

Honor and War:
Southern US Presidents and
the Effects of Concern for Reputation

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First draft: 23/08/2009

This draft: 03/06/2013

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Abstract

Reputation has long been considered central to international relations, but unobservability, strategic selection, and endogeneity have handicapped quantitative research. We exploit a rare source of variation—the fact that a third of US presidents were raised in the American South, a well-studied example of a “culture of honor”—to identify the effects of heightened concern for reputation for resolve. We deduce multiple implications of our theory, building on a family of formal models that account for unobserved selection into disputes. Using matching, permutation inference, and the nonparametric combination of tests we find strong support for our theory. Disputes under Southern presidents are approximately twice as likely to involve US uses of force, last on average twice as long, and are three times more likely to end in victory for the United States. Other characteristics of Southern presidencies do not seem able to account for this pattern of results.

The Online Appendix (<http://goo.gl/CgVj1>) contains details on the regional and ethnocultural background of each president, along with other descriptive statistics. Complete replication files, including extensive balance statistics, can be downloaded from the following anonymous link: <http://goo.gl/GiY60>. These will also be posted online at the time of publication.

Do national leaders go to war for reputation? More precisely, does concern for their state's and their own reputations cause leaders to escalate military conflicts they would otherwise settle peacefully? Scholars since Thucydides have argued that reputational considerations are important motives for war.¹ The logic is familiar: based on a state's behavior in one dispute (e.g., giving in to Hitler's demands at Munich), potential adversaries and allies make inferences about its likely behavior in future disputes (further appeasement); in anticipation of such reputational consequences, states alter their behavior (stand up to aggressors instead of appeasing them).

Despite the centrality of reputation to many theories of international relations, reputational effects are difficult to demonstrate. Case studies are hampered by policy makers' strategic and self-serving incentives to misrepresent their true motives and beliefs. As a result, coding actors' motivations after the fact is an inherently "subjective," "debatable," and "theory-laden" endeavor.² For their part, statistical studies of reputation are subject to pervasive selection biases and unobservable confounding.³ The presumed ubiquity of reputational effects is part of the problem: How can we infer the causal effect of concern for reputation without observable variation in the causal factor of interest?

We address these problems by exploiting a natural experiment—haphazard variation in the cultural backgrounds of US presidents—to examine the conflict-related effects of concern for reputation. Natural experiments and other design-based approaches are increasingly recognized as crucial to causal inference⁴ but are rare in the fields of IR and civil conflict.⁵ Our research design is premised on the fact that the importance attributed to reputation—

¹See, for example, [Morgenthau 1948](#); [Schelling 1966](#); [Huth 1999](#); [O'Neill 1999](#).

²[Jervis 2012](#), 341.

³[Fearon 2002](#).

⁴[Robinson et al. 2009](#); [Dunning 2012](#).

⁵[Hyde 2010](#); [Mintz et al. 2011](#); for exceptions, see [Miguel et al. 2004](#); [Hyde 2007](#); [Lyall 2009](#); [Jha and Wilkinson 2012](#).

and to related concepts like honor and prestige—varies greatly across cultures. If reputation is as influential as many claim, variation in national leaders’ concern for reputation should have important effects on their behavior in the international arena. The key to exploiting these differences is isolating variation in leaders’ culture-induced concern for reputation that is independent of geographic location, regime type, and other national attributes.

The United States offers an excellent opportunity to apply such a design.⁶ Compared to the rest of the country, the culture of the American South—a well-studied example of a “culture of honor”⁷—places much greater emphasis on concern for a particular kind of reputation: reputation for resolve. This cultural regularity, combined with the fact that one-third of presidents have been Southern, introduces systematic variation in the most important US foreign-policy decision maker’s concern for reputation for resolve. Since we exploit historical variation in the regional cultural background of leaders of a single country, all time-invariant nation-specific confounders are implicitly held constant. Moreover, as we argue below, the timing of Southern presidencies bears little relationship to the factors influencing international conflict, enhancing the plausibility of our causal claims.

To evaluate the effects of this manipulation, we test a set of empirical implications of heightened concern for reputation for resolve⁸ using a dataset of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) involving the United States. We contrast US conflict behavior under Southern and non-Southern presidents, matching presidencies on such variables as US power status and recent dispute history to adjust for potential confounders. We employ permutation tests consistent with the clustered nature of treatment assignment, thus accounting for the depen-

⁶We considered other countries as well, including the UK, Israel, Italy, and Nigeria. We focused on the United States because it has been involved in many conflicts, its subnational culture of honor has been well studied, there has been sufficient variation in presidents’ cultural background, and the US president has great influence over foreign policy.

⁷Nisbett and Cohen 1996.

⁸Formally derived in Authors 2012.

dence among MIDs within presidencies. Finally, we conduct a global test of our theory using a technique new to political science: the nonparametric combination of dependent tests.⁹

Consistent with our expectations, we find that under Southern presidents US disputes are twice as likely to involve a US use of force, last on average twice as long, and are three times more likely to end in a favorable outcome for the United States. These results are robust to a large number of conditioning strategies and statistical tests, and we present evidence that they are unlikely to be the consequence of attributes of Southern presidents other than concern for reputation for resolve. Our findings provide rare quasi-experimental evidence for the effects of reputational concerns on interstate conflict and speak to a number of other literatures, such as the role of leaders in international relations.¹⁰

Our paper is organized as follows. The first section reviews the IR literature on reputation and clarifies the relationship between *honor* and *concern for reputation for resolve*. We then summarize the testable implications of heightened concern for reputation for resolve, which are formally derived in a separate paper.¹¹ The third section provides an overview of the culture of honor in the American South and its relationship to foreign relations. Our data, empirical strategy, and results are detailed in the fourth section. The fifth section presents evidence ruling out alternative causal mechanisms linking Southernness and differences in conflict behavior. We conclude with a summary of our results and their implications.

I Reputation and Honor in International Relations

Reputation has been considered a motive for interstate conflict since the founding of the discipline. Thucydides argues that wars are fought for three reasons: “honor, fear, and

⁹Pesarin and Salmaso 2010.

¹⁰See, for example, Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Saunders 2011.

¹¹Authors 2012.

interest.”¹² Hobbes places “Glory,” which “maketh men invade . . . for Reputation,” among the “three principall causes of quarrell.”¹³ Morgenthau argues that promoting national “prestige—its reputation for power—is . . . an indispensable element of a rational foreign policy.”¹⁴ Schelling concurs, noting that a “reputation for action . . . is one of the few things worth fighting over.”¹⁵

Reputation and honor have also figured prominently in the private calculations and public rhetoric of US foreign-policy makers. The United States’ very first overseas military expedition, dispatched by President Thomas Jefferson in retaliation for the Barbary pirates’ depredations on American merchants, followed a clear reputational logic. In a letter to John Jay, Jefferson explained that “insults” to American interests “must be resented, even if we had no feelings, yet to prevent their eternal repetition. . . . Weakness provokes insult & injury, while a condition to punish it often prevents it. . . . [A]n insult unpunished is the parent of many others.”¹⁶

Subsequent US presidents justified their own military interventions in similar terms. Responding to German provocations on the eve of American entry into World War I, Woodrow Wilson announced, “We covet peace and shall preserve it at any cost but the loss of honor. . . . Once accept a single abatement of right, and many other humiliations would certainly follow.”¹⁷ Five decades later, Lyndon Johnson declared, “Our national honor is at stake in Southeast Asia, and we are going to protect it.”¹⁸ And in 2004, alluding to the recent US invasion of Iraq, George W. Bush concluded, “For diplomacy to be effective, words must be

¹²Quoted in [Kagan 1995](#), 8.

¹³[Hobbes 1985](#), 185.

¹⁴[Morgenthau 1948](#), 93.

¹⁵[Schelling 1966](#), 124.

¹⁶[Jefferson 1785](#); see also [Herring 2008](#), 98–9.

¹⁷[Wilson 1916](#).

¹⁸[Wyatt-Brown 2005](#), 441–2.

credible. And no one can now doubt the word of America.”¹⁹

All of the preceding quotations are from Southern presidents, who are often said to be especially concerned with national honor,²⁰ but similar examples could be cited for non-Southern presidents. Indeed, for most wars in human history a plausible narrative can be constructed in which the reputational concerns of a nation’s leader, elite, or public drove key escalatory decisions.²¹ As noted above, the apparent ubiquity of reputational concerns is one reason that demonstrating their influence is so difficult.

