

プロジェクト報告

Working Paper: Regional Power Ascent and Territorial Disputes¹⁾

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Introduction

It is known that territorial disputes are among the most dangerous causes of international conflict. Despite its importance as a cause of conflict, however, we know relatively little about when states initiate revisionist territorial challenges. Revealing the underlying causes of revisionist territorial challenges contributes to understanding regional security, because resolution and prevention—whenever possible—of territorial disputes are a key to regional peace.

This paper is a first-cut study that examines drivers of revisionist territorial claims from a regional perspective. It investigates conditions under which a state initiates new territorial claims. We hypothesize that a rising power making the ascent of regional primacy is especially prone to revisionist territorial claims. We empirically test the claim using the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) dataset (Frederick, Hensel, and Macaulay 2017). The analyses show that initiation of a new territorial claim is the most likely when the regional share of a state's capabilities is around 50 percent—

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a regional power (or a would-be regional power) which is sufficiently powerful but still has not established regional primacy is likely to initiate revisionist claims. In the following sections, we first briefly explain the intellectual context and propose an argument. Second, we move on to describe the research design and discuss empirical results. Lastly, we conclude with a discussion of implications for regional peace.

Territorial Disputes from a Regional Perspective

It has been widely known that territorial disputes are among the most influential factors of international conflict. Since territoriality is at the core of sovereign state system, disputes over boundary issues are likely to escalate into overt conflict. Disputes over economically, strategically, and symbolically valuable territories are especially prone to military conflict (Gibler 2007; Huth 1996; Rasler and Thompson 2006; Senese and Vasquez 2005). Territorial disputes are also particularly important in relation to recurrent conflict and international rivalry. States that develop entrenched enmity over various issues are often called rivalries, and those rivalries over spatial or territorial controversies are apt to be especially conflict prone (Rasler and Thompson 2006; Rider and Owsiak 2015). A major problem in the literature is that we know relatively little about when these territorial disputes are initiated.

The presence of territorial disputes is especially crucial in relation to continuation and escalation of rivalries among regional states, because unsolved territorial disputes are closely related to the initiation and maintenance of rivalries (Owsiak and Rider 2013; Rider and Owsiak 2015). Almost by definition, territories are contested by neighboring states, which is clearly different from rivalries over status in the international system ("positional" rivalries). Therefore, rivalries fueled by territorial disputes tend to shape a regional context of security. If salient territorial issues have been settled in a region like in the contemporary West Europe, such region is almost free from the most contentious source of international conflict. On the other hand, a region in which many territorial issues remain unsolved still have potential sources of conflict and rivalry.

Empirically, territorial disputes tend to be clustered in regions. Table 1 shows the geographic distribution of territorial disputes over time. The data is taken from the ICOW territorial claims data. Regions are based on the regional delineation of the

