We utilize three operationalizations of leader preferences based on prior work on leader characteristics and conflict. We find that dovish democratic leaders are significantly less likely to initiate a conflict when they are lame ducks than when they can run for re-election and that term limits have no significant effect on the probability a democratic leader with hawkish preferences initiates an interstate conflict. These results are consistent with arguments that claim institutions and leaders' preferences interact to influence patterns of interstate conflict (Arena and Palmer 2009) and strategic conflict avoidance can limit hawkish leaders' opportunities to fight (Foster 2008).

This paper makes three contributions to the study of domestic politics and interstate relations. First, it adds to the emerging literature on how term limits affect interstate conflict behavior. Second, it offers an improved measure of term limits that will be useful to scholars studying a variety of topics. Third, we offer further evidence that explicitly considering how institutional constraints interact with actors' preferences can improve our understanding of international behavior.

The remainder of the paper proceeds in six sections. The first describes the relationship

between electoral accountability and interstate conflict and the emerging literature on the implications of term limits for conflict behavior. The second section discusses how scholars have linked leaders' preferences to interstate conflict. The third draws on insights from existing scholarship to derive expectations about how term limits might influence interstate conflict initiation. The fourth section describes our research design while the fifth presents our results. We conclude with a discussion of our findings' implications for interstate conflict scholarship.

1 Electoral Accountability and International Conflict

Perhaps no area of international relations scholarship relies to the same extent on electoral accountability to explain behavior as research on interstate conflict. In particular, the constraining nature of elections is central to most theoretical explanations of democracies' conflict behavior. Institutional explanations for the democratic peace commonly argue that, relative to dictators, democratically elected leaders are systematically constrained from using military force as a tool of foreign policy by the higher political costs she might face by deciding to go to war (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001). The ultimate source of variation across regime types in the costs of conflict is that democratic incumbents are electorally accountable to conflict-averse publics, whom most directly have to bear the costs of fighting, while autocrats are not. Indeed, Kant's (1991) argument for why the two regime types should exhibit different propensities for conflict hinged on the idea that democratic leaders were less inclined to choose the military option because the people over whom the leader ruled would be likely to hold her accountable for picking a policy that was out-of-line with their preferences. Beyond the democratic peace, electoral accountability is used to explain why democracies are less likely to participate in conflicts the closer they are to an election (Gaubatz 1991), when they have more inclusive electoral systems (Reiter and Tillman 2002), and when elections in parliamentary systems are likely to be called (Williams 2013). The common theme running through these arguments is that democratic leaders are constrained from using military force because their political futures are contingent on the support of relatively pacific publics on election day.

Electoral accountability, though, is not necessarily a source of peace in democracies. This is most clearly seen in the literature on diversionary conflict, which argues leaders will use military force abroad as a way to ensure their political survival in troubling times (among many others, Mitchell and Prins 2004, Johnson and Barnes 2011). Thinking the public will react

favorably to the presence of an external threat, a leader has an incentive to initiate a conflict in an attempt to distract the public's attention away from whatever is hampering her ability to remain in power. As support for a leader grows in the shadow of interstate conflict, the likelihood of a leader holding onto power by winning re-election also increases. A similar logic underlies the "gambling for resurrection" argument that leaders have an incentive to prolong losing wars in the hope of pulling off an unlikely victory that will allow them to remain in power (Downs and Rocke 1994). Work on opposition parties and interstate conflict also suggests electoral accountability can provide democratic incumbents an incentive to pursue belligerent policies. Schultz (2005) demonstrates dovish governments are more likely to be removed from power after offering concessions in an interstate crisis than are hawkish governments. Similarly, Arena (2015) shows that the threat of an opposition party turning against a war effort, and thus harming a leader's electoral prospects, can cause democratic leaders to continue fighting losing conflicts. Focusing on intra-elite bargaining, Saunders and Wolford (2015) demonstrate that accommodating the demands of elite opposition can make democratic leaders less selective about the conflicts they enter. Thus, while electoral accountability is often assumed to lead democratic incumbents to pursue peaceful policies, the desire to extend one's tenure via re-election can provide democratic leaders with an incentive to behave in a bellicose manner.

The extensive literature on democratic institutions and interstate conflict historically assumes democratic leaders are always electorally accountable. A natural question to ask, then, is what happens when democratic leaders cannot be re-elected? An emerging literature on the effect of term limits on conflict behavior has begun to address this question.

1.1 The Effect of Term Limits

Term limits complicate the idea democratic leaders are always electorally accountable. While they promote electoral competition by limiting the incumbency advantage (Chen and Niou 2005), term limits necessarily lead to a "final-period" problem in which incumbents are barred from extending their tenure through re-election and, therefore, are electorally unaccountable (e.g., Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011, Alt, Bueno de Mesquita and Rose 2011). Some proponents of term limits argue the final-period problem is not a problem at all; removing the incentive for re-election allows incumbents to ignore the potential political consequences and enact policies in the public's interests (Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011, pg. 1822). While lame ducks can decide to do what is best for the public, by definition "term limits decouple

policy performance and leader survival" (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, 315) and, thus, ensure incumbents face no personal electoral consequences for ignoring their constituents' preferences.[1][2]

A growing literature has begun to consider the consequences of the final-period problem for interstate conflict.[3] As Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013, pg. 662) point out, most "arguments suggest that term limited leaders should behave *more* aggressively than those leaders still appealing to winning coalitions or the median voter" (italics in original). Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi (2014) argue that, like autocrats, term-limited democratic incumbents know they will be removed from office regardless of their policy decisions and are unconstrained by the electorate's preferences when deciding whether to use force. Empirically, they find democratic dyads without term limits are more peaceful than other dyads and no difference in the probability of conflict between dyads of democracies with term limits, mixed dyads, and non-democratic dyads. Similarly, Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013) argue that a lame duck leader should be more likely to initiate a conflict because binding terms limit their personal political cost of war compared to a democratic leader who can win re-election. Consistent with this expectation, they find that, on average, term limits have a positive effect on interstate conflict initiation.

Moving from conflict initiation to coercive diplomacy, Haynes (2012) analyzes the implications of term limits for the relationship between audience costs, regime type, and interstate crises. Drawing on the logic of audience costs (Fearon 1994), Haynes argues the threats of lame ducks should be less credible than those issued by electorally accountable democratic leaders, implying democracies led by a term-limited leader should behave more like non-democracies in interstate crises. Empirically, he finds that threats issued by lame ducks are more likely to be reciprocated and lame ducks are more likely to back down in crises. That is, term-limited democratic leaders act more like autocrats in crises than electorally accountable democratic leaders, at least per audience cost theory (Fearon 1994).

It is not necessarily the case, though, that term limits make democratic leaders behave more belligerently. As noted above, the desire to be re-elected provides democratic incumbents

[1]This leads to an interesting question: why would voters ever elect a politician who could ignore their preferences without consequences? We are unaware of research on this topic, but suspect something akin to Fenno's paradox (1973) is at work: voters do not think their preferred candidate would be the type of leader to ignore what is best for the country and pursue their personally preferred policies. This dynamic likely is exacerbated when it comes to interstate conflict because candidates' foreign policy positions rarely drive voters' decisions (e.g., Abramowitz 1995).

[2]To be clear, we are arguing lame ducks cannot be punished electorally for ignoring their constituents' preferences, not that they will necessarily ignore their constituents' preferences. We address below why a lame duck might pursue policies consistent with her constituents' preferences.