I.1 Concepts and Definitions

The study of reputation raises a bewildering proliferation of related concepts, so before we proceed several definitions are in order. Our particular focus here is the relationship between the concepts *concern for reputation for resolve* and *honor*. A *reputation* is a belief about an actor’s behavioral propensities that is informed by the actor’s past behavior. An actor’s *resolve* is its (private) willingness to escalate a conflict to a given level, such as the onset of war. Since resolve is a function of situation-specific factors (e.g., the interests at stake) as well as enduring ones, *reputation for resolve* is best defined as others’ beliefs about the persistent determinants of the actor’s resolve.²²

Among the most important determinants of actors’ resolve are their beliefs about the importance of cultivating a reputation for resolve. Although all international actors have incentives to care about their reputations, their degree of concern need not be equal. Actors

¹⁹Bush 2004.

²⁰See, for example, Fry 2002; Wyatt-Brown 2005.

²¹See, for example, Snyder and Diesing 1977; Jervis and Snyder 1991; Kagan 1995; Markey 1999; Tang 2005.

²²Huth 1997, 82.

that are embroiled in other ongoing disputes²³ or that face many potential opponents²⁴ have incentives to place greater emphasis on maintaining a reputation for resolve. So too may actors who believe that reputations form easily, are widely known and transferable across domains, and exert powerful effects on behavior—what Huth²⁵ labels the “strong-interdependence-of-commitments position” on deterrence. In other words, actors vary in their *concern for reputation for resolve*.

To identify the effects of leaders’ concern for reputation for resolve, our study exploits variation in the cultural importance of *honor*. Honor is an essentially reputational concept: a man²⁶ does not have honor unless others believe he does, and an honorable man is expected to care intensely about being seen as honorable.²⁷ Although the specific qualities that entitle one to honor differ across contexts, resolve is a quality common to nearly all honor systems. Honorable men must be prepared to risk harm and to commit violence in order to defend their honor, even against minor insults and challenges.²⁸ Honor also requires fulfilling (“honoring”) one’s promises and threats. Once made, commitments themselves become points of honor that must be defended for honor to be preserved.²⁹ In short, the ethic of honor demands that its adherents cultivate a reputation for not backing down in disputes once honor is at stake—that is, a reputation for resolve.

Honor tends to be most prominent in settings, such as rural herding societies, where possessions are easily expropriated, political authority is weak, and reputations are well known.³⁰ In such anarchic environments, a reputation for tenacious defense of one’s property

²³Wiegand 2011.

²⁴Sechser 2007; Walter 2009; Tingley and Walter 2011.

²⁵Huth 1999.

²⁶The variety of honor we examine applies predominately to men; see O’Neill 1999, 87.

²⁷Peristiany 1966, 21–2; Pitt-Rivers 1968, 503; Stewart 1994, 12–3.

²⁸O’Neill 1999, 91–2; Moritz 2008, 101.

²⁹Pitt-Rivers 1968, 505; O’Neill 1999, 127–35.

³⁰Campbell 1964; McElreath 2003.

may be the only effective means of deterring predation. Given the similarities between the international system and the social contexts where honor tends to thrive, it is not surprising that honor has a long pedigree in international relations.³¹ In international relations, the ethic of honor dictates that foreign-policy makers be highly concerned with their state's and their own reputation for resolve. Still, although the international system provides a favorable environment for honor, both individuals and societies vary in their concern for honor and thus in their concern for reputation for resolve.³²

II Theoretical Expectations

Given the complex selection effects generated by strategic interactions,³³ deducing the observable implications of heightened concern for reputation for resolve is not a straightforward task. Elsewhere, we analyze a family of formal models of interstate conflict that works through these strategic complications.³⁴ We derive three robust predictions for the effect of concern for reputation for resolve on the equilibrium characteristics of interstate disputes. We also show that other seemingly intuitive expectations are sensitive to largely arbitrary features of the model, such as the shape of the probability distribution of types. This section summarizes the model and the relevant results.

II.1 The Game

A natural model for interstate disputes is a two-player sequential game of chicken under incomplete information, with weakly increasing material costs of conflict and weakly increasing costs to backing down. The stages of the game can be interpreted as successively higher lev-

³¹Kagan 1995; O'Neill 1999; Donelan 2007; Lebow 2010.

³²Lebow 2008, 5; Jervis 2012, 340.

³³Fearon 2002.

³⁴Authors 2012.

els of conflict escalation.³⁵ Figure 1 displays a version of the game with three stages, the minimum needed to jointly model selection into disputes and behavior within them.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

³⁵Variants of this kind of model are found in, for example, Fearon 1994; Slantchev 2011; and Trager and Vavreck 2011.

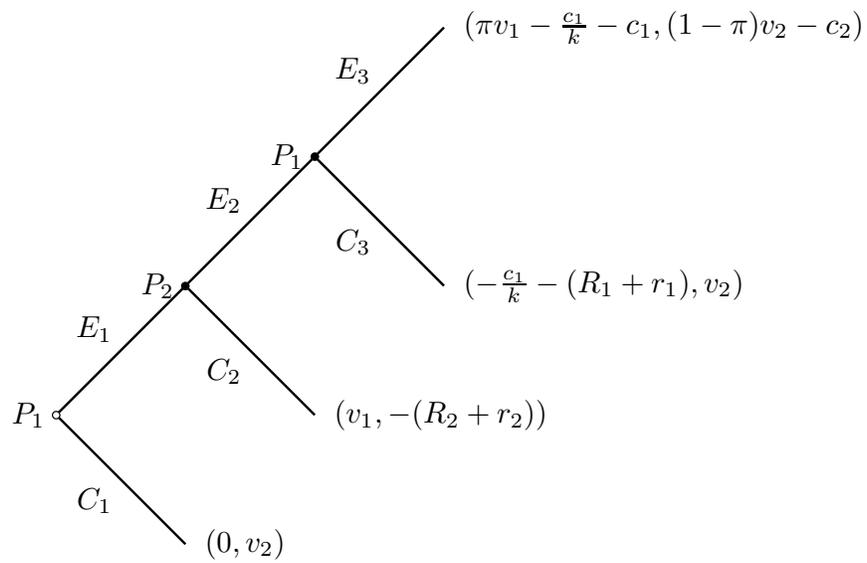


Figure 1: Three-stage crisis model with concern for reputation for resolve (Authors 2012)

The game involves two players, P_1 and P_2 , who at each stage j must decide whether to escalate (E_j) or concede (C_j). The model's parameters are:

- $R_i > 0$, $r_i > 0$: P_i 's perceived reputational costs to conceding after the first stage
- $c_i > 0$: P_i 's material cost of escalating if its opponent doesn't concede
- $k > 1$: cost of escalating in the third stage relative to the first stage
- $v_i > 1$: value to P_i of the issue in dispute
- $\pi \in (0, 1)$: probability P_1 wins the issue if it escalates in the final stage

$R_i + r_i$ represent P_i 's perceived costs of backing down, whether personal (e.g., damage to self-esteem), political (e.g., domestic audience costs), or realist (e.g., emboldening future challengers). These costs, presumed to be greater for leaders more concerned with reputation for resolve, are partially common knowledge (R_i) and partially private information (r_i). Separating public and private reputation costs enables us to determine whether the effects of concern for reputation for resolve depend on whether opponents are aware of actors' differential levels of concern. All the other parameters are common knowledge except c_i , which is drawn from a commonly known distribution.

The following stylized narrative of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis conveys the intuition behind the model. First, Premier Khrushchev of the Soviet Union (P_1) decides whether to station nuclear missiles in Cuba (E_1) or accept the status quo (C_1). If Khrushchev sends the missiles, then (once his action is revealed) both parties' reputations become engaged in the dispute: Khrushchev's because it would be humiliating to withdraw forces under pressure, and President Kennedy's (P_2) because the missiles are perceived as a challenge to US resolve, especially since Kennedy had explicitly warned Khrushchev against deploying offensive missiles. Each player will now pay a reputation cost ($r_i + R_i$) if it backs down. After the missiles are deployed and discovered, Kennedy can either concede or escalate the dispute. If Kennedy concedes (C_2), he forgoes the value of the no-missile status quo (v_2)

and pays the reputation costs ($R_2 + r_2$) of backing down. If Kennedy escalates (E_2) with a naval blockade and plans for airstrikes against Cuba, Khrushchev can either back down (C_3) by removing the nuclear missiles from Cuba or escalate (E_3) the dispute by challenging the blockade, provoking a US air strike and, for the sake of this stylized narrative, turning the dispute over to the generals.