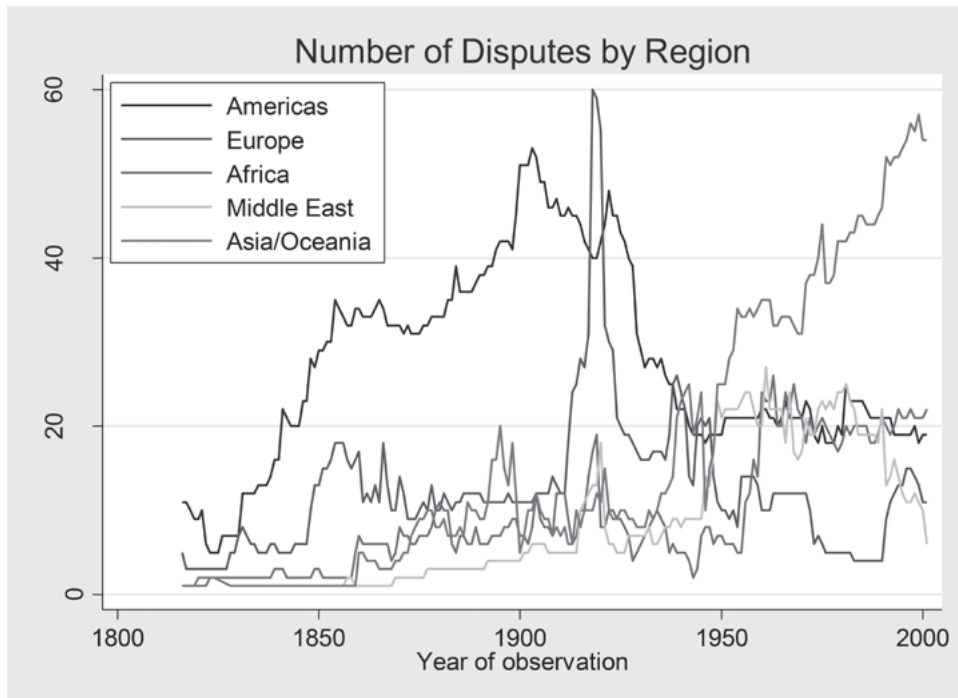


Figure 1.

Correlates of War which divides the world into five big regions. From a relatively long historical perspective, the end of WWII in 1945 appears to be an important point of change. Before WWII, the Americas and Europe were the two major “hot spots” of territorial disputes. Most claims were made in the Americas, but the number of disputes spiked in Europe in the early twentieth century. These trends almost completely changed after the end of WWII. Territorial disputes are clustered in three regions—Asia/Oceania, the Middle East, and Africa in the post-war era.

Why do territorial disputes cluster in a few regions but not in others? A potential explanation would be that territorial disputes are initiated especially when new states are formed. That explanation makes certain sense. Indeed, many territorial rivalries are initiated within a few years after creation of a new state (Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2007). However, is that the whole story? Do territorial disputes almost mechanically emerge after independence of new states? The literature has not sufficiently theorized the full dynamics of territorial disputes except for the escalation and termination (i.e., resolution) of them.

Regional Power Ascent and Revisionism

We argue that a potential regional power which is on a rise to the status of regional primacy is likely to initiate revisions to the territorial status quo, and therefore, likely to initiate a territorial claim. A regional power has willingness and capacity to play a leading role in influential in regional affairs. Furthermore, in contrast to middle powers, regional powers “have to bear a special responsibility for regional security and for the maintenance of order in the region” (Nolte 2010, 890). Whether a local state seeks to be a regional power playing the leading role depends not only on the opportunities but also willingness. There are often inconsistencies between capabilities and power status—some states have capabilities but do not choose to be actively involved in regional affairs (i.e., underachievers), while others are relatively more active than their capabilities (i.e., overachievers) (Cline et al. 2011; Nolte 2010).²⁾

Ascending to the regional power status necessarily involves re-defining the existing regional order. Although the magnitude of “scrapping and building” varies depending on how the preferences of the rising potential regional power differ from those of the preexisting one, redefinition of regional order more or less requires denying the existing distribution of interests. An indispensable, and almost most fundamental, aspect of regional order is the geopolitical status quo especially if territorial boundaries are not long established.

The geopolitical status quo can be challenged in multiple ways. First, a regional power can directly challenge the territorial status quo if the ascending power has the perception that it has been seriously deprived of territories that the state should deserve. A series of territorial claims made by Germany in the interwar period would fit this pattern. Second, an ascending regional power may challenge the geopolitical status quo in a broader sense, seeking a better access to a geostrategically important areas or routes. China’s maritime claims in recent years would fall within this category. Even uninhabited territories and rocks can be targeted by an aspiring power if it has sufficient capabilities to rewrite the status quo and a favorable

2) On the issue of power status, see also Ramey et al. (2014).

renegotiation is important for the new geopolitical order.

In sum, we argue that a state is most likely to initiate territorial disputes when it is ascending to the status of regional power. Territorial challenges are a part of redefining the geopolitical order of a region. A state does not have an opportunity to start redefining the when it does not even have a sufficient level of capabilities. By the time when the state achieves regional primacy and establishes a new order, the renegotiation phase ends and the new regional hegemon does not have the willingness to initiate further claims. Therefore, we expect a curvilinear effect of relative capabilities on the risk of territorial disputes. A state is most likely to initiate territorial disputes during the phase of contestation in which the regional share of capabilities is large enough but not excessive.

Data and Method

We begin with an exploratory analysis of a few regional powers drawing on the ICOW territorial claims data. We selected the United States, Russia/USSR, Germany, Israel, and Japan as cases of historical regional powers and explored when these states initiated new territorial challenges.