[3]To be fair, some scholars noted term limits could complicate their arguments and findings but could not address the issue empirically due to a lack of systematic data (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, pgs. 314-319).

with an incentive to engage in diversionary behavior (e.g., Mitchell and Prins 2004). This implies democratic leaders serving their final term in office have no incentive to engage in diversionary conflict. Consistent with this logic, Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013) find that an economic recession is associated with a higher probability of conflict initiation among electorally accountable democratic leaders but not term limited leaders.

While most arguments imply term limits increase the likelihood of interstate conflict by removing electoral accountability (Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi 2014), Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013) demonstrate that removing a leader's ability to be re-elected can have a differential effect on conflict initiation. Framed differently, having the opportunity to initiate an interstate conflict does not necessarily imply a democratic leader will be willing to use force (e.g., Most and Starr 1983). Indeed, the idea that term limits should lead to a uniform increase in conflict initiation relies on the implicit assumption that democratic leaders systematically hold relatively bellicose preferences for using military force. Otherwise, there is no reason to think lowering the barriers to using force should result in a higher probability of conflict. We argue that leaders' preferences over the use of force vary and likely condition the effect of term limits on conflict initiation. The next section describes how previous scholarship has linked leader preferences to conflict behavior.

2 Preferences for Using Force

The claim that preferences influence interstate conflict behavior is not new. Scholars have long recognized that leaders with "hawkish" preferences behave differently than leaders with "dovish" preferences with respect to interstate bargaining and conflict (e.g., Schultz 2005). This idea has been incorporated into the literature on intra-democratic conflict variation through the concept of a government's political orientation. Specifically, scholars argue that members of right-wing parties are relatively more pro-military or hawkish while members of left-wing parties are relatively more pro-peace or dovish (Schultz 2001, Palmer, London and Regan 2004). This difference in preferences manifests itself in variation in the conflict behavior of left and right governments. Palmer, London and Regan (2004), for example, show that parliamentary democracies with right governments are significantly more likely to use force than are their left-leaning counterparts. Similar evidence is provided by Arena and Palmer (2009) and Clare (2010), who find that across different economic conditions and coalition structures, respectively, right-

wing governments are more likely to use military force. A government's political orientation also influences the duration of conflicts. Koch (2009) demonstrates that left governments fight significantly shorter conflicts than right governments while Koch and Sullivan (2010) find that left governments are more likely to pull out of unpopular military interventions than right governments.

The finding that democracies led by politicians with relatively hawkish preferences are more bellicose than democracies led by politicians with relatively dovish preferences is well-established. However, due to scholars' reliance on measures of policy preferences primarily based on European parties' platforms, the research that documents this result focuses largely on the behavior of parliamentary governments. This approach is problematic for understanding the relationship between term limits, leader preferences, and conflict initiation because binding term limits are generally associated with presidential democracies (e.g., Haynes 2012). As such, we need to look beyond existing work that relies on the right-left dichotomy.

Instead of using a government's orientation to represent its leader's preferences, recent work relies on information about leaders' personal characteristics to proxy their preferences regarding the use of force (Horowitz, Stam and Ellis 2015). This approach rests on the assumption that how leaders think about military force as a policy option while in office is based on key elements of their background and life experience. For example, Horowitz and Stam (2014) find that leaders with prior military service, and especially those that did not see combat, are more likely to initiate conflicts than are leaders with a civilian background. Though not a panacea, operationalizing leaders' preferences based on their backgrounds offers advantages beyond the fact that it offers greater coverage for the set of leaders we analyze in our data. Most importantly, the notion that preferences can be proxied by the various life histories of political leaders provides us with multiple options for how to empirically assess theoretical expectations about hawks and doves in the context of term limits, a point we return to in the research design section.

3 Theoretical Expectations

The research described above suggests multiple plausible relationships between term limits and interstate conflict. We begin by outlining a set of expectations concerning the average or unconditional influence of term limits on conflict initiation before considering how variation in leaders' preferences over the use of force could condition the link between term limits and

conflict.

3.1 Unconditional Expectations

Much of the research on the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict draws on the role electoral accountability plays in institutional explanations of the democratic peace. Going back to Kant, these arguments claim that electoral accountability implies democratic leaders need to enact policies that approximate the public's ideal point, which tends toward peace, in order to remain in power. An office-valuing democratic leader's decision to go to war therefore is influenced by the electoral costs affiliated with deviation from the public's preferred policy position. Leaders who cannot run for office again can choose policies that are different from their constituents' preferences without negative electoral consequences. Removing electoral accountability, then, allows a leader to initiate conflict without worrying about losing re-election because a pacific public disapproves of her decision. This logic leads to the unconditional expectation about the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation described by Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013) and Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi (2014):

Unconditional$_{Positive}$: Lame duck democratic leaders are more likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders.

Evidence that term limits systematically affect other government policies or outcomes is mixed,[4] suggesting that term limits might have no consistent influence on conflict initiation. Indeed, existing research gives us two theoretical reasons to think this might be the case. First, lame duck democratic leaders concerned with the success of their party might avoid using force, regardless of their underlying preferences for conflict. If a leader cares about her party's continued control of the executive and believes initiating a conflict could harm her party's chances in the next election, then her inability to run for re-election should not increase the likelihood she uses force. This idea is consistent with both the "overlapping generations" (Alesina and Spear 1988) and "permanent referendum" (Tufte 1975) models of democratic politics.[5] Second,

[4]For instance, consider research on the effect of gubernatorial term limits on state-level policies and outcomes in the United States. Besley and Case (1995) find whether term limits influence economic policy is conditional on whether the governor is a Democrat or Republican; Alt, Bueno de Mesquita and Rose (2011) find electorally accountable governors produce greater economic growth than unaccountable governors; Keele, Malhotra and McCubbins (2013) find term limits have no influence on state expenditures; and List and Sturm (2006) find that the effect of term limits on environmental legislation is conditional on the size of a state's environmental lobby.

[5]More broadly, it is also consistent with the idea that term limits promote a "party-based" over a "personality-based" version of democracy (Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011).

potential targets could mitigate the effect of term limits on conflict initiation through strategic conflict avoidance. The strategic conflict avoidance argument claims potential targets will alter their behavior so as to deprive democratic leaders with the diversionary incentive an excuse to initiate a conflict against them (e.g., Smith 1996, Clark 2003, Fordham 2005). If these dynamics also apply to term-limited leaders, then potential targets might behave in a manner that limits the opportunities for lame ducks to use force. Thus, potential successor concerns and/or strategic conflict avoidance could result in a null relationship between term limits and conflict initiation.

Unconditional$_{Null}$: The probability of interstate conflict initiation should not differ for lame ducks and electorally accountable democratic leaders.

Research that argues the incentive to be re-elected leads democratic incumbents to behave in a bellicose manner implies a relationship between term limits and conflict initiation thus far overlooked in the emerging literature. While their specific questions, models, and results differ, Schultz (2005), Arena (2015), and Saunders and Wolford (2015) all demonstrate that the desire to be re-elected in the presence of strategic political opposition leads democratic incumbents to pursue policies that are more belligerent than the policies they would choose if they were unconcerned with their political future. If we think avoiding military conflicts is generally in the public interest, this is consistent with one of the classic arguments for term limits: democratic leaders are more likely to govern with an eye towards what is best for the public when they are unconcerned with re-election (Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011, pg. 1822). If the desire to be re-elected provides democratic incumbents with an incentive to behave in a bellicose manner, then removing the source of that incentive should reduce the likelihood of conflict initiation. Term limits, by definition, prevent a democratic leader from extending her tenure through re-election. This leads to the following expectation:

Unconditional$_{Negative}$: Lame duck democratic leaders are less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders.