II.2 Empirical Implications

Linking the theoretical model to the available data requires mapping aspects of the game to observed categories of behavior. Most importantly, we must decide when to consider reputation to be “engaged” in a dispute. While it is not always possible to pinpoint the moment at which reputation for resolve becomes engaged, previous scholarship suggests that a public expression of military hostility is almost always sufficient to engage it. Fearon, for example, argues that “leaders and publics have typically understood threats and troop deployments to ‘engage the national honor.’”³⁶ Consistent with this claim, Tomz shows that public threats and other militarized actions substantially increase the reputation-motivated domestic audience costs to backing down in an interstate dispute.³⁷ Following this line of reasoning, we make the following assumption:

Assumption 1: *The militarization of a dispute (threat, display, or use of force) is sufficient to engage the reputations of the participants.*

We also make the following additional assumptions:

Assumption 2: *When taking comparative statics for P_2 , E_2 corresponds to a use of force. When taking comparative statics for P_1 , E_3 corresponds to a use of force.*

Assumption 3: *The duration of disputes is increasing in the level of escalation.*

³⁶Fearon 1994, 580.

³⁷Tomz 2007.

Assumption 4: *A player achieves victory in a dispute if its opponent concedes (C_j) or with probability π or $1 - \pi$ in the final stage.*

We then evaluate the effects of an increase of r_1 , r_2 , R_1 , or R_2 on four outcomes: (1) the frequency of militarized disputes, (2) use of force in militarized disputes, (3) duration of militarized disputes, and (4) victory in militarized disputes. Because we do not believe that we can reliably identify the actor who first engaged reputation (i.e., who is P_1)³⁸ and are agnostic as to whether concern for reputation is public or private information, we look for results that are robust to changes in each of the four reputation parameters.

Contrary to a common intuition, in our model increased concern with reputation for resolve does not, in general, have a consistent effect on the frequency of militarized disputes. The logic behind this result is as follows. The direct effect of increasing an agent's concern for reputation for resolve is to make that agent more resolved. This deters challengers. Due to complicated selection effects, the net result may be to embolden *or* deter the agent, depending on the probability distributions of types and of players' beliefs. Absent stronger assumptions, it is not possible to derive clear predictions about the effect of concern for reputation on the frequency of militarized disputes, or on any statistic that is not conditional on reputation being engaged.

Our model does, however, generate robust predictions for players' behavior once reputation has been engaged. These are robust to different type distributions, kinds of uncertainty, and strategic selection. The model predicts that the more leaders care about reputation for resolve:

Hypothesis 1: *The more likely they are to use military force in militarized disputes.*

Hypothesis 2: *The longer the duration of their disputes.*

³⁸The coding of the state that "initiated" a militarized dispute does not necessarily correspond to the state that first engaged reputation, because reputation-engaging actions often occur before the first threat, show, or use of force.

Hypothesis 3: *The more likely they are to win disputes.*

The remainder of the paper describes our strategy for testing these hypotheses.

III Design-Based Empirical Strategy

In this section, we describe our strategy for identifying exogenous variation in leaders' concern for reputation for resolve. Our design-based approach exploits alternation in the regional background of US presidents as a source of cultural variation in their concern for reputation for resolve. This design is appealing because it is based on a recurring causal manipulation governed by processes only weakly related to US foreign relations. Presidential transitions provide a sharp manipulation of the worldview of the leader, with the risk of endogeneity in the timing of leadership transitions mitigated by predetermined election intervals and formal rules of vice-presidential succession.

Because this variation occurs entirely within a country, country-specific factors are held constant by design. We adjust for residual differences between Southern and non-Southern presidencies by matching presidencies on sets of potential confounders, and evaluate the assumptions underlying our design with historical evidence and placebo tests. We use non-parametric permutation methods appropriate for small samples and systematically test our hypotheses under 408 different combinations of matching specifications, coding rules, sample definitions, and test statistics (Figure 3).

III.1 Southern Honor and Interstate Conflict

Our research design rests on the claim that presidents from the American South are likely to place greater emphasis on honor and reputation for resolve than presidents raised elsewhere. Honor has long been recognized as one of the ordering principles of Southern society, with “tremendous importance [for] regulating and determining the conduct of the individual.”³⁹

³⁹Franklin 1970, 34.

An ethic of honor was prominent among both of the groups that most influenced Southern white culture, the English “Cavaliers” and the Scotch-Irish.⁴⁰ Southern whites in all subregions and classes displayed a similar devotion to honor: the upper-class duel and lower-class feud were distinguished by “the relative crudeness of the violence” but were “expressions of the same desire.”⁴¹ By contrast, “honor never sank deep roots” in the more orderly, commercial, and egalitarian North.⁴² While honor did have a place in Northern culture through the early 19th century, non-Southerners tended to conceive of honor in terms of Christian virtue and were less liable to resort to violence in its defense.⁴³

From the perspective of cultural psychology, the Southern culture of honor can be thought of as a sociocultural “model” or “tool kit,” a set of “blueprints for how to think, feel, and act” transmitted to Southerners through the process of socialization.⁴⁴ These socialization processes are strong enough that the culture of honor has achieved “functional autonomy,” allowing it to persist to the present day, long after its original causes have faded away.⁴⁵ The conflict attitudes and behavior of contemporary Southerners remain distinctive, as the psychologists Dov Cohen and Richard Nisbett have shown in a series of innovative studies.

Cohen and Nisbett find that in surveys, white Southerners are more likely than white non-Southerners to endorse violence, but only when honor is implicated.⁴⁶ In laboratory experiments, Southern men are more likely than non-Southerners to believe that an insult “damaged their masculine reputation or status.”⁴⁷ Southerners feel more upset and aggressive in response to insults, experience larger increases in testosterone and cortisol levels,

⁴⁰Fischer 1989; Ayers 1989.

⁴¹Franklin 1970, 33–7; Wyatt-Brown 1982, 355–6.

⁴²Ayers 1989, 1483; Krause 2002, 97–131.

⁴³Fischer 1989, 188, 582–3; Freeman 2001, 168.

⁴⁴Markus and Hamedani 2007, 15–18.

⁴⁵Vandello et al. 2008.

⁴⁶Cohen and Nisbett 1994.

⁴⁷Cohen et al. 1996, 957.

and behave in more dominating and physically aggressive ways.⁴⁸ In short, contemporary Southerners are more likely than non-Southerners to respond forcefully to challenges to their honor.

Are Southerners' distinctive attitudes towards interpersonal conflict reflected in their attitudes towards interstate conflict? The evidence, both historical and contemporary, suggests that the answer is yes. The connection between honor and foreign affairs is a prominent theme in Southern historiography. "Whenever a Southerner fought another," Franklin observes, "the honor and dignity at stake were no less important to the individual than they would be to an embattled nation."⁴⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, the foremost historian of Southern honor, argues that the ethic of honor has led Southerners to follow a distinctive "code of conduct" in international affairs, one characterized by an intense concern with the nation's status in the world and "a compulsion for revenge when, in both personal and collective terms, repute for one or another virtue is repudiated."⁵⁰ Fry's historical survey of the South and foreign affairs identifies honor as one of the fundamental principles structuring the region's relations with the rest of the world.⁵¹ Honor powerfully shaped Southern attitudes towards the War of 1812,⁵² the acquisition of Florida,⁵³ the Mexican–American War,⁵⁴ the Civil War,⁵⁵ and US imperialism,⁵⁶ as well as the major conflicts of the 20th and early 21st centuries.⁵⁷

⁴⁸Cohen et al. 1996; Nisbett and Cohen 1996, 41–55.

⁴⁹Franklin 1970, 36.

⁵⁰Wyatt-Brown 2005, 433.

⁵¹Fry 2002.

⁵²Risjord 1961.

⁵³Stevenson 2004.

⁵⁴Hospodor 1999.

⁵⁵Cooper 1983, 180–1.

⁵⁶Quirk 1967.