Next, we conduct a more confirmatory statistical analysis of territorial disputes using a state-year dataset. Since we aim at testing the hypothesis that an ascending regional power is likely to initiate territorial disputes, our dependent variable is *the onset of a new territorial challenge*. The variable is measured using the ICOW territorial claim data. The variable is coded 1 if a state initiated any (including multiple) new territorial challenge in the given year and 0 otherwise.

The main independent variable is the *regional share of capabilities*. Because we argue that an ascending regional power (as opposed to an established regional hegemon) is most likely to initiate territorial challenges, there is expected to be a curvilinear relationship between the regional share of capabilities and the risk of a territorial challenge. The regional share is computed simply as a state's capabilities divided by the regional total, based on the COW regions. We use the military expenditure as an indicator of capabilities, but the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) is also used as an alternative index. Both data are taken from the National Material Capabilities data (Greig and Enterline 2010).

Because this study is the initial analysis, we keep the model as simple as possible with no control variables except temporal dependence. In addition to addressing temporal dependence the temporal terms carry a substantive meaning in our model, because a simple alternative explanation for the regional clustering in territorial disputes is that newly independent states are likely to initiate claims. Therefore, we incorporate *the duration since independence* (in the cubic polynomial form) as a control for temporal dependence in the logit regression analysis. Table 1 summarizes the data.

Table 1. Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
New territorial challenge	0.047	0.212	0	1
State duration	48.7	43.8	0	200
Military expenditure share	0.109	0.220	0	1
CINC share	0.103	0.201	7.470E-06	1

Cases of Regional Powers

The United States achieved regional primacy in military power relatively early (Figure 2). As Figure 3 shows, the number of disputes peaked around 1900, at which point roughly 40% of those disputes were on the “challenger” side (as opposed to the status quo side). In earlier years, the United States initiated fewer disputes but usually on the revisionist side. This suggests that in the pre-1920 era—when the U.S. was still consolidating the regionally hegemonic status—initiation of new territorial challenges was most likely.

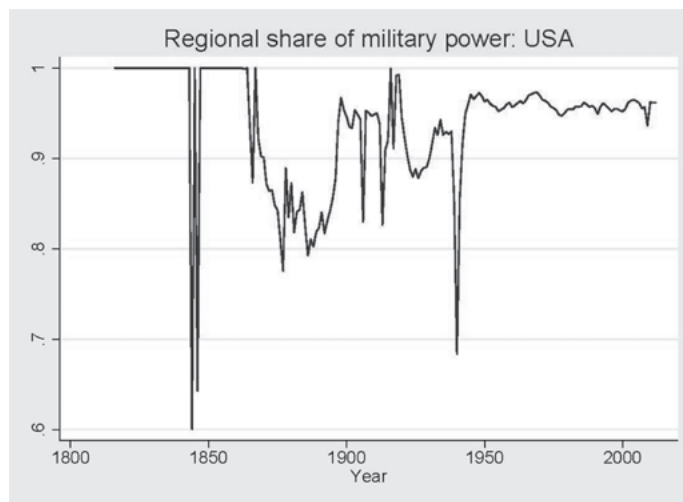


Figure 2.

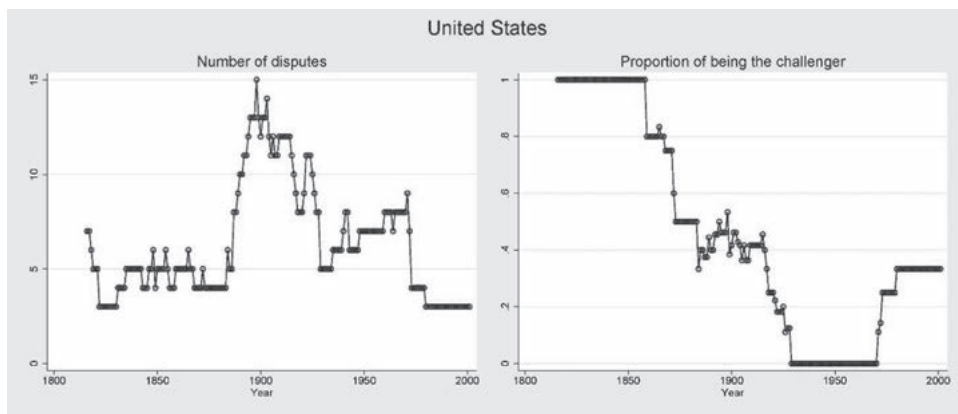


Figure 3.

