

Project Summary

Analyzing the Dynamics of International Mediation Processes

This project will examine the dynamics of third-party international mediation using statistical time-series analyses of political event data.

Third-party mediation is one of the most common international responses to political conflict. Studies show that mediation was attempted in over half of the conflicts in the post-WWII period; it is likely that the use of mediation has increased following the end of the Cold War. Surprisingly, there have been few systematic studies on mediation. Those that do exist have generally focused on relatively static contextual factors such as the conflict's attributes and the prior relationship between the mediator and protagonists rather than on dynamic factors—both contextual and process—that may contribute to the success or failure of mediation activities. In contrast, the extensive qualitative literature provides numerous hypotheses about dynamic aspects of mediation. These studies, however, are primarily case studies, often by mediation practitioners, that exhibit little cumulation and, when taken as a whole, are rife with contradictory assertions.

This research will formally test a number of the hypotheses embedded in the theoretical and qualitative literatures on mediation, using automated coding of event data from news-wire sources and employing time-series and event-history methods available in standard statistical packages. Event data provide a rich set of indicators about the results of mediation, the political circumstances of the mediation (for example, prior military success or failure by the protagonists), and the various strategies employed by the mediating parties. The research will look at the factors that influence (1) whether mediation is accepted by the parties in a conflict, (2) whether formal agreements are reached, and (3) whether the agreements actually reduce the level of conflict.

The project will initially focus on conflicts in the Middle East, a region where the principal investigators have substantial field experience. The TABARI machine coding system—an open-source successor to the NSF-supported KEDS coding program—will be adapted to code events according to the new IDEA coding framework developed by Taylor, Jenkins, and Bond. The broader research community will have access to the revised coding program, coding dictionaries, and data sets via a web site. After refining the statistical tests on the Middle East case, the analysis will be extended to event data on conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and West Africa. Finally, a subset of tests will be applied to the historical crises in Leng's Behavioral Correlations of War data set and to the contemporary crises being documented in Alker's Conflict Early Warning System project.

The research will utilize three types of statistical models. The first set of models will employ interval-level methods on scaled and aggregated event data, using methods similar to those found in econometric analysis. The sensitivity of the event scaling system will also be examined. Second, mediation will be explored using the “time series cross-sectional logit” technique that has been widely used in the “democratic peace” research and other war-initiation literature. This work will take into consideration modifications suggested by Beck, Katz, King, and others to improve the effectiveness of this methodology. Finally, event-history and other duration models will be estimated; this approach should be particularly useful given the large random element in the timing of many conflicts.

This study will make contributions in both the academic and practical arenas. It will provide an extensive empirical analysis of hypotheses about the dynamics of the mediation process, a topic that has been largely understudied. Those empirical generalizations can inform the efforts of individuals engaged in actual international mediation. The project will also continue the development of research tools and data sets that can be used in a variety of statistical studies of international behavior.