⁵⁷Fischer 1989, 843; Wyatt-Brown 2005. The only political science work to directly compare

The Vietnam War illustrates some of the complex ways that honor has influenced Southerners' attitudes towards international conflict. Southern political leaders were initially wary of US involvement in Vietnam, anticipating the costs of defending that commitment. As Georgia's Richard Russell, leader of the Southern bloc in the Senate, put it: "Once you've committed the flag . . . there's no turning back."⁵⁸ Despite their initial skepticism, Southern congressional leaders became the firmest opponents of withdrawal once the conflict was under way. As Mississippi Senator John Stennis put it, what mattered was not "how we got there" but that American "honor [is] at stake," and so the "real question is: How can we win?"⁵⁹

President Lyndon Johnson shared both his fellow Southerners' initial ambivalence and their belief that leaving Vietnam would lead to dishonor and humiliation, and he chose to escalate the war rather than pursue plausible opportunities for withdrawal. Despite the war's personal and political toll, Johnson continued to insist, "We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw."⁶⁰ Logevall argues strenuously that had the non-Southerner Kennedy not been assassinated, he would not have escalated the war as Johnson did, in part because unlike Johnson, Kennedy did not view the conflict as a test of personal manliness.⁶¹ Similarly, Caro provides evidence that Johnson preferred a more hawkish policy

the conflict behavior of Southern and non-Southern presidents is an unpublished paper by Joshi (2008), which considers only MIDs in which the United States was the "target" state (on the rationale that in these MIDs the US was "insulted") and finds no significant differences.

⁵⁸Fite 1991, 359.

⁵⁹Fry 2006, 1.

⁶⁰Logevall 1999, 393; Herring 2008, 736–45; see also Berman and Routh 2003; Wyatt-Brown 2005.

⁶¹Logevall 1999, 395–400.

than that adopted by Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁶²

Similar distinctiveness has also been evident in Southern public opinion, as Hero's comprehensive *The Southerner and World Affairs* documents.⁶³ Southern survey respondents attribute higher probability to the outbreak of conflict and are more likely to tolerate the escalation of limited conflicts into general wars. Southerners are more likely to consider deterrence based on military might the most reliable way to prevent an attack and guarantee national security. If war does break out, they tend to believe that "we should fight to 'lick' our opponents" so that others "will know what to expect from [the United States] and act accordingly"—a clear expression of concern for reputation for resolve.⁶⁴

Regional differences persist to this day. White Southerners express greater favorability towards the military than whites elsewhere, and they are more likely to believe that the Iraq War was "worth the cost" and effective at deterring terrorists.⁶⁵ A re-analysis we conducted of Tomz's study of domestic audience costs confirms these patterns.⁶⁶ Under this study's control condition, in which the president does not prevent an act of aggression but had not made any commitments to do so, Southern white males had similar levels of disapproval as their non-Southern counterparts (29% vs. 31%). Consistent with the logic of honor, however, Southerners become substantially more likely than non-Southerners to disapprove of presidents who threaten to "push out the invaders"—thus engaging their reputation—but then fail to do anything about the act of aggression (54% vs. 45%).⁶⁷

In sum, the historical, psychological, and survey evidence all suggests that the culture of honor is a real and enduring phenomenon that shapes Southerners' attitudes and behavior

⁶²Caro 2012, 208–15.

⁶³Hero 1965.

⁶⁴Hero 1965, 81–6, 111–26.

⁶⁵American National Election Studies 2008; see also Golby and Stein 2011.

⁶⁶Tomz 2007.

⁶⁷The one-sided permutation p -value of the difference in differences is 0.056.

regarding not only interpersonal conflict, but interstate conflict as well. The central theme of Southern distinctiveness in violent conflict is an aversion to backing down once one’s honor is at stake. This logic applies equally to interpersonal conflicts as to international violent conflicts. The question remains, however, whether the consequences of Southerners’ heightened concern for reputation for resolve translates into real differences in US conflict behavior when a Southerner is president.

IV Statistical Analysis and Results

Having argued that Southerners’ ethic of honor heightens their concern for reputation for resolve, we now evaluate whether the interstate conflict behavior of Southern presidents supports the three hypotheses derived from our formal model. We test these hypotheses in a nonparametric framework, addressing potential confounding by matching presidents on a variety of control variables. Since we are interested in the overall support for our theory, we combine the individual hypotheses into a single joint test. We demonstrate that the null hypothesis of no difference in conflict behavior between Southern and non-Southern presidents is implausible under a large variety of coding schemes, conditioning strategies, sample definitions, and test statistics. Other factors correlated with Southernness are unlikely to account for our results.

Data and Variables

Our dataset consists of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) involving the United States in the years 1816–2001.⁶⁸ We focus on “bilateral” MIDs (those involving the United States and only one other country; $n = 192$) because they correspond most closely to the two-player

⁶⁸Derived from the MID3 dataset using the EUGene computer program; see [Ghosn et al. 2004](#); [Bennett and Stam 2010](#). Following [Weeks and Cohen 2009](#), we drop fishing disputes from our dataset.

set-up of our theoretical model, but we also report the results for multiparty disputes in which the United States was a primary belligerent (denoted “primary” MIDs; $n = 267$).

Thirty-six presidents experienced at least one primary MID, thirty-four of whom presided over at least one bilateral MID.⁶⁹ We categorized every president as being culturally Southern or non-Southern according to the following rule: a president is labeled “Southern” if and only if he (a) was born and spent his childhood in the South, or (b) was either born or raised in the South, and spent his pre-presidential political career there. Following Nisbett and Cohen, we define “the South” as the states of the former Confederacy plus Arizona, Kentucky, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.⁷⁰ Eleven presidents are coded as “Southern” under this scheme. Our results are robust to alternative codings of presidents’ Southernness.⁷¹

We constructed three response variables, one for each hypothesis. *US Use of Force* is coded as 0 if the highest hostility level reached by the US was “none,” “threat of force,” or “show of force,” and 1 if the US reached “use of force” or “war.” *Duration* is defined as the number of days the dispute lasted, censored at the last day of the original president’s term. *Outcome* is an ordinal variable with three levels, “US loss” (−1), “draw” (0),⁷² and “US win” (+1), where the first and third categories are disputes that ended in a victory or yield by one party.

Nonparametric Approach

A key feature of our dataset is that the response variables are measured at the level of the militarized dispute, but the causal variable of interest varies at the level of the president. Nearly all standard regression techniques for analyzing clustered data of this sort lean heavily

⁶⁹MIDs are assigned to the president under whom US involvement in the MID began.

⁷⁰Nisbett and Cohen 1996.

⁷¹See Online Appendix for details on the coding of presidents and disputes.

⁷²Disputes not resolved by the end of the original president’s term are also coded as draws.

on parametric assumptions and/or behave poorly in small samples.⁷³ For these reasons, we instead employ a nonparametric approach that avoids the stronger assumptions required by regression and is better suited to analyzing a small number of clusters with an unknown structure of intra-cluster dependence.

Our approach is based on permutation (a.k.a. randomization) inference, which allows us to test the null hypothesis of no difference between Southern and non-Southerners with minimal assumptions.⁷⁴ To conduct the permutation tests, the labels “Southern” and “non-Southern” were permuted across presidents and a one-sided p -value was calculated based on the proportion of permutations with a value of the test statistic as or more supportive of the alternative hypothesis than the one observed. The clustering in the data is respected by permuting at the level of the president rather than the MID, avoiding the need to model the covariance of MIDs within presidencies.⁷⁵

Our primary interest is not in the results of the individual tests, but rather in evaluating the overall level of support for our theory. To do so, we employ a technique new to political science: the nonparametric combination (NPC) of dependent tests.⁷⁶ In essence, the NPC method calculates the probability, if the treatment actually had no effects, of observing a pattern of results as or more supportive of our theory than the observed data, while taking into account the dependence across tests under the null hypothesis. This is done by combining the p -values of the partial tests into a single statistic whose observed value is compared to its permutation distribution.⁷⁷ Unlike parametric alternatives, NPC does

⁷³[Angrist and Pischke 2009](#), ch. 8.

⁷⁴[Keele et al. 2012](#).

⁷⁵[Small et al. 2008](#).

⁷⁶[Pesarin and Salmaso 2010](#).

⁷⁷We use Liptak’s combining function based on the standard normal CDF, which has superior power when all the alternative hypotheses are true, as is expected here; see [Pesarin and Salmaso 2010](#), 128–9. Using the more agnostic Fisher’s combining function has little

not assume a particular multivariate distribution for the responses and yields tests that are exact in small samples. To highlight the overall degree of support for our theory, the following analyses focus on the NPC p -values rather than the results for the individual response variables.