The Russian ascent of regional primacy in capabilities was especially evident in the first half of the twentieth century, following the Russian Revolution (Figure 4). At that time, Russia was involved many territorial disputes and most of them were revisionist claims (Figure 5). The Russian case also roughly follows the expected pattern.



Figure 4.

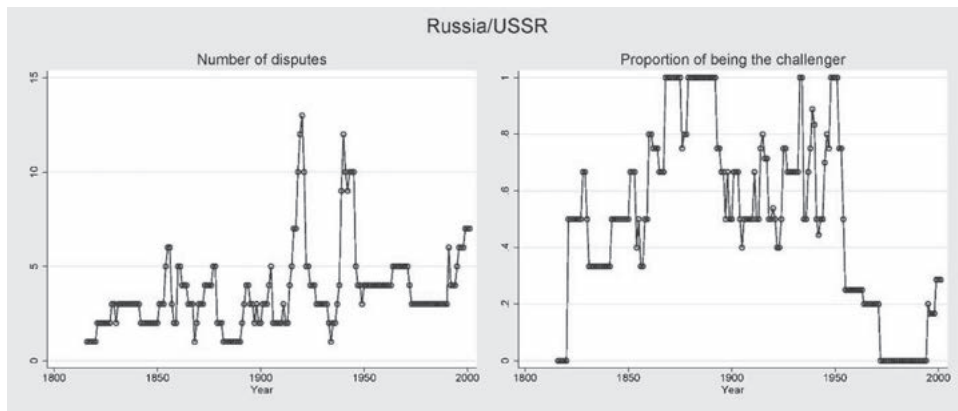


Figure 5.

Germany's ascent as a regional power continued from the late nineteenth century to WWII, briefly interrupted by the post-WWI period (Figure 6). As evident from Figure 7, the German period of ascent corresponds with active revisionism in territorial affairs. By and large, Germany was on the revisionist side, except for a brief period after WWI when others claimed territorial changes.



Figure 6.

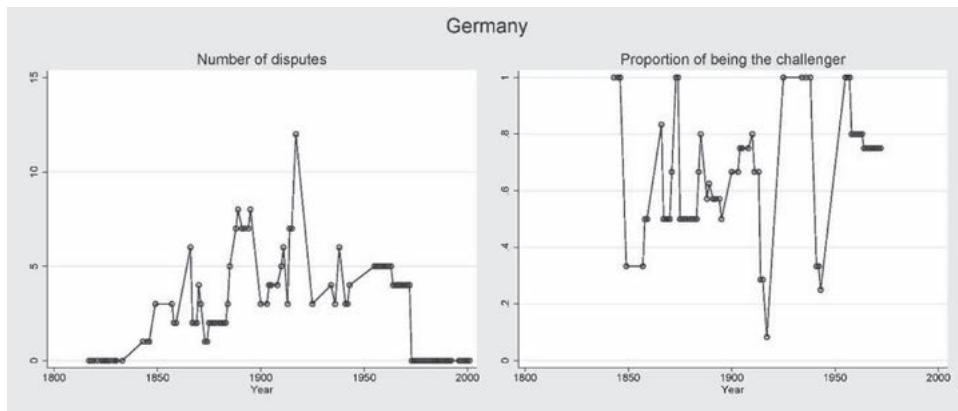


Figure 7.

Israel is an unclear case of a regional power at least in terms of the military expenditure because its regional share has not reached 30% (Figure 8). The most rapid regional ascent occurred during the 1960s. During that period, Israel was involved in relatively more revisionist territorial claims, although it is to be noted that territorial disputes have been there since the state's independence (Figure 9).