The above discussion outlines three unconditional expectations about the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict. These expectations follow from scholars' understanding of how democratic political institutions influence conflict processes. As the following sub-section demonstrates, though, taking into consideration leaders' underlying preferences over the use of force suggests a set of conditional relationships between term limits and conflict initiation.

3.2 Conditional Expectations

Our conditional expectations about the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation rely on the assumption that leaders have two basic incentives for implementing policy: remaining in power and enacting their personally preferred policies (Wittman 1977, Strøm 1990, Roemer 2001). This implies an incumbent's optimal policy outcome is a function of the policy that will best secure her political survival and her personally preferred policy, weighted by the relative degree to which she is survival-motivated or policy-motivated (Alesina and Spear 1988). When framed in this manner, it is clear how electoral accountability, and thus its removal, influences the policies an incumbent will pursue: whether a leader can extend her tenure via re-election will influence the relative weights she places on her motivations for enacting policy. Leaders for whom re-election is possible have an incentive to pursue policies that can ensure their continued tenure absent among lame duck leaders. By removing electoral accountability, term limits provide leaders in their final period in power with greater autonomy with which to pursue their personally preferred policies (Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011).

A useful way to think about how term limits and leader preferences interact to influence patterns of interstate conflict is through the concepts of opportunity and willingness (Most and Starr 1983). The existing literature considers term limits as a mechanism that provides leaders with an increased opportunity to initiate a conflict. It says little about leaders' willingness to use force because it implicitly assumes all leaders are relatively hawkish and, therefore, would use force more frequently if not constrained by the prospects of re-election. Willingness, in other words, is held constant through an assumption about leaders' shared preferences for conflict. As discussed above, though, significant variation exists in leaders' preferences for the use of force. This variation and the greater weight given to personal preferences in determining policy outcomes in lame duck terms should result in variation in the effect of term limits on patterns of interstate conflict.

The relationship between leader preferences and electoral accountability should shape how likely democratic leaders are to initiate interstate conflict. Term limits provide a lame duck leader with the opportunity to pursue her personally preferred policies instead of the policies that best secure her political survival. Whether any leader is willing to use this opportunity to initiate an interstate conflict should be conditional on her preferences for conflict. This implies a relatively hawkish leader should be more likely to initiate conflicts once freed from the need to pursue re-election.

Conditional Expectation$_{Hawks}$: Among leaders with hawkish preferences, lame duck democratic leaders are more likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders.

Term limits allow relatively hawkish democratic leaders to initiate interstate conflicts without harming their chances of extending their tenure. At the same time, it is unclear why a lame duck with dovish preferences should be more likely to initiate a conflict simply because term limits provide her with greater policy autonomy. Indeed, the existence of strategic domestic opposition should make dovish democratic leaders less likely to initiate a conflict when they are term limited than when they can be re-elected.

Arguably the primary goal of opposition parties is to become governing parties (e.g., Strøm 1990). When incumbents want to remain in power and have preferences over policy outcomes, political competition results in democratic leaders pursuing policies that lie somewhere between their personally preferred policy and the policy that ensures their party wins the next election (Wittman 1977, Strøm 1990, Roemer 2001). Framed differently, the desire to be re-elected and political opposition interact to make political incumbents pursue policies more moderate than their personal ideal policy. Dovish politicians are often perceived as being weaker on national security issues than hawkish politicians (Petrocik 1996). The desire to be re-elected therefore provides dovish incumbents with an incentive to behave more hawkishly than their underlying preferences would dictate in order to limit the opposition's ability to benefit electorally from the dovish incumbent's perceived weakness.

Per the discussion above, this claim is consistent with analyses that consider the implications of strategic opposition for interstate conflict. In particular, Schultz (2005), Arena (2015), and Saunders and Wolford (2015) demonstrate that strategic political opposition can make democratic leaders who want to be re-elected pursue policies that are more belligerent than the policies they would choose if they were unconcerned with their political future. This dynamic should be stronger when a leader's natural inclination is to avoid using force. This argument about preferences over the use of force therefore implies the following expectation about term limits and interstate conflict among democratic leaders with dovish preferences:

Conditional Expectation$_{Doves}$: Among leaders with dovish preferences, lame duck democratic leaders are less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders.

The previous two expectations suggest leaders' preferences over the use of force condition the effect of term limits on conflict initiation. While intuitive, the logic underlying these expectations does not consider how strategic behavior at the international level might influence the data generating process. Indeed, if leaders' preferences condition the effect of term limits on conflict initiation, strategic conflict avoidance should have an asymmetric effect on the relationship between term limits, leaders' preferences, and interstate conflict. Strategic conflict avoidance should limit or negate any increase in the probability of conflict initiation we would otherwise observe among lame duck democratic hawks. This is because the transparency associated with democratic systems allows potential targets to adjust their behavior in a manner that removes the ability for a hawkish leader unconcerned with re-election considerations to act on their underlying preferences before the opportunity arises.[6] It would not, though, influence the effect of term limits on conflict initiation among leaders with dovish preferences. Here, lame duck democrats are less likely to target a country than democratic leaders who can extend their tenure through re-election. Thus, potential targets have no reason to strategically avoid disagreements with relatively dovish term limited democratic leaders. This claim is consistent with evidence that shows foreign states are more passive toward the United States when the more hawkish party holds the White House, even when the United States is experiencing problems that are consistent with diversionary motives and thus have an incentive to initiate a conflict (Foster 2008, Clark, Fordham and Nordstrom 2011). The interaction between term limits, leaders' preferences, and strategic conflict avoidance therefore implies the following expectation:

Conditional Expectation$_{StrategicConflictAvoidance}$**:** Among hawkish leaders, lame duck democratic leaders are no more or less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders. Among dovish leaders, lame duck democratic leaders are less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than electorally accountable democratic leaders.

The preceding discussion makes clear that a range of conditional and unconditional expectations about the relationship between term limits, leader preferences, and interstate conflict can be derived from the existing literature. The next section describes how we empirically assess these expectations.

[6]See Smith (1996), Clark (2003), and Clark, Fordham and Nordstrom (2011) on the role of transparency in strategic conflict avoidance dynamics.

4 Research Design

We examine our theoretical expectations using a democratic leader-year data set of 2,245 observations between 1960 and 2001.[7][8] A leader-year unit-of-analysis allows us to code initiation based on the leader who was in power at the beginning of a conflict in years where multiple leaders served, something not possible with a state-year or state-dyad-year unit-of analysis. The underlying leader-year structure and most of our control variables were taken from the replication materials associated with Debs and Goemans (2010), which updates Chiozza and Goemans (2004).[9] The probability a leader initiates an interstate conflict in a given year is estimated using logit models with robust standard errors clustered on the country.

4.1 Key Conceptual Variables

Assessing the theoretical expectations requires the operationalization of three concepts: interstate conflict initiation, whether a leader is term limited, and leaders' preferences over the use of force. Our dependent variable, *Conflict Initiation*, is coded one if a leader initiated a militarized interstate dispute in year t per the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) project, v.3.1 (Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer 2004) and zero otherwise. *Conflict Initiation* was drawn primarily from Horowitz and Stam (2014) and supplemented with data from the MID3 project.[10]

The variable *Term Limited* is coded one in year t if an incumbent leader is legally barred from serving as her country's political executive upon the expiration of her current term and zero otherwise. Our leader-year measure of lame duck status is based on the state-year term limits data collected by Baturo (2014). We went through each leader-year observation to ensure the state-year observation of a term-limited leader was accurately applied.[11] This step was

[7] We will make available the materials needed to replicate all analyses associated with this project upon publication.