Bivariate Results

Figure 2 plots our central finding: MIDs under Southerners last almost twice as long, and the United States is nearly twice as likely to use force and nearly three times as likely to win the dispute (four bilateral MIDs ended in a US defeat, one of which occurred under a Southerner). The permutation p -values for the differences of means are 0.03, 0.08, and 0.05, respectively, and the NPC joint p -value is 0.02.⁷⁸

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

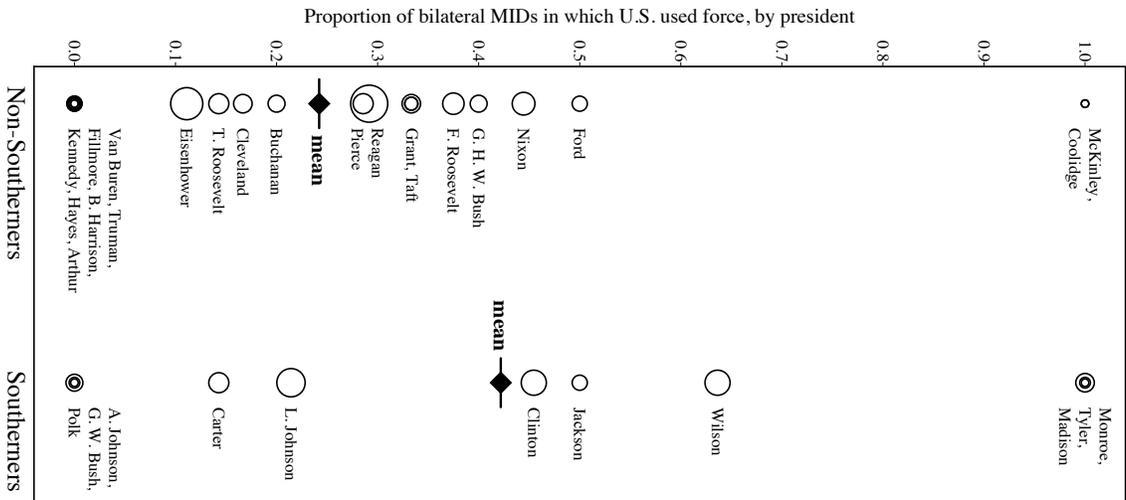
The raw differences in conflict behavior under Southern and non-Southern presidents is certainly striking, but can they support the inference that the differences were *caused* by a Southerner being president? That is, would the interstate conflict behavior of the United States have been any different had, all else equal, a non-Southerner been president rather than a Southerner? We believe such an inference is plausible, for several reasons.

Our claim to causal inference rests in large part on the design of this study. We chose this case because the processes by which US presidents are selected into office—national elections and vice-presidential succession—are not strongly related to the potential outcomes of interest. Although there are exceptions, as a rule presidential “elections are not decided on

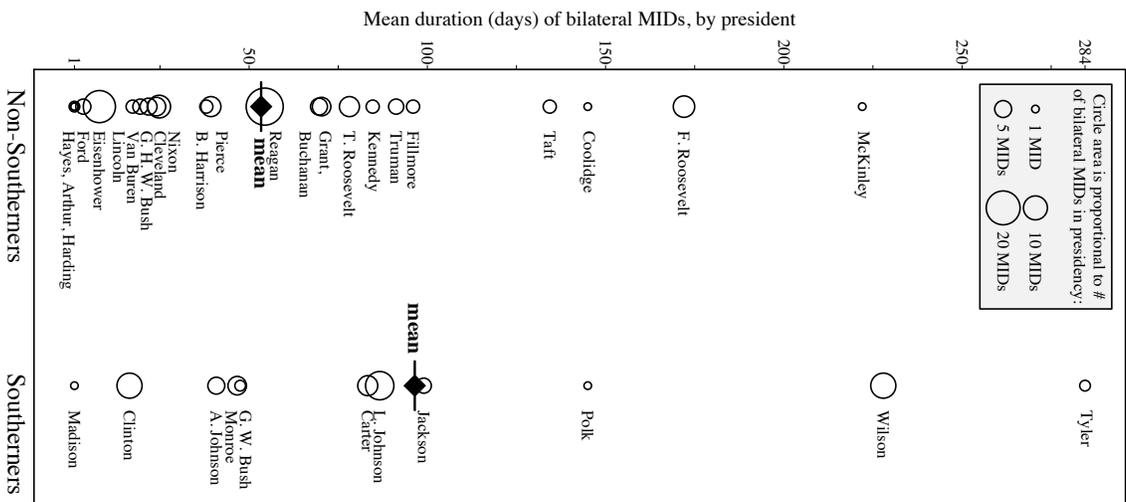
impact.

⁷⁸Although Southerners and non-Southerners behave very differently once a dispute has become militarized, they become involved in MIDs at the same rate, about 1.6 per year in office. This is consistent with our theoretical model’s indeterminate predictions regarding MID frequency; see [Authors 2012](#).

Use of Force (p = 0.032)



Duration (p = 0.083)



Outcome (p = 0.045)

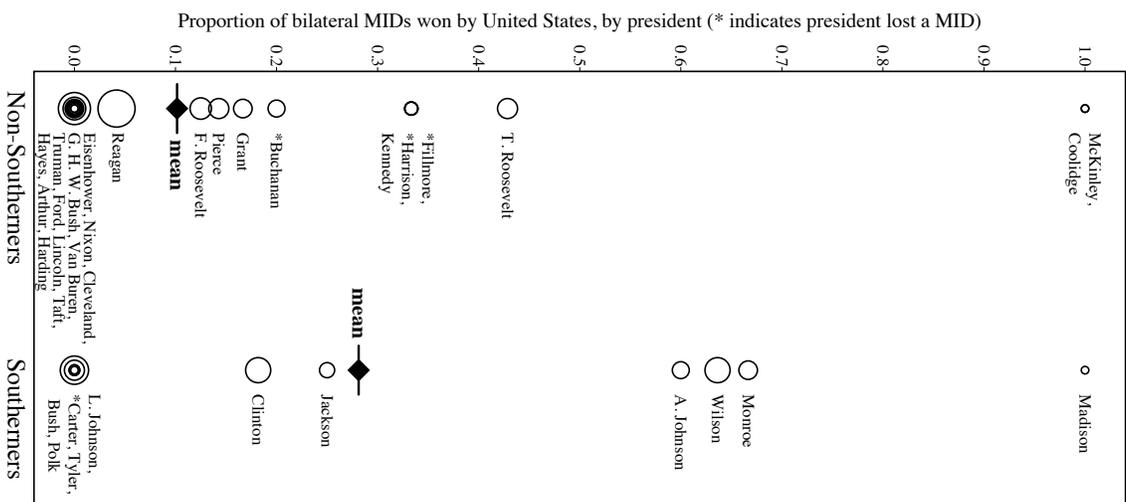


Figure 2: *US Use of Force, Duration, and Outcome* in bilateral MIDs under Southern ($n = 64$) and non-Southern ($n = 128$) presidents. President-level means are plotted, with circle size proportional to their number of bilateral MIDs. Diamonds indicate the pooled mean in each treatment group. Panel titles indicate the cluster-wise permutation p -values of the difference of means of each variable (including losses in the case of *Outcome*). The NPC joint p -value of the marginal tests is 0.025.

foreign policy issues.”⁷⁹ Even when foreign policy does matter, the international situation on Election Day is often a poor guide of what will unfold over a president’s term.⁸⁰ Furthermore, three of the Southerners in our dataset became president upon the unexpected death of their non-Southern predecessor. In sum, selection effects are less of a concern in this study than they would be if presidential selection were more closely tied to foreign affairs. Nevertheless, in the following section we demonstrate that our results are robust to controlling for a host of potential confounders.

Conditioning Strategy

To comprehensively evaluate the robustness of our findings, we varied the statistical analyses in five key respects: (a) the set of control variables used to match presidents; (b) whether matching was done with or without replacement; (c) the sample of MIDs; (d) the test statistics used in the individual permutation tests; and (e) the presidents coded as Southern. For each combination of coding scheme, variable set, replacement setting, and MID sample, we searched for the optimal set of matches using the R function `GenMatch`.⁸¹ As with the unmatched data, the NPC method was used to combine the results of the partial tests, the

⁷⁹Larson 1985, 317; Almond 1950; but see Aldrich et al. 1989.