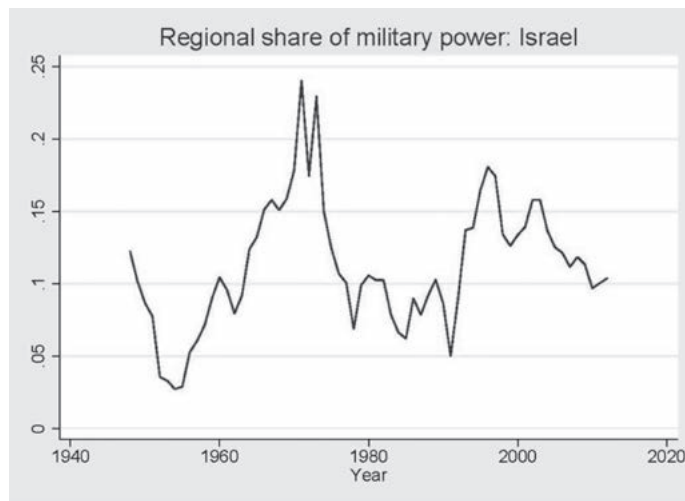


Figure 8.

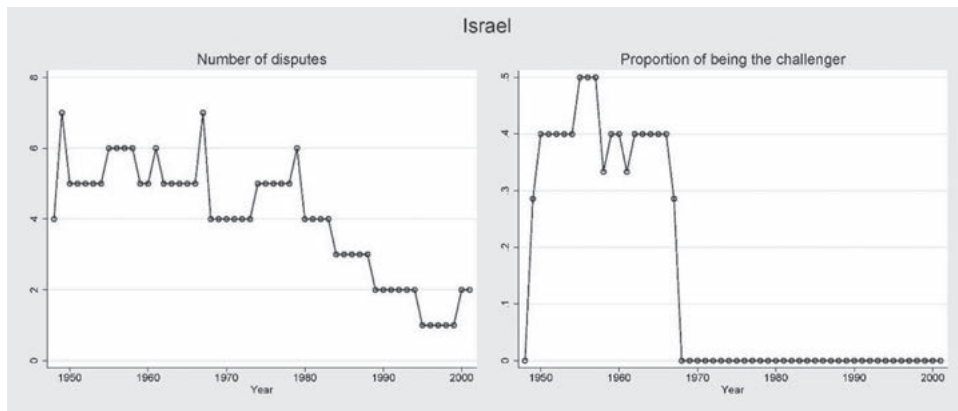


Figure 9.

Japan (Figures 10 and 11) does not clearly follow the trend but only roughly. Although it initiated many revisionist claims during the interwar period, the rapid ascent in the earlier years was did not involve excessive territorial claims.

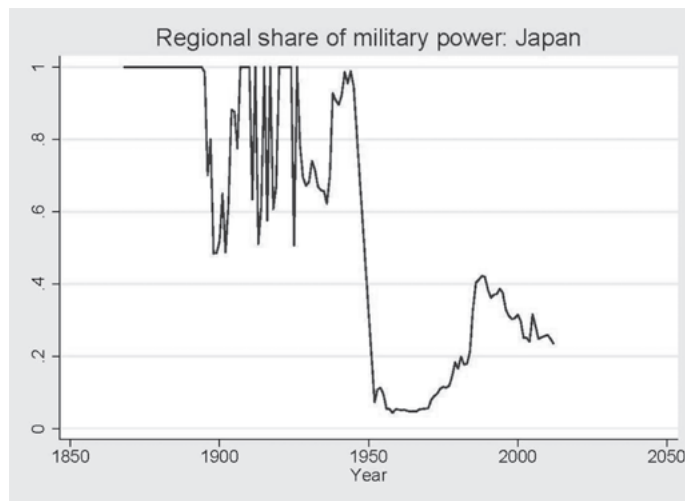


Figure 10.

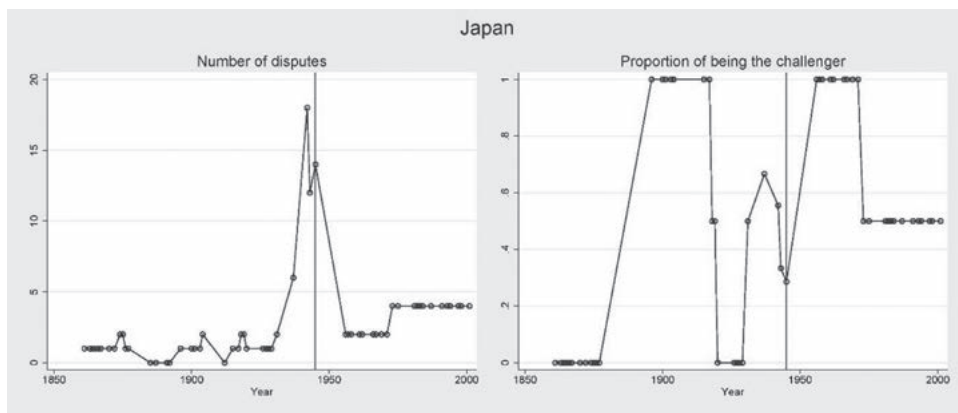


Figure 11.