[8] States included in the data set can be found in the Supplementary Appendix. A state is considered a democracy in a given year if it has a value of greater than or equal to +7 on the 21-point *Polity2* scale (Marshall and Jaggers 2005).

[9] One exception should be noted. Debs and Goemans (2010) drop Switzerland from their data set. We therefore took leader-year observations for Switzerland from the Archigos data set (Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza 2009).

[10] Horowitz and Stam (2014) use a modified leader-year data set for their analyses in that "in years where a leader year includes more than one militarized dispute, we [they] included each dispute observation" and "for leader years that did not experience MIDs, we [they] reduce those observations down to one observation per country per year, keeping the information for the leader who served in office for the most days that year." Our data set contains a single observation for each leader-year. Our different units-of-analysis mean that merging Horowitz and Stam's data with our data results in missing observations when there is more than one leader in a year for country that did not initiate a MID in that year. We coded the missing observations using the MID3 data (Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer 2004).

[11] For questionable cases or observations that were not covered by Baturo (2014), whether a leader was term limited in a given year was coded based on at least two independent sources. Sources include the Comparative Constitutions Project (Ginsburg, Melton and Elkins 2011), the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy data set (Hyde and Marinov 2012), Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010), newspaper articles, and encyclopedia entries. The specific

important because directly merging a state-year, term limited variable to a leader-year data set systematically miscodes leader-year observations in cases where a state had multiple leaders in a given year but only one of the leaders was term limited. For example, Gerald Ford's ascension to the Presidency midway through 1974 means that a variable identifying whether a leader is term limited should take on different values depending on which president was used to code that year. A variable that uses a state-year or dyad-year unit-of-analysis would, by construction, mischaracterize whether the President of the United States in 1974 was term limited for at least part of the year. To our knowledge, our analyses are the first to use a leader-year measure of term limits in a cross-national study.

The third measure required to assess the theoretical expectations is an indicator of leaders' preferences concerning the use of force. As noted above, empirically identifying leaders' underlying preferences for conflict is difficult. Most analyses that attempt to do so resort to the left-right orientation of leaders' political parties as a proxy variable (e.g., Palmer, London and Regan 2004). We take a different approach. Recent research demonstrates leaders' life experiences and personal characteristics systematically influence conflict initiation (among others, Horowitz and Stam 2014, Colgan 2013). Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015) offer the most comprehensive analysis of this type. Specifically, they analyze interstate conflict initiation as a function of a wide range of leaders' background experiences and personal attributes, including prior military service, involvement in rebel movements, work experience, and family life. We empirically identify variation in leaders' underlying preferences over the use of force using three measures that build upon Horowitz, Stam and Ellis's (2015) work. The first is an index based on the personal attributes Horowitz, Stam and Ellis find to be statistically significant, unconditional predictors of interstate conflict initiation.[12] Five leader characteristics are associated with higher probabilities of conflict initiation: prior involvement with a rebel movement that lost against the government, prior military service without seeing combat action, working in a creative occupation, prior military service that included combat action, and age. In contrast, a leader who worked in the medical field or was considered an "illegitimate" child is statistically less likely to initiate a conflict than other leaders. *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$ was created by adding

sources associated with a given observation will be made available upon publication.

[12]More precisely, these variables are significant predictors of MID initiation in a model that only includes personal attributes and does not consider possible interactions. The results of this model are presented graphically in Figure 2.3 on page 67 of Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015). Statistical significance at the 0.05 level was identified by examining the replication file "WhyLeadersFightMonadicReplication". Replication materials are available at `https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/ZK3FYV`.

one point for each personal attribute a leader possesses that correlates with a higher probability of conflict initiation and subtracting one point for each attribute that correlates with a lower probability of initiation.[13] *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$ varies between -1 and +3 and has a mean of 0.6 and median of zero.

Our second indicator of leaders' preferences is a theoretically informed index based on three factors that should correlate with leaders' underlying willingness to use force. The first is prior military service. Members of the military are socialized to place a higher value on using force than civilians (e.g., Nordlinger 1977, Geddes 2003), which makes them more likely to interpret national security as a military issue and undervalue non-military policy options (Huntington 1957, Sechser 2004, Weeks 2012). There is also evidence of a selection effect: individuals with more hawkish preferences are more likely to choose to join the military than individuals with dovish preferences (Bachman et al. 2000). Consistent with these claims, military regimes (Sechser 2004) and leaders who previously served in the military (Horowitz and Stam 2014, Horowitz, Stam and Ellis 2015) are more likely to initiate interstate conflicts.[14] A second background experience that should be associated with leaders' willingness to initiate conflicts is participation in a rebel movement. Participating in armed rebellion suggests that an individual is relatively risk-acceptant and comfortable with violence compared to individuals that do not join rebel groups (Horowitz, Stam and Ellis 2015). Importantly, evidence suggests leaders with a rebel background are more likely than other leaders to initiate interstate conflicts (Horowitz and Stam 2014). A third life experience that should correlate with leaders' preferences over the use of force is whether they received a military education. The education and socialization that occur at a military academy are likely to produce alumni that place a relatively high value on the efficacy of the military. At the same time, a military education does not provide students with the first-hand appreciation of the costs and risks of combat that can temper the hawkishness associated with military socialization (Janowitz 1964, Betts 1977, Horowitz and Stam 2014). Consistent with this view, Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015) cite Kaiser Wilhelm II's military education as a source of his bellicose worldview upon assuming the German throne (pg. 132). With the above points in mind, the variable *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$ proxies leaders' preferences over the use of force based on whether they served in the military participated in

[13] For a leader's age, a leader got one point if he or she was older than the sample median.

[14] Horowitz and Stam (2014) and Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015) argue and demonstrate that the relationship between a leader's military service and conflict initiation is conditional on whether an individual experienced combat. We address this point below.

a rebel movement, or received a military education. *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$ varies between 0 and 3 and has a mean of 0.3 and a median of 0.

The preceding paragraphs make clear there are a number of factors that could reasonably be linked to leaders' preferences regarding the use of force. However, as Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015) note, "the single leader background experience most plausibly relevant to the initiation of military conflict is whether a leader had prior military service" (pg. 130). Therefore, our third proxy for leaders' preferences is the dichotomous variable *Military Service*, coded one in year t if a leader has prior military service and zero otherwise.

The data underlying *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$, *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$, and *Military Service* were taken from the replication materials associated with Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015). The statistical models used to analyze the unconditional relationship between term limits and conflict initiation use these indicators of leaders' preferences as control variables. We assess the possibility that the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict initiation is conditional on leaders' preferences by interacting *Term Limited* with *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$, *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$, and *Military Service*, respectively.[15]

4.2 Potential Confounding Variables

It is possible that any empirical relationship between conflict initiation, term limits, and leaders' preferences is due to a (set of) confounding factor(s). In our case, a confounding variable would be an antecedent factor that brings about a correlation between conflict initiation and term limits and/or leaders' preferences (among others, Ray (2003) and Morgan and Winship (2014, especially pages 82-84)).