⁸⁰Woodrow Wilson famously commented on the eve of his inauguration that “it would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs”; see Notter 1965, 217. Notwithstanding his reelection slogan, “He kept us out of war,” Wilson presided over 17 primary MIDs, including World War I. A similarly ironic lack of foresight of what would become a defining issue of a presidency was evident in the 2000 election, in which foreign policy played little role aside from George W. Bush’s criticism of military interventionism and “nation-building”; see Herring 2008, 938.

⁸¹Sekhon 2011. We used one-to-one ATT matching, giving presidents equal weight for the purposes of calculating covariate balance. The “optimal” set of matches was the set that maximized the minimum balance test p -value across all variables used to match.

sole difference being that permutations were made only within matched pairs.⁸²

A survey of the literature on US uses of force abroad yielded over twenty potential confounders.⁸³ In general, matching on all available control variables is not advisable. Each additional control may reduce balance on other covariates, possibly biasing the estimate. Bias can also be exacerbated by controlling for variables that are affected by treatment, are only weakly related to the outcome, or are “colliders” on a backdoor path.⁸⁴ Given the difficulty of selecting an optimal set of control variables, we do not base our conclusions on a single “correct” matched dataset but rather demonstrate the robustness of the results to controlling for the following different sets of confounders:

- **Basic Covariates (7):** This baseline set of covariates captures the essential features of the historical and foreign-policy context. It includes the year the president assumed office (*Year President’s Term Began*), indicators for the power status of the United States (*Great Power* post-1896 and *Superpower* post-1945), and proxies for US international commitments and war-weariness (*Log Years Since Last War*, *MID Ongoing When President Entered Office*, and *Number of MIDs in Previous 5 Years*).
- **Lagged DVs (6):** These covariates are the average values of the *US Use of Force*, $\log(\textit{Duration})$, and *Outcome* in MIDs that occurred in the five and ten years before the president in question took office.⁸⁵
- **Structural Covariates (18):** This control set consists of the Basic Covariates and Lagged DVs, plus five additional variables: *War Ongoing When President Entered*

⁸²Pesarin and Salmaso 2010, 38.

⁸³We relied especially on Fordham 1998; Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Howell and Pevehouse 2005; James and Oneal 1991; Meernik 1994; Ostrom and Job 1986; and Park 2010.

⁸⁴Morgan and Winship 2007, 64–73.

⁸⁵For Madison and Monroe, the two presidents for which lagged data are not available, the averages for five and ten years *after* their terms ended were used instead.

Office, *Log Deaths Per Capita in Last War*, *Number of MIDs in Previous 10 Years*, *Percent Elite Veteran*, and *Previous President Southern*. This covariate set includes all “pre-treatment” control variables—that is, those realized before the regional background of the president was determined. The first three variables are additional controls for the foreign-policy context. *Previous President Southern* is the lag of the treatment variable. We include the percentage of the US political elite who are veterans, which Gelpi and Feaver argue influences US decisions to use force abroad.⁸⁶

- **Party Covariates (20):** This set includes all the Structural Covariates, plus indicators for whether the president is a *Whig* or *Democrat/Democratic-Republican*. (Only one Southern president, George W. Bush, was in the excluded category of Republican.) This set controls for durable differences in the parties’ approach to foreign policy.
- **In-Term Covariates (22):** This set includes all the Party Covariates, plus the proportions of the president’s term spent in an economic recession (*Proportion in Recession*) and under unified party government (*Proportion Unified*). The state of the economy and the partisan composition of Congress have both been identified as important influences on US uses of force,⁸⁷ but both are also post-treatment and potentially affected by US conflict behavior.
- **All Covariates (23):** In addition to the variables in all the other sets, this adds an indicator for presidents who served in the military. Military service may affect presidents’ personal attitudes towards the use of force⁸⁸ but is also probably influenced by presidents’ cultural attitudes towards honor.⁸⁹

For each of the six sets of matching variables, we test our hypotheses under separate

⁸⁶Gelpi and Feaver 2002.

⁸⁷See, for example, Howell and Pevehouse 2005.

⁸⁸Gelpi and Feaver 2002.

⁸⁹Cohen and Leung 2010.

specifications that match either with or without replacement, use the sample of bilateral or primary MIDAs, and use one of four different regional codings of presidents.⁹⁰ Finally, we examine the robustness of our results to four different sets of permutation test statistics:

1. Stratified difference of means, which takes a weighted average of the pairwise mean differences and which have certain optimality properties when matching is done at the level of the cluster.⁹¹
2. Pooled difference of means, the permutation equivalent of the Student's *t*-test.
3. Outlier-robust rank statistics: the Wilcoxon rank sum statistic for H1 and H3 and the censoring-adjusted logrank statistic for H2.⁹²
4. Shrinkage estimates from hierarchical models with random effects for president: logistic, Cox proportional hazard, and linear regression for H1, H2, and H3, respectively.

Covariate Balance and Placebo Tests

The identifying assumption in this study—that the probability of the US president being from the South is (conditionally) as-if random—implies that pretreatment characteristics of Southern and non-Southern presidencies should be similar, up to random chance. The Online Appendix details the balance and placebo tests we conducted, but here we briefly summarize the results.

Creating matched pairs of presidents substantially improves covariate balance, especially when relatively few covariates are used to match (see Table 1). For the Basic Covariates,

⁹⁰We considered alternative definitions of the South and consulted the ethnocultural ancestry of the president as a robustness coding. Only two presidents were sensitive to these alternative definitions: Harry Truman (non-Southern under our initial coding scheme) and George W. Bush (initially Southern). See Online Appendix for details.

⁹¹For details, see [Hansen and Bowers 2008](#).

⁹²[Lehmann 1975](#); [Harrington 2005](#).

the post-matching balance is nearly perfect. Even when all 23 covariates are used, the worst-balanced covariate is only marginally significant.

A more stringent test of random treatment assignment is a “placebo test”: a test of an effect known or assumed to be zero.⁹³ Lagged dependent variables are well suited for placebo tests whenever confounding processes have temporal persistence, which is often the case. We conducted placebo tests of the six lagged DVs using the R function `xBalance`,⁹⁴ which implements individual and omnibus balance tests for stratified clustered data.⁹⁵

The placebo results are mostly supportive of as-if random assignment. None of the 96 omnibus tests of lagged DVs, including the 16 for presidents matched on Basic Covariates alone, can be rejected at the 0.1 level. The results for individual lagged DVs are less consistent. Averaged over the preceding 10 years, the lagged DVs are quite well balanced. Over the preceding 5 years, however, the average of *US Use of Force* is marginally significantly higher among Southerners, with a typical z -score across matched sets of about +1.8. In contrast, the lagged 5-year average of $\log(\textit{Duration})$ is marginally significantly lower among Southerners (typical z -score ≈ -1.75). As for *Outcome*, the United States tended to fair somewhat better in the 5 years before a Southern presidency, though not significantly so.

In sum, matching presidents succeeds in creating treated and control groups that are relatively balanced in terms of potential confounders. Matching presidents on the Basic Covariates alone is sufficient to pass an omnibus placebo test on the lagged DVs. The results for the 5-year lags of *US Use of Force* and *Duration*, however, raise the possibility that Southerners have been selected into the presidency at unusual times for US foreign relations. We address this possibility in Section V.

⁹³Sekhon 2009, 500–02.

⁹⁴Bowers et al. 2010.

⁹⁵`xBalance` reports asymptotic two-sided p -values.

Results After Matching

Table 1 lists the matched pairs of Southern and non-Southern presidents created with each combination of control variables for our original coding of Southernness, among presidents who experienced at least one bilateral MID (see Online Appendix for the other matched sets). For each matched dataset, the table lists partial and global p -values for the response variables, as well as the covariate with the smallest balance test p -value and its associated balance statistics. The global p -values, which are consistently supportive across matched comparisons, smooth out the variability of the individual tests.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A fuller picture of the results is provided by Figure 3, which plots the NPC joint p -values corresponding to the 408 combinations of regional codings (represented by columns), matching variable sets (rows), replacement settings, MID samples, and test statistics. Overall, the data provide strong evidence of a difference between Southern and non-Southern presidents in the manner predicted by our theory. The median NPC p -value in the plot is 0.06 and the interquartile range is (0.02, 0.13). The results for bilateral MIDs, which correspond most closely to our two-player formal model, are especially consistent, with a median of 0.05 and an IQR of (0.02, 0.10). The individual response variables *US Use of Force*, *Duration*, and *Outcome*, with median p -values of 0.15, 0.08, and 0.13 respectively, contribute about equally to the overall results, though the partial p -values are more variable than the global ones. It is by combining the information across partial tests that we have the statistical power to detect these differences despite samples as small as 10 matched pairs.