Results

As expected, the regional share of military expenditure significantly influences the risk of a new territorial challenge. Model 1 includes the military expenditure share in a simple functional form. The model suggests that the risk of a new territorial challenge monotonously increases as a state becomes more powerful vis-à-vis others in the same region. The odds ratio is $\exp(1.725) = 5.610$, implying that a two standard deviation change in the regional capabilities share (e.g., from 0.30 to 0.74) would increase the odds of new territorial challenge by 2.47 times.

Table 2. New Territorial Challenge

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Linear	Quadratic	Up to top 3
Military expenditure share	1.725** (0.269)	6.246** (1.026)	4.392** (1.519)
Military expenditure share ²		-5.030** (1.101)	-3.492* (1.397)
State duration	-0.090** (0.018)	-0.091** (0.018)	-0.045 (0.023)
State duration ²	0.002** (0.000)	0.002** (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)
State duration ³	0.000** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Intercept	-2.457** (0.182)	-2.614** (0.200)	-3.002** (0.456)
N	11142	11142	3331
Log pseudolikelihood	-1982.075	-1945.291	-923.212

Note : *p<0.05 **p<0.01. Robust standard errors (clustered around states) in parenthesis.

However, the model fit improves after we brought the quadratic term in the model (Model 2). A negative coefficient suggests that there is an inverse-U shape relationship between the regional capabilities share and the risk of a territorial challenge. In other words, the risk initially increases as relative capabilities increase, but an excessive regional share—close to a hegemonic regional power—decreases the risk of a revisionist territorial claim. As graphically shown in Figure 12, the predicted

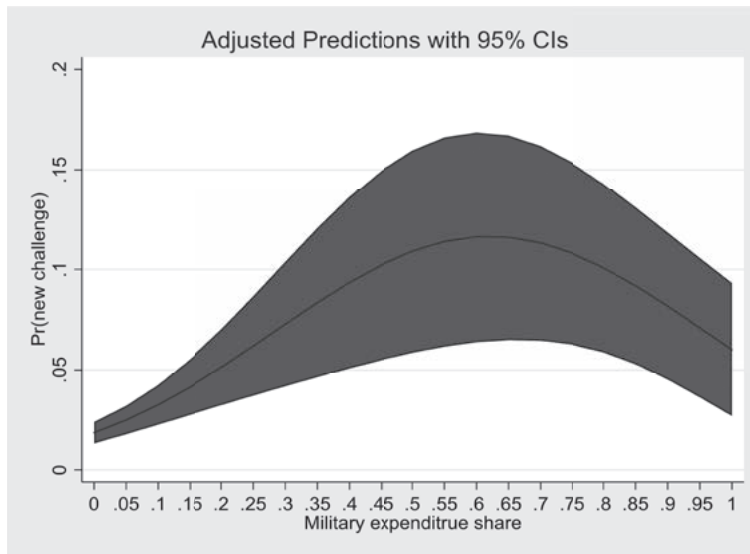


Figure 12.

probability of a new territorial challenge (holding other variables at the mean) peaks when the regional capabilities share is around 60%, then decreases as the regional share approaches to the complete domination.

The effect of the regional capabilities share is also substantively large. When the regional share is 10% (in an average case), the probability of a territorial claim onset is predicted to be 0.032. An ascent to 60% capabilities share increases the probability to 0.116. Indeed, more than three times. A caveat is that a further ascent of clear regional primacy suppresses the risk. For example, at the 90% regional capabilities share, the probability of a new claim drops to 0.082—almost as low as when the regional capabilities share is about 35%. The results hold when we use the regional share in terms of the CINC. Also, the results are similar when the sample is limited to states which are among three most powerful states in a region.