We explicitly consider five potentially confounding factors. We account for institutional variation among democracies that could confound our estimates. Specifically, democracies with parliamentary systems are less likely to initiate crises than those with presidential systems (e.g., Chiozza and Goemans 2011) and executive term limits are (largely) limited to presidential systems. The dichotomous *Parliamentary System* is drawn from Alvarez et al. (1996). We also control for the potentially confounding effect of a leader's sex. Compared to men, women are less likely to be political executives and generally have less bellicose preferences (among others, Welch and Thomas 1988, Ondercin 2013). Cross-national research on the effect of having a

[15]The Supplementary Appendix provides cross-tabulations between *Term Limited* and our indicators of leaders' preferences.

female political executive on interstate conflict is sparse due to the rarity of female leaders (see Caprioli and Boyer 2001, 505-509), but interstate conflict is decreasing in women's representation in democratic legislatures (Caprioli and Boyer 2001) and gender equality (Caprioli 2003). However, it is possible that female leaders "may well need to be more aggressive in crises than their male counterparts ... because to appear and act feminine (and therefore weak) would be political suicide" (Caprioli and Boyer 2001, 507). The dichotomous *Female Leader* is drawn from Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza (2009). Interstate rivals are more likely to participate in interstate conflicts and wars than other states and, thus, might have populations systematically more likely to prefer hawkish leaders than would otherwise be the case. This is similar to research that finds citizens prefer more hawkish leaders when facing an external threat (Gadarian 2010, Getmansky and Zeitzoff 2014). The variable *Rival* is coded one in a given year if a state has a strategic rival and zero otherwise per Thompson and Dreyer (2012). Similarly, a state's probability of fighting in an interstate conflict is increasing in its number of borders (Cunningham and Lemke 2013), which could increase citizens' preferences for having a hawkish leader. *Number of Borders* is drawn from Debs and Goemans (2010). Finally, we account for temporal dependence in our dependent variable by including the cubic polynomial of the number of years since the last time a state initiated a conflict (Carter and Signorino 2010). Modeling temporal dependence is often framed around appropriately specifying the underlying baseline hazard in a statistical model. However, a state's past involvement in interstate conflict represents a potential confounding factor in our analyses given that it could influence the extent to which domestic populations prefer leaders with relatively hawkish preferences.[16]

5 Empirical Results

We begin by examining the relationships between term limits and interstate conflict in the raw data. Table 1 reports the cross-tabulation of *Conflict Initiation* and *Term Limited*.

Table 1 suggests term limits are associated with a slightly lower rate of interstate conflict initiation. Electorally accountable democratic leaders initiate conflicts in 11.8% of cases (205/1,739) while lame duck leaders do so in 10.3% of cases (52/506). While suggestive, this basic analysis does not account for how other factors influence the use of force. We therefore

[16]Summary statistics are reported in the Supplementary Appendix.

Table 1: Term Limits and Conflict Initiation

	No Initiation	Initiation	Total
Accountable	1,534	205	1,739
Term-Limited	454	52	506
Total	1,988	257	2,245

turn to a more systematic evaluation of the unconditional relationship between term limits and interstate conflict initiation.

5.1 Unconditional Analyses

Table 2 presents our three primary models of the unconditional relationship between term limits and interstate conflict initiation. The models differ only with respect to the measure of leaders' preferences over the use of force, with *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$, *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$, and *Military Service* used in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3, respectively.

Table 1 indicates term-limited democratic leaders are less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than their electorally accountable counterparts. Importantly, the negative relationship between *Term Limited* and *Conflict Initiation* is statistically significant (at the 0.01 level) in all three models. To provide greater context to these results, we calculated the probability of conflict initiation given an electorally accountable leader and a term-limited leader and the difference in these two quantities using a set of post-estimation simulations based on the models reported in Table 2.[17] Figure 1 reports the mean quantities, with 95% confidence intervals, yielded by the simulations.[18]

Row 1 of Figure 1 nicely illustrates the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict initiation. Column A, based on Model 1 in Table 2, indicates the probability of conflict initiation for an electorally accountable democratic leader (red square) is roughly 0.05 while the probability a lame duck (blue diamond) initiates a conflict is approximately 0.03. The analyses reported in Columns B and C, respectively based on Models 2 and 3, also indicate the probability of conflict initiation is higher among democratic incumbents who can run for re-election than it is among lame ducks. Row 2 of Figure 1 reports the difference in the predicted probabilities

[17]The simulations assume the control variables take on their mean values if they are continuous and their median values if they are ordinal or nominal. Further details regarding the post-estimation simulations are provided in the Supplementary Appendix.

[18]The lower and upper bounds of the confidence intervals represent the 2.5^{th}, and 97.5^{th} percentile values yielded by our simulations.

Table 2: Term Limits and Interstate Conflict Initiation, 1960-2001

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Term Limited	-0.63**	-0.67**	-0.66**
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.23)
Hawkish Index$_{Empirical}$	0.30**		
	(0.09)		
Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$		0.22*	
		(0.10)	
Military Service			0.43*
			(0.17)
Rival	1.40**	1.42**	1.46**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Number of Borders	0.08*	0.08*	0.08**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Parliamentary System	-0.25	-0.23	-0.20
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Female Leader	0.59*	0.53†	0.50†
	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.30)
Peace Years	-0.24**	-0.25**	-0.24**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Peace Years^2	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Peace Years^3	-0.0001	-0.0001†	-0.0001†
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Constant	-2.28**	-2.15**	-2.17**
	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.22)
Observations	2245	2245	2180
χ^2	209.72	207.56	210.77
pr $> \chi^2$	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Log pseudolikelihood	-665.83	-668.82	-657.99

Logit model with robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses.
Two-tailed: †: $p \leq 0.1$; $*$: $p \leq 0.05$; $**$: $p \leq 0.01$.

of conflict initiation for an electorally accountable and a term-limited democratic leader. As the 95% confidence interval about the difference in probabilities lies below the zero-line in each panel, the results in Row 2 indicate lame ducks are significantly less likely to initiate interstate conflicts than are democratic leaders who can extend their tenure via re-election.