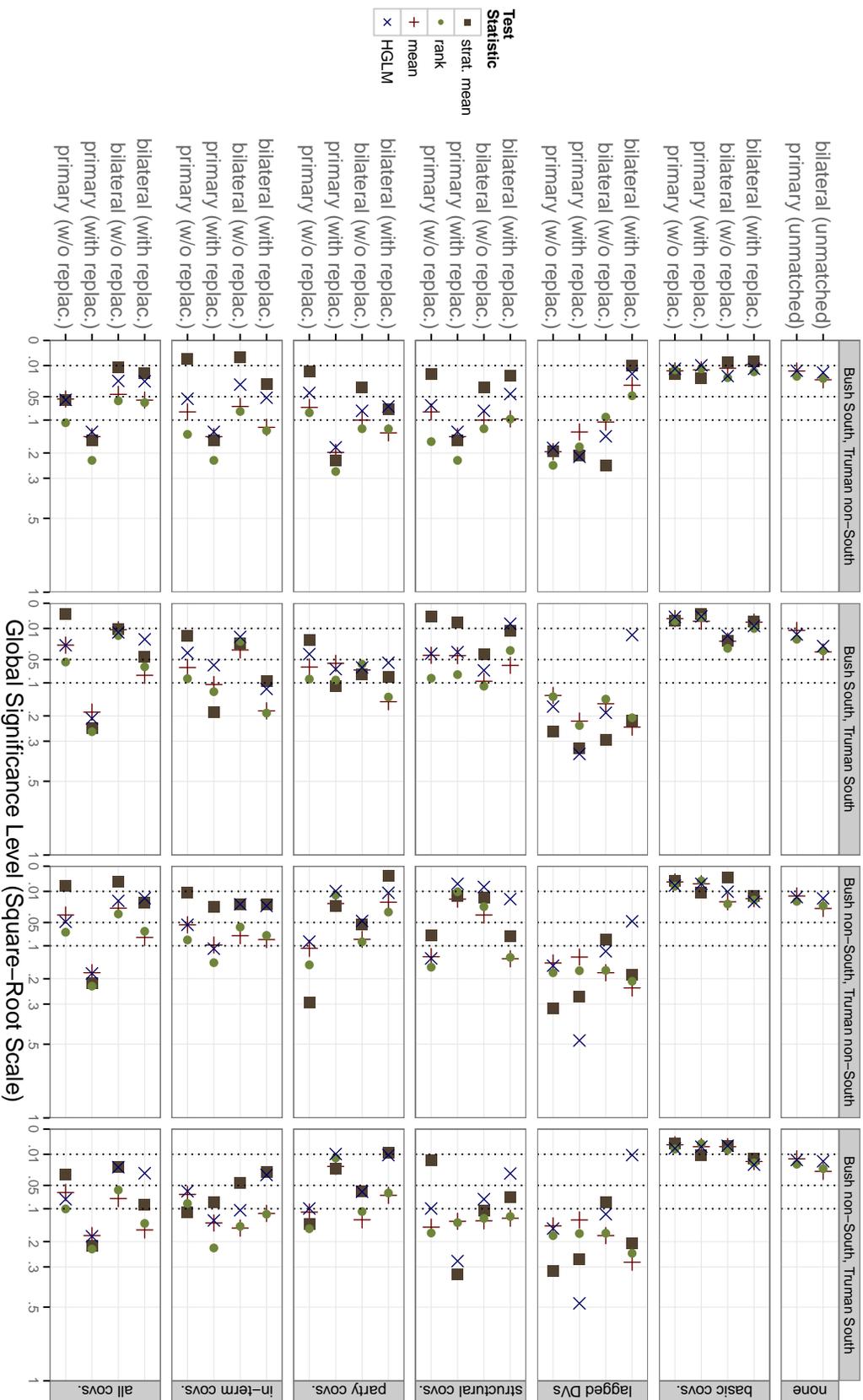
[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 1: For each president coded as Southern under our preferred coding scheme, this table lists the non-Southerner matched to him, with (top) and without (bottom) replacement, using six sets of matching variables. The response-variable p -values are from stratified difference-of-means permutation tests. Below them is listed the most-imbalanced matching covariate in each matched dataset and measures of its imbalance.

MATCHING WITH REPLACEMENT							
Non-Southerner Matched Using Given Set of Covariates							
	Southerner	Basic	Lagged DVs	Structural	Party	In-Term	All
Presidents	Madison	Fillmore	Harding	Harding	RooseveltT	Harding	Van Buren
	Monroe	Grant	Harding	Grant	RooseveltF	Grant	RooseveltT
	Jackson	Cleveland	Harding	RooseveltF	RooseveltF	RooseveltF	RooseveltT
	Tyler	Pierce	Nixon	Buchanan	Buchanan	Buchanan	Harding
	Polk	Van Buren	RooseveltT	Buchanan	Buchanan	Buchanan	Van Buren
	JohnsonA	Pierce	Truman	Buchanan	McKinley	Buchanan	Cleveland
	Wilson	RooseveltT	Nixon	RooseveltT	RooseveltT	RooseveltT	RooseveltF
	JohnsonL	Nixon	Cleveland	BushGHW	BushGHW	Kennedy	Kennedy
	Carter	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Kennedy
	Clinton	Reagan	Truman	Truman	Nixon	BushGHW	Kennedy
BushGW	Kennedy	Truman	Kennedy	Nixon	Ford	Ford	
DV's	US Force p	0.12	0.04	0.09	0.21	0.10	0.02
	Duration p	0.07	0.07	0.18	0.27	0.15	0.15
	Outcome p	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.22
	NPC Joint p	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.02
Balance	Most-Imbal. Match Cov.	<i>Log Yrs. Since War</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Log % Dead in Last War</i>	<i>Ave. Log Dur. Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Unified Gov't</i>
	Mean Diff.	+0.17	+0.10	-1.56	-0.73	+0.23	-0.18
	Std. Diff.	+0.14	+0.27	-0.58	-0.68	+0.64	-0.53
	Paired t Test p	0.66	0.08	0.10	0.03	0.04	0.09
	K-S Test p	0.35	0.33	0.03	0.16	0.34	0.07

MATCHING WITHOUT REPLACEMENT							
Non-Southerner Matched Using Given Set of Covariates							
	Southerner	Basic	Lagged DVs	Structural	Party	In-Term	All
Presidents	Madison	Fillmore	RooseveltF	Grant	Grant	Van Buren	Harding
	Monroe	Cleveland	Coolidge	RooseveltT	RooseveltT	Grant	Grant
	Jackson	Grant	Harding	Cleveland	Cleveland	RooseveltT	RooseveltT
	Tyler	Pierce	Nixon	Van Buren	Van Buren	Buchanan	Van Buren
	Polk	Van Buren	Ford	Buchanan	Buchanan	Pierce	Cleveland
	JohnsonA	Buchanan	Truman	Coolidge	Coolidge	Arthur	Buchanan
	Wilson	RooseveltT	Buchanan	RooseveltF	RooseveltF	RooseveltF	RooseveltF
	JohnsonL	Nixon	BushGHW	Kennedy	Kennedy	Kennedy	Kennedy
	Carter	Ford	Reagan	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford
	Clinton	Reagan	McKinley	BushGHW	BushGHW	BushGHW	Truman
BushGW	Kennedy	RooseveltT	Harding	Harding	Harding	BushGHW	
DV's	US Force p	0.10	0.38	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.05
	Duration p	0.08	0.13	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.13
	Outcome p	0.04	0.30	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.09
	NPC Joint p	0.01	0.25	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.01
Balance	Most-Imbal. Match Cov.	<i>Log Yrs. Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Since War</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Last 5 Yrs.</i>	<i>Log % Dead in Last War</i>	<i>Pr. US Force Last 5 Yrs.</i>
	Mean Diff.	+0.12	+0.23	+0.28	+0.28	-1.67	+0.25
	Std. Diff.	+0.10	+0.64	+0.77	+0.77	-0.62	+0.69
	Paired t Test p	0.79	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.05
	K-S Test p	0.37	0.35	0.36	0.35	0.11	0.36

Figure 3: NPC joint p -values for the three outcome variables based on 408 combinations of coding schemes (rows) are based on 36 presidents (34 in the case of bilateral MIDs). The matched samples contain 10, 11, or 12 pairs of presidents, depending on how many presidents are coded as Southern.



