

Dissertation Abstract

“Alliances from the Inside Out: A Theory of Domestic Politics and Alliance Behavior”

Existing work cannot explain why countries form or maintain alliances absent security threats, though we know countries routinely do just these things. I argue countries form alliances to manage the essential problem that they must use finite budget resources to provide domestic security and national security; the guns versus butter dilemma. States sometimes form alliances to “contract out” national security so they can allocate more resources to domestic concerns. Not only should we expect alliances to form and endure absent threats, but we should expect more generally that domestic political and economic demands will influence alliance decisions.

Thus, the contracting theory of alliance formation rests upon the following claims. Leaders must manage competing demands for allocations toward guns and butter to retain political power (Powell 1999). Their need to address those demands is shaped by the size of the minimum winning coalition within the state (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Leaders responsible to large-sized coalitions face greater pressures to address domestic demands as failing to do so can lead to office removal. Domestic demands for greater security policy allocation or greater social policy allocations lead states to seek out efficiency in policy allocations. The formation of an interstate alliance increases the efficiency of security policy allocations as states can provide as much (or more) security than they were previously providing using less resources (Morgan and Palmer 2003). As a result alliances increase efficiency in security policy allocations, thus freeing resources for allocation towards other desired ends.

I examine my theory using maximum likelihood estimation techniques on a set of all-country dyads between 1816 and 2000. I utilize data from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (Leeds et al. 2000, 2002), the Political Survival Project (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003) as well as data that a colleague and I collected on government respect for its citizen’s welfare (Abouharb and Kimball 2004). Results of the most general model of the contracting theory of alliance formation suggest that both external security demands and internal social policy demands increase the chances a dyad forms an alliance (Chapter 3).

Since leaders form alliances because of demands for greater security or to address domestic social demands, this implicitly suggests that not all states are equal in their alliance partner attractiveness for a variety of systematic reasons. Most existing empirical work treats all cases as if they have equivalent chances of engaging in alliance formation. As a matter of theory my project suggests that not only is this undesirable but fails to account for whether a pair of states is potential partners for one another. I estimate an empirical model of alliance commitments that accounts for states’ opportunities to ally (Chapter 4 & Job Presentation). The empirical results not only support the notion that opportunities to ally vary across states and across time, but point to domestic political forces as a major source of that variability.

The contracting theory as specified above assumes that alliances function as substitutes for decreasing allocations towards security policies. In Chapter 5 I relax this assumption and examine whether alliances function as complements or substitutes for states in security policy allocations. Using all-country dyad cases from 1950 until 2000, I examine the nature of the relationship between alliance formation and security policy allocations. Finally, the contracting theory also suggesting there are consequential differences across democracies in terms of a leader’s need to be responsive to the demands of the citizens due to the structure the democratic system (i.e. the number of possible veto players). Thus, I examine the contracting theory through a comparative lens to determine how differences across democracies shape the likelihood of alliance formation between states. Chapter 6 focuses on the conclusions and implications resulting from the findings of this project.