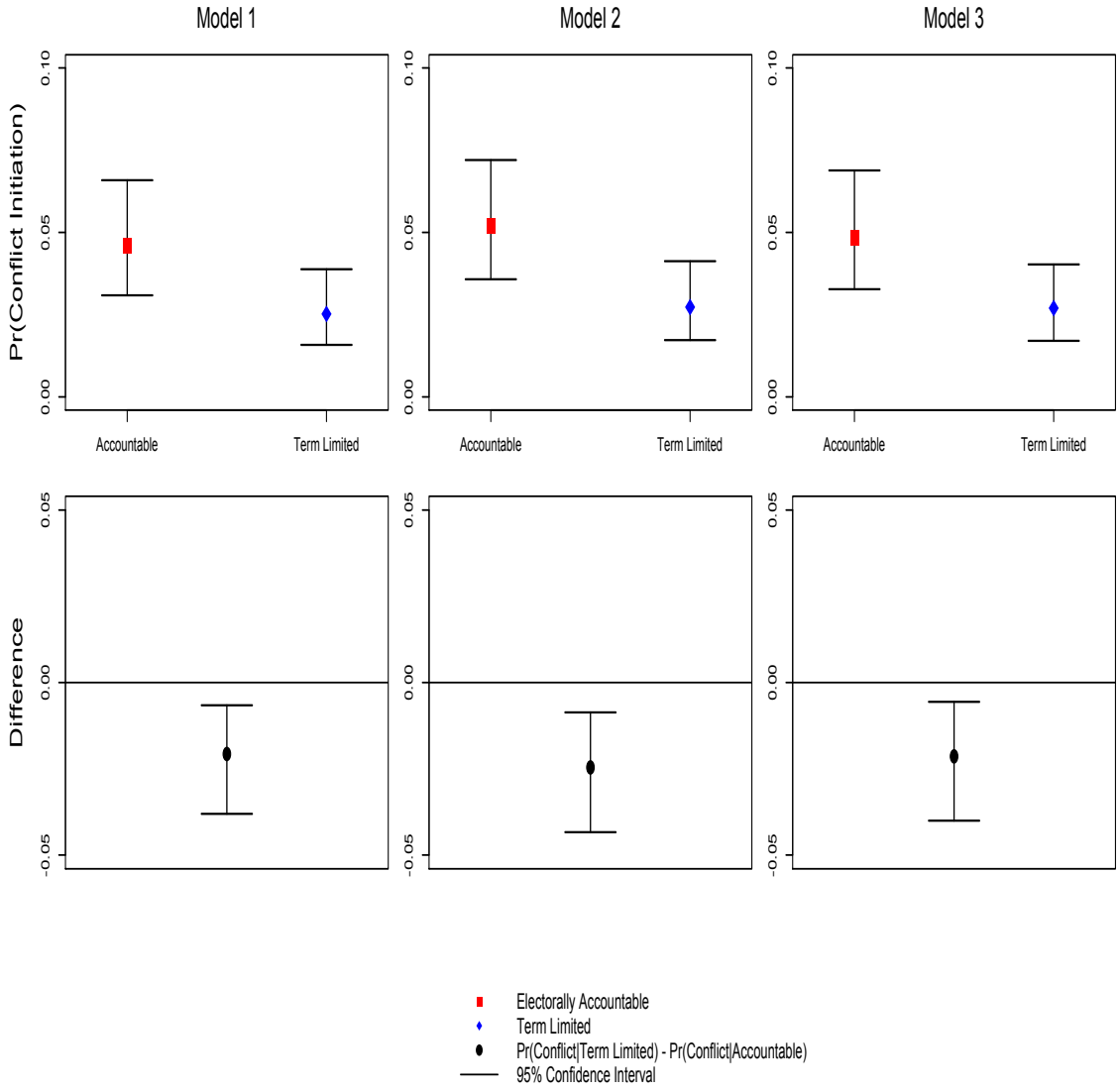

Figure 1: Term Limits and the Probability of Conflict Initiation. Based on models in Table 2.

The effects of the other variables in our statistical models largely conform to expectations. Most importantly, *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$, *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$, and *Military Service* are all positive and statistically significant predictors of interstate conflict initiation. We find a negative but insignificant relationship between conflict initiation and *Parliamentary System*. Our results indicate that female leaders are more likely to initiate conflicts than are male leaders. As expected, the probability of conflict initiation is higher when a state has a strategic rival and is increasing in a state's number of borders. Finally, there is a negative but non-monotonic

relationship between conflict initiation and the number of years since the last time a state initiated an interstate conflict.

Our primary analyses suggest that, on average, term limited democratic leaders are less likely to initiate an interstate conflict than are democratic leaders who can be re-elected. We conducted an extensive series of additional analyses to assess the robustness of this result. Our first robustness checks were a set of models that controlled for a state's economic growth (Gleditsch 2002), GDP per capita (Gleditsch 2002), involvement in a civil war (Sarkees and Schafer 2000, Fearon and Laitin 2003), major power status (Correlates of War 2001), and degree of military mobilization (measured as the difference in a state's number of soldiers in year t and *t-1* divided by its population and multiplied by 100 with data from Correlates of War (2001)). Second, we estimated ordered logit models that accounted for variation in the severity of MIDs to ensure our results were not driven by low-level conflicts (Horowitz and Stam 2014). Third, we estimated a set of negative binomial models to account for cases in which a leader initiated multiple MIDs in a year. Fourth, we estimated models that differentiated term limits by whether a leader could serve a single mandate or multiple mandates before being barred from running for re-election. Fifth, we estimated models that included a time trend. Our sixth and seventh sets of robustness checks were models that included year and decade fixed effects, respectively. Eighth, we estimated models with regional fixed effects (regions defined by Correlates of War (2001)) to ensure our findings were not driven by region-specific factors. Ninth, we estimated a model that differentiated leaders' prior military service based on whether they saw combat to account for the finding that leaders who served but did not participate in combat are more conflict prone than leaders who fought in a conflict (Horowitz and Stam 2014, Horowitz, Stam and Ellis 2015). Tenth, we estimated a model that differentiated military service by whether a leader had a career in the military or not. The logic underlying this specification is that leaders who had a career in the military, and therefore rose to a rank that gave them more responsibility, might hold different preferences regarding the use of force than leaders with less extensive military service.

Space considerations preclude us from thoroughly discussing the results of each robustness check here. We therefore summarize the effect of term limits on conflict initiation yielded by each robustness check in Table 3.[19] As Table 3 makes clear, our additional analyses overwhelmingly indicate that, on average, term limited democratic leaders are significantly less likely to initiate

[19]Standard results tables are available in the Supplementary Appendix.

interstate conflicts than are democratic incumbents who can run for re-election. Indeed, with one exception, the coefficient on *Term Limited* was negative and statistically significant at the 0.05 level or greater in every specification. The exception to the consistent negative relationship between term limits and conflict initiation is that lame duck leaders in multiple mandate systems are no more or less likely to initiate a conflict than their electorally accountable counterparts.

Table 3: Effect of Term Limits on Conflict Initiation:
Summary of Robustness Checks for Unconditional Analyses

	Hawkish Index$_{Empirical}$	Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$	Military Service
Additional Controls	–	–	–
Low-Intensity Conflicts	–	–	–
High-Intensity Conflicts	–	–	–
Multiple Conflicts	–	–	–
Single Mandates	–	–	–
Multiple Mandates	NS	NS	NS
Time Trend	–	–	–
Year Fixed Effects	–	–	–
Decade Fixed Effects	–	–	–
Regional Fixed Effects	–	–	–
Combat Experience	NA	NA	–
Military Career	NA	NA	–

+ : Positive and Significant; NS : Not Significant; – : Negative and Significant; NA : Not Applicable
Significance based on 0.05 level with two-tailed test.

The results in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 1 indicate that, on average, lame ducks are less likely than electorally accountable incumbents to initiate interstate conflicts. The analyses reported thus far do not consider how leaders' preferences over the use of force might condition the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation. We now turn to an assessment of this possibility.

5.2 Conditional Analyses

Table 4 reports our primary models of the conditional relationship between conflict initiation, term limits, and leaders' preferences over the use of force. *Hawkish Index*$_{Empirical}$, *Hawkish Index*$_{Theoretical}$, and *Military Service* are used to proxy leaders' preferences in Models 4, 5, and 6, respectively. Our use of multiplicative interaction terms prevents us from directly assessing the relationship between conflict initiation, term limits, and leaders' preferences using only the information provided in Table 4 for two reasons (e.g., Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006). First,

the coefficients associated with a multiplicative interaction term only tell us the impact of an increase in that variable when the other constituent terms are equal to zero. Second, the standard errors associated with the constituent variables and interaction term only reflect the uncertainty around the estimated effect of a variable when the other terms are equal to zero and do not take into consideration the covariance among each variable, the other constituent terms, and the interaction term. We therefore assess the relationship between term limits, leaders' preferences, and conflict initiation using post-estimation simulations based on the models reported in Table 4. Figure 2 reports the results of these simulations.

Row 1 of Figure 2 presents the probability of conflict initiation for an electorally accountable democratic leader (red square) and term limited democratic leader (blue diamond), with 95% confidence intervals. The results in Row 1 suggest electorally accountable democratic leaders are more likely to initiate conflicts than are lame ducks regardless of leaders' preferences over the use of force.[20] Consider the results in Column A, which is based on a model that measures leader preferences using $\textit{Hawkish Index}_{Empirical}$ (Model 4). The predicted probability of conflict initiation given a very dovish leader is 0.04 when she is electorally accountable and 0.02 when she is term limited. The same model indicates the probability of conflict initiation given a very hawkish leader is 0.1 when she is electorally accountable and 0.08 when she is term limited. Indeed, holding leaders' preferences over the use of force constant at any particular value, the mean probability of conflict initiation is always higher for an electorally accountable leader than a term limited leader in each panel of Row 1.