How does the time matter? The effect of duration since independence is nonlinear, following the cubic function. Figure 13 shows how the state duration affects the risk of a new territorial challenge, holding other variables at the mean. The risk peaks twice. First, as expected by the conventional wisdom, a territorial challenge is highly likely right after a state is formed. However, the probability is predicted to decline rapidly within 20 to 30 years since independence. Another peak emerges a few decades later—presumably when the state acquires the capabilities large enough to

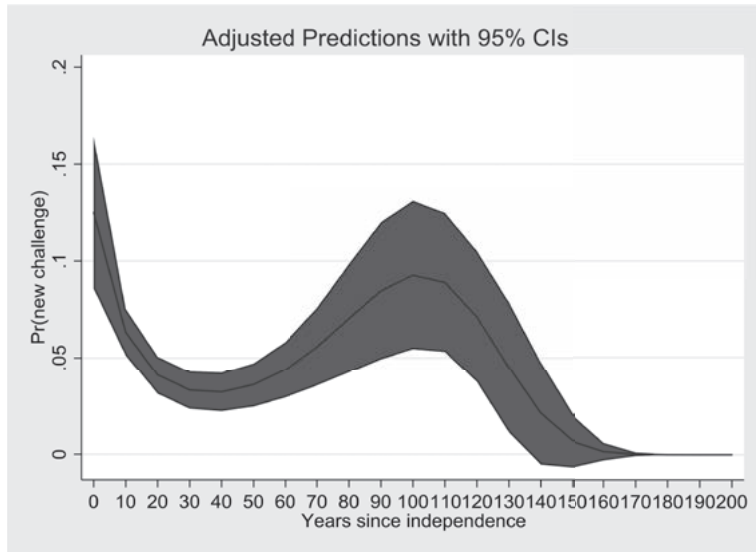


Figure 13.

claim revisions to the existing territorial order. These predictions imply that the geographic clustering in territorial disputes does not only reflect collective emergence of new states. Rather, multiple (revisionist) territorial claims are likely to be initiated when a powerful state starts an ascent to a regional power.

In short, both exploratory and confirmatory statistical analyses suggest that the rise of a potential regional power affects the risk of a territorial claim initiation, and such an effect is the clearest when the regional power is sufficiently powerful but has not achieved a complete regional hegemony. The results are robust to the use of an alternative indicator of material capabilities.

Conclusions

This has been a first-cut study of how ascending regional powers are “dangerous” in terms of initiating territorial claims. We argue that acquisition of the regional power status needs redefinition of the existing regional order. Especially, rewriting the geopolitical status quo is at the heart of regional political order. Therefore, ascending regional powers are most likely to initiate new territorial challenges.

What do these findings imply for the causes of regional peace? First, not only the unit-level (state- or dyadic-) variables but also an important macro-regional

condition—the rise of a regional power—influences the risk of territorial instability in the overall region. It is important to note that the regional clustering in territorial disputes is endogenous to the theoretical account. Multiple territorial challenges can be made by a single ascending regional power in similar timings, and those claims are (naturally) clustered geographically.

This is a very different understanding of the process than the one based on, for instance, a historical mismatch between national/ethnic and state boundaries. Some regions have been particularly likely to develop such territorial disputes due to various historical contexts. Miller (2007) argues that regions such as the Balkans and the Middle East were plagued by a mismatch between nations and state boundaries at some historical moments. However, this strand of explanation assumes that the processes of territorial disputes are still independent from each other, while arguing that the underlying risk factor is clustered in regions. On the other hand, the argument suggested by this study explicitly explains why territorial disputes are geographically clustered. In short, the study of territorial disputes needs to incorporate macro-regional conditions into analysis.

Second, on the policy front, we can expect that there can be multiple phases of regional territorial contestation. The first phase may be the period in which many new states emerge. For instance, the Middle East in the postwar period was plagued by escalated territorial rivalries for the most part centering on Israel. However, a region may fall into a series of territorial-geopolitical contests when a regional power emerges from within it. The contemporary East Asia can fall into this category. Although the initial wave of territorial contestation among newly independent states—including the Sino-Taiwanese conflict and the Korean War—ended in the Cold War era, China's rise as an aspiring regional/global power has triggered multiple maritime disputes such as the Senkaku Islands and the South-China Sea disputes. A revision of the East Asian regional order necessarily involves a renegotiation and redefinition of the geopolitical status quo in favor of China. From the perspective of regional power ascent as an important cause of territorial conflict, it is likely that territorial disputes in the region will be diversified and escalated as China's bid for regional primacy continues.

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