V Ruling Out Alternative Causal Mechanisms

US dispute behavior differs markedly when a Southerner is president. This finding does not, however, prove that the effect of Southern presidencies is mediated through greater attachment to honor and concern for reputation. In this section we consider whether another aspect of Southernness could be the causal mechanism at work.

In his comprehensive historical survey of the South and foreign affairs, Fry identifies five factors that have shaped the region's orientation towards foreign policy: attachment to honor and military prowess; commitment to white supremacy; agrarian economic interests; fear of centralized state authority; and loyalty to the Democratic Party.⁹⁶ Bensel's *Sectionalism and American Political Development* yields a similar list of alternatives to honor, though with greater emphasis on Southern support for free trade and its hostility to a permanent military establishment until World War II.⁹⁷ Chester too emphasizes the South's rural agrarianism, Democratic loyalty, and system of racial apartheid.⁹⁸ Hero's book-length treatment of foreign-policy attitudes in the South highlights the region's "cautious, conservative view of international relations," its pessimism about the prospects for international harmony, and its esteem for military virtues.⁹⁹ More generally, the scholarship on the South emphasizes that through the mid-20th century, the region was poorer, more rural, more hierarchical, and less egalitarian than the rest of the nation, with a much larger black population and an ethnically more homogenous white population.

For one of the regional differences listed above to offer a plausible alternative explanation to honor, it would have to satisfy three conditions. First, Southern and non-Southern presidents themselves would have to differ with respect to the alternative factor, as they do in their attachment to honor. Second, it must be plausible that the rival factor causally

⁹⁶Fry 2002, 5–6.

⁹⁷Bensel 1984.

⁹⁸Chester 1975, 274–85.

⁹⁹Hero 1965, 81 and passim.

accounts for the pattern of differences we find. Third, the factor should not be an aspect or consequence of the culture of honor.

The foreign-policy effects of the South's system of racial hierarchy, which persisted a century after the abolition of slavery, were complicated.¹⁰⁰ On one hand, Southern elites' desire to insulate their racial system from external interference rendered them hostile to a powerful central government with a standing army.¹⁰¹ Southerners also feared that US imperialism would lead to the incorporation of non-whites into the polity.¹⁰² These effects could lead Southerners to be less hawkish in foreign policy, especially as regards imperialist activities.

On the other hand, it is possible that racism caused Southern presidents to underestimate the capabilities of non-white foreign adversaries and thus to enter into more conflicts with them. To evaluate the above possibility, we examined whether Southerners were more likely to get into disputes with non-white opponents (non-European countries other than Canada and Australia). We found that the opponents of Southern presidents were actually somewhat less likely to be non-white countries. In summary, differences in racial attitudes might account for some differences on conflict behavior, but we do not see a clear mechanism by which these differences would translate into the precise patterns of conflict behavior that we observed.

Other explanations also fail at least one of the conditions outlined above. The rural and agrarian nature of Southern society may have been one reason why cultures of honor that were imported from elsewhere continued to flourish there.¹⁰³ In addition, the South's status as an economically "peripheral" region dependent on export-oriented agriculture caused it

¹⁰⁰Racism was hardly unique to the South; racial hierarchy was a core assumption of American foreign policy ideology for most of US history; see [Hunt 1987](#), 46–91.

¹⁰¹[Bensel 1984](#), 404–05.

¹⁰²[Fry 2002](#), 109.

¹⁰³[Nisbett and Cohen 1996](#).

to oppose protectionist tariffs and contributed to its resistance to US acquisition of colonies that would compete with Southern staples.¹⁰⁴ Other than by sustaining a culture of honor, however, it is difficult to see how agrarianism would lead to the interstate conflict patterns we observe.

The same can be said of Southern fears of centralized state authority and a standing military, the effects of which would seem to run counter to the effects of honor. Loyalty to the Democratic Party is also an unlikely alternative explanation. For much of US history, the Democrats have been less enthusiastic about foreign interventionism than their partisan rivals. In any case, matching presidents to control for their party affiliation yields the same pattern of results. As for wealth and race, there are few differences between Southern and non-Southern presidents on these factors: nearly every president in our time period was a rich white male.

Finally, there is Southerners' oft-noted valorization of the military and martial virtues. Separating Southern militarism from the culture of honor is difficult, as the former could easily be an aspect or consequence of the latter. Nevertheless, militarism does offer a potential alternative mechanism, if not to honor, then to concern for reputation. That is, if Southerners have higher utility for fighting, this might cause behavior similar to that predicted by our reputational model. We do match presidents on military service, finding the same results, but this may not fully account for attitudinal differences between presidents. The militarism hypothesis, however, seems contrary to our finding that Southerners and non-Southerners become involved in disputes at the same rate. Nor is it consistent with the qualitative historical evidence that Southerners have often been ambivalent about a standing army and military adventurism until after a conflict is underway.

In summary, partly due to their theoretical ambiguity, alternative explanations for our results cannot be ruled out. However, other than the culture of honor, none of the major regional differences mentioned in the literature provides a compelling theoretical account for

¹⁰⁴Bensel 1984.

the pattern of results we document. Nor do the qualitative and quantitative empirics that could be brought to bear on these alternative mechanisms provide persuasive evidence. On the contrary, there is deep and compelling evidence, drawing on the historical literature and extrapolating from well-documented differences in mass opinion and behavior, that Southern presidents tended to have greater concern for honor than non-Southern presidents, and that this difference could plausibly give rise to the pattern of outcomes that we observe.

One final threat to our inference is suggested by the results of the placebo tests. Although the omnibus balance tests—especially for presidents matched on the Basic Covariates—support as-if random assignment, the marginally significant differences on 5-year-lagged *US Use of Force* suggests the possibility of selection effects. For example, perhaps Southern presidents are selected into office during periods of heightened international tension precisely because of their distinctive approach to interstate conflict. Mitigating this concern is the fact that *MID Duration* tends to be somewhat lower in the five years preceding Southern presidential administrations, contrary to the theorized effects of honor. This suggests that international tension may not be higher when Southerners come to power. More generally, it provides evidence against the class of confounding processes in which the outcome variables and the probability of the president being Southern happen to covary in the same manner as predicted by our theory. Nevertheless, the possibility that Southerners' attachment to honor leads them to be selected into office during unusual times is an intriguing one and merits further investigation in future research.

VI Conclusion

Building on the work of qualitative and historical scholars, our formal and statistical approach sheds new light on the role of honor and reputation in international affairs. We find compelling evidence that US presidents, who are likely to care more about reputation for resolve due to their socialization in the South's culture of honor, behave substantially

and significantly differently in interstate militarized disputes: they are twice as likely to use force, experience disputes twice as long, and are three times more likely to achieve victory. These results are consistent with the predictions of our formal models of honor and conflict escalation, and are unlikely to be caused by other factors correlated with Southern presidencies.

While interesting in themselves, our findings also have important implications for understanding international politics. First, our results provide relatively clear statistical evidence of the effects of concern for reputation, which scholars and policymakers have long believed to be critically important to international relations. Consistent with our theory, a greater concern for reputation appears to yield benefits in the form of a greater likelihood of victory, but at the cost of longer and more violent disputes. It does not, however, necessarily cause leaders to become more involved in militarized disputes in the first place. It is also important to keep in mind that the large observed differences are only those from comparing Southern and non-Southern US presidents. Historical evidence suggests that even our “control” group of non-Southern presidents placed high value on reputation. As a result the full effect of concern for reputation in international relations is likely much larger.

These findings have implications for other literatures as well. They offer new evidence for the political effects of culture and suggest that designs based on within-country comparisons offer a promising alternative to existing approaches in the study of culture and IR.¹⁰⁵ Our work also suggests that the qualities of individual leaders have major implications for their nation’s foreign policy, and it provides a fresh perspective on the enduring theme of sectionalism in American politics. These insights are made possible by a multimethod approach that closely integrates qualitative evidence, formal theory, research design, and nonparametric statistics. In particular, we introduce a powerful and widely applicable method to political science—nonparametric combination—which allows global testing of elaborate theories under conditions, such as small sample sizes, in which statistical power is otherwise limited.

¹⁰⁵Contrast with [Johnston 1995](#).

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