The second row of Figure 2 presents the difference in the probability of conflict initiation for an electorally accountable leader and a lame duck across the respective ranges of our measures of leaders' preferences for the use of force. Row 2 suggests that the effect of term limits on conflict initiation is conditional on leaders' preferences. In particular, the probability of conflict initiation is significantly lower when she is term limited than when she is electorally accountable given a dovish leader but not a hawkish leader. Notably, this is the case with each of our three empirical proxies for leaders' preferences over the use of military force. The results in Figure 2 therefore suggest the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation is conditional on leaders' preferences and that the negative, unconditional relationship between term limits and conflict identified in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 1 is driven by the behavior of dovish leaders.

[20] They also suggest the probability of conflict initiation is higher for hawkish leaders than dovish leaders, which provides some face validity to our indicators of leaders' preferences.

Table 4: Term Limits, Leaders' Preferences, and Interstate Conflict Initiation, 1960-2001

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Term Limited	-0.75**	-0.59*	-0.71**
	(0.29)	(0.25)	(0.24)
Hawkish Index$_{Empirical}$	0.27**		
	(0.10)		
Term Limited*Hawkish Index$_{Empirical}$	0.15		
	(0.23)		
Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$		0.25*	
		(0.11)	
Term Limited*Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$		-0.18	
		(0.26)	
Military Service			0.38*
			(0.18)
Term Limited*Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$			0.32
			(0.49)
Rival	1.40**	1.42**	1.46**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Number of Borders	0.08*	0.08*	0.09**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Parliamentary System	-0.26	-0.22	-0.22
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Female Leader	0.58†	0.54†	0.50†
	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.30)
Peace Years	-0.24**	-0.25**	-0.24**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Peace Years^2	0.01*	0.01**	0.01*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.00)
Peace Years^3	-0.0001	-0.0002†	-0.0001
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Constant	-2.25**	-2.17**	-2.16**
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Observations	2245	2245	2180
$> \chi^2$	212.06	207.30	211.85
pr $> \chi^2$	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Log pseudolikelihood	-665.60	-668.56	-657.79

Logit model with robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses.
Two-tailed: †: $p \leq 0.1$; $*$: $p \leq 0.05$; $**$: $p \leq 0.01$.

The analyses reported in Figure 2 suggest dovish democratic leaders are significantly less likely to initiate military conflicts when they are lame ducks, but the probability of conflict initiation among hawkish leaders is not conditional on whether they can run for re-election. To assess whether this finding is sensitive to the models reported in Table 4, we re-ran every robustness check described for our unconditional analyses on models that included an interaction

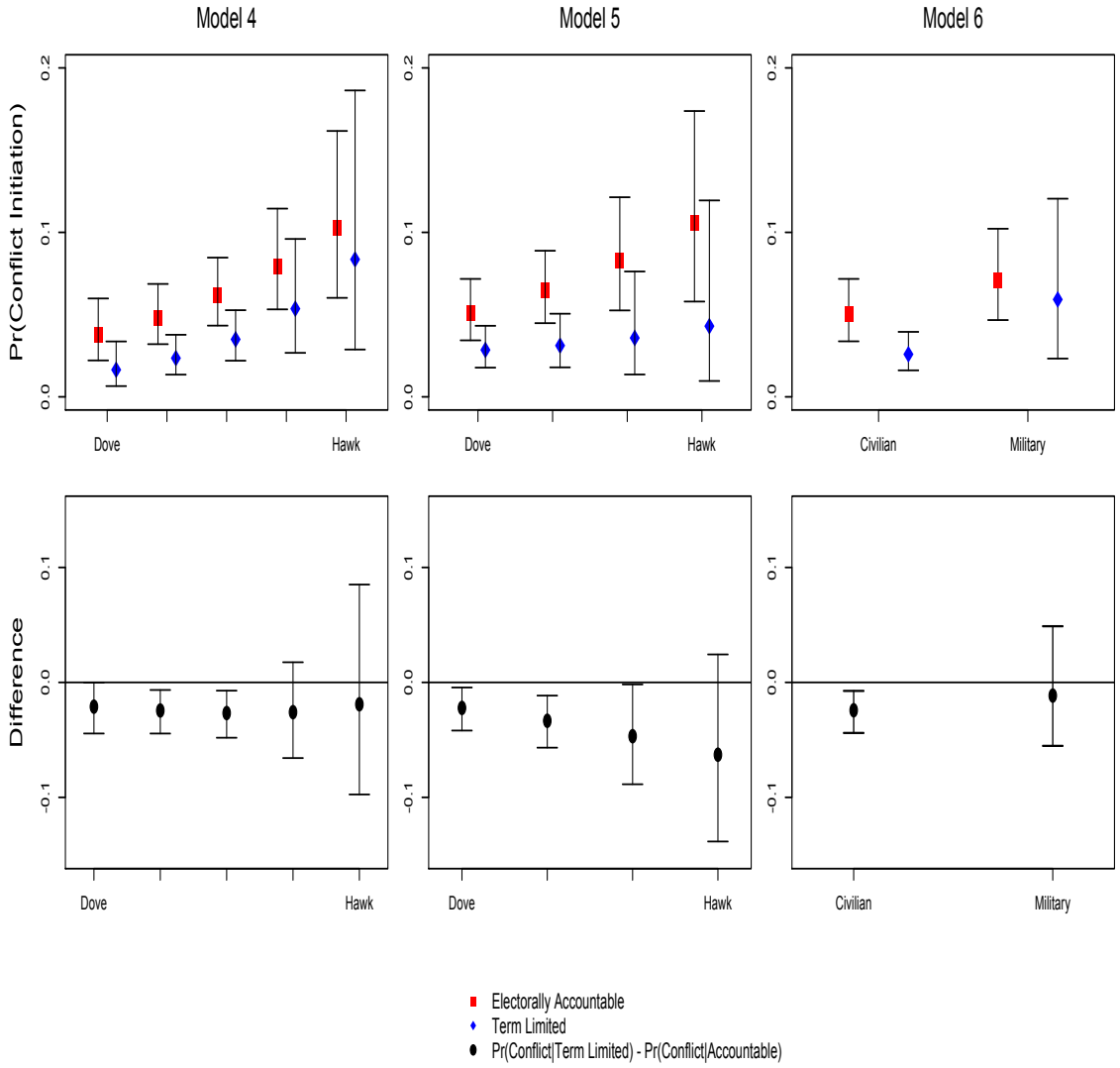

Figure 2: Term Limits, Leaders' Preferences, and the Probability of Conflict Initiation. Based on models in Table 4.

term between *Term Limits* and our indicators for leaders' preferences. Table 5 summarizes the results of these robustness checks.

The results reported in Table 5 largely are consistent with our primary analyses: dovish leaders are significantly less likely to initiate conflicts when they are term limited but the probability of conflict initiation among hawkish leaders is not significantly related to whether they are electorally accountable. There are a few exceptions to the general pattern. For example, we again find that term limited leaders in multiple mandate systems are no more or less likely to

Table 5: Effect of Term Limits on Conflict Initiation:
Summary of Robustness Checks for Conditional Analyses

	Hawkish Index$_{Empirical}$		Hawkish Index$_{Theoretical}$		Military Service	
	Dovish	Hawkish	Dovish	Hawkish	No	Yes
Additional Controls	NS	NS	–	NS	–	NS
Low-Intensity Conflicts	–	NS	–	–	–	NS
High-Intensity Conflicts	–	NS	–	NS	–	NS
Multiple Conflicts	–	NS	–	NS	–	NS
Single Mandates	–	NS	–	NS	–	NS
Multiple Mandates	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Time Trend	–	NS	–	–	–	NS
Year Fixed Effects	–	NS	–	NS	–	NS
Decade Fixed Effects	–	–	–	–	–	NS
Regional Fixed Effects	–	NS	–	–	–	NS
Service, No Combat	NA	NA	NA	NA	–	NS
Service, Combat	NA	NA	NA	NA	–	NS
Military Career	NA	NA	NA	NA	–	NS
Military Non-Career	NA	NA	NA	NA	–	NS

+ : Positive and Significant; NS : Not Significant; – : Negative and Significant; NA : Not Applicable
Significance based on 0.05 level with two-tailed test.
Dovish and Hawkish, respectively, represent average effects for lowest and highest two values on each index.

initiate conflicts when they are lame ducks than when they can run for re-election. Further, we find that relatively hawkish leaders also are less likely to initiate conflicts when they are lame ducks in a few specifications (e.g., models with decade fixed effects). That said, our additional analyses largely are consistent with the finding that dovish leaders are less likely to initiate interstate conflicts when they are term limited than when they can run for re-election while hawkish leaders' propensity to initiate conflicts is unrelated to lame duck status.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

If electoral accountability is a force for peace in the international system, then it follows that term limited democratic leaders should be more likely to initiate conflicts than democratic leaders who can be re-elected. This logic underlies most of the emerging literature on the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict, but implicitly assumes all democratic leaders will choose to use the increased policy autonomy associated with lame duck status to engage in conflict. Relaxing this assumption produces expectations that run counter to the conventional wisdom, creating a situation where multiple theoretical relationships can be

derived. Moving from the logic of the democratic peace to consider strategic behavior–both domestically in terms of political opposition and internationally as strategic conflict avoidance–compels us to consider the possibility that term limits have no effect or even a negative effect on the probability of disputes being initiated by democratic leaders.

As it turns out, our unconditional results stand in direct contrast to much of the existing literature on term limits and conflict initiation. We find consistent evidence that lame duck leaders are less likely to start disputes than are those leaders who can run for re-election. These findings are consistent with the argument that democratic leaders have an incentive to behave more belligerently when they are eligible to be re-elected due to domestic political competition (Arena 2015).

Considering variation in leaders' preferences over the use of force, the influence of domestic political opposition, and the potential for strategic conflict avoidance complicates the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict. Democratic leaders with relatively hawkish preferences might want to use the lack of electoral accountability when they are term limited to initiate conflicts. Potential targets recognize this, though, and have an incentive to act in a way that limits the ability of lame duck hawks from initiating conflicts. Thus, strategic conflict avoidance should result in term limited hawks being no more or less likely to use force than electorally accountable hawks. In contrast, term limits free democratic leaders with dovish preferences from political competition with their domestic opposition and the accompanying need to to act more belligerently than their underlying preferences. This implies the relationship between term limits and interstate conflict we observe should be limited to democratic leaders with relatively dovish preferences, and they should be less likely to initiate an interstate conflict when they are lame ducks.

With only a few exceptions, our statistical analyses yield consistent results across three measures of leaders' preferences. We find that lame duck status is associated with lower probabilities of interstate conflict initiation among leaders with dovish preferences but has no significant effect on the likelihood hawkish democratic leaders initiate a conflict. This is consistent with the idea that a leader's preferences over the use of force condition the effect of term limits on conflict initiation. Furthermore, when considered in light of the results from our analyses of the unconditional expectations, it appears that the negative general relationship between term limits and interstate conflict is being driven by the behavior of dovish leaders.

As noted above, our conditional results are consistent with strategic conflict avoidance. The

finding that hawkish leaders do not increase their use of force when the electoral connection is broken fits with the strategic conflict avoidance perspective in that potential targets can negate the ability of term limited democratic leaders with hawkish attitudes to act on their underlying preferences. Our results are in line with studies that find direct evidence that potential target states change their behavior when when the chances for being targeted by a democracy are higher (Clark, Fordham and Nordstrom 2011), but is at odds with recent studies that incorporate leaders' preferences with indicators based on the party of the U.S. president (Clark, Fordham and Nordstrom 2016) or the emphasis placed on foreign policy issues in parties' manifestos (Heffington Forthcoming).

Taken as a whole, our analyses make three contributions to our understanding of international relations. First, and most directly, they add to the growing literature on how term limits affect patterns of interstate conflict. Our unconditional results strongly call into question the idea that lame duck democratic leaders should be more likely to initiate conflicts simply because they are no longer electorally accountable. Additionally, our conditional results indicate that term limits significantly affect the propensity of dovish leaders to initiate conflicts, but not hawkish leaders.

Second, our findings offer further evidence that international politics are shaped by the interaction of domestic institutional constraints and leaders' preferences. We agree with Horowitz and Stam (2014), who point out that the idea leader experiences shape choices is intuitive, but underexplored. The combination of a leader-year unit-of-analysis and new data on leader and winning coalition turnover and leaders' backgrounds (Licht 2014, Ellis, Horowitz and Stam 2015, Leeds, Mattes and Matsumura N.D.) dovetails nicely with the call for theorizing about how preference variation affects policy outcomes.

Our third contribution is our measure of term limits. The variable we use in our analyses identifies whether a democratic leader is a lame duck in a given year. Existing cross-national data on term limits are coded at either the state-year or state-dyad-year. These units-of-analysis necessarily contain measurement error in cases where a state had multiple leaders in a given year but only one of the leaders was term limited. Thus, our term limits measure represents an improvement over the state-centric measures used in previous cross-national research and should be useful for scholars interested in how term limits might affect a wide variety of domestic and international behaviors.

We conclude with a brief discussion of five avenues for future research. First, and perhaps most obviously, the competing theoretical expectations and statistical results presented here

muddy the water regarding the way that lame duck status affects conflict initiation. This calls for additional theoretical and empirical work on the subject. For example, even with employing three different measures of leader preferences we have not exhausted the possible ways to capture leaders' preferences in a cross-national setting. Extending the coverage of party manifestos to a broader set of states may offer a future option. Second, it is almost certainly the case that factors other than leaders' preferences condition the relationship between term limits and conflict initiation. For example, we find that the effect of term limits is limited to single mandate systems and Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2013) find that economic performance conditions the effect of lame duck status. Future research could fruitfully consider what else might influence the effect of term limits on interstate conflict. Third, we are unaware of research that analyzes how term limits affect other foreign policies. For example, it seems plausible that removing electoral accountability could alter a democratic leader's incentives to impose or end economic sanctions. Thus, how term limits influence other international phenomena would seem to be fertile ground for research. Fourth, scholars might consider empirically analyzing the circumstances that lead democracies to adopt term limits. Cross-national research on the adoption of executive term limits does not exist and would improve our understanding of domestic and international politics. Fifth, a data collection effort that systematically identifies potential political challengers would be an immense contribution to scholarship that analyzes the influence of political leaders. Indeed, because the imposition of term limits and the leaders countries select are not random, these last two suggestions are necessary to address endogeneity concerns about almost any cross-national research on term limits or political leaders, including ours. As this discussion suggests, we view the theoretical expectations and empirical findings presented here as contributing to an emerging and promising literature and hope they spur future research that improves our understanding of the relationship between term limits and domestic and international politics.

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