Democratic Third Parties, Conflict Intensity, and International Mediation

July 12, 2021

Abstract

Especially more difficult conflicts tend to attract international mediation, while democracies are more likely to mediate than other third parties. Notwithstanding these well-established findings, I contend that a joint effect of third-party democracy and dispute intensity is associated with a *lower* probability of mediation. Mediation is not costless for third parties and domestic audiences may punish leaders for failed interventions. As democracies are more vulnerable than non-democratic regimes to such audience costs and anticipate these especially for difficult conflicts that are likely to fail, they will opt for the "easier" cases. I test the observable implication of this argument using data on civil wars and mediation since 1946 and find strong and robust support for it. This article adds to our understanding of conflict management and sheds further light on the persistent selection mechanisms surrounding international mediation.

1 Introduction

International mediation is commonly defined as "a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider (whether an individual, an organization, a group, or a state) to change their perceptions or behavior, and to do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law" (Bercovitch, 1997, p.130). Its onset is driven by demand and supply-side incentives in that both the belligerents and the third party must agree on an intervention (e.g., Greig, 2005; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Beardsley, 2011; Crescenzi et al., 2011). It is a well-established finding that mediation is more likely to occur in the more difficult conflicts (e.g., Bercovitch and Jackson, 2001; Greig, 2005; Greig and Regan, 2008; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Melin and Svensson, 2009; Beardsley, 2010; DeRouen Jr, Bercovitch and Pospieszna, 2011; Hellman, 2012; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016; Böhmelt, 2016; Keels and Greig, 2019; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020). A key mechanism behind this is that precisely these cases do need assistance from third parties for a peaceful settlement, and since such conflicts may spill-over and then impose further costs on other states (see Mehrl and Böhmelt, 2020). The "easier," i.e., less intense disputes are generally less likely to attract mediation as belligerents can solve their differences more often by themselves and involvement of the international community is neither desired nor offered.

Another key result in the literature is that democratic third parties are more likely than non-democracies to mediate (e.g., Crescenzi et al., 2011; Hellman, 2012; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Yazici, 2020). Democracies are both more likely to offer their services and to be accepted as an intervener by the antagonists. Being familiar with the norms of non-violent conflict resolution and compromise from political processes at the domestic level, democracies convey these ideas to the international level when mediating

conflicts (e.g., Dixon, 1993, 1994; Mitchell, 2002; Andersson, 2006). Similarly, democracies constitute the more credible mediators due to the transparency of their domestic institutions (Crescenzi et al., 2011). A synergetic effect of these two factors – conflict intensity and a democratic third party – seems plausible against this background: democracies will be even more likely to mediate when encountering a more difficult case.

Counterintuitively, however, this article argues that it is precisely the combination of third parties' democratic regime type and high conflict intensity that *lowers* the chances of international mediation. Although the more challenging disputes are, in fact, the ones most in need of third-party assistance, they are also more likely to fail. This imposes costs not only on the fighting parties, but also on the mediator. In the words of Beardsley and Lo (2013, pp.79-80), "[t]he costs of providing third-party conflict management can be considerable, as a third party's diplomatic resources are often quite limited in terms of staffing, and high-level negotiations often require substantial attention. While pre-negotiation and actual participation in the peace process can be resource-consuming in terms of person-hours, many peacemaking attempts also involve paying the physical costs of material incentives and inducements. By initiating a peace process, the third party additionally risks its reputation since it will look incompetent if situations do not improve or even get worse." Hence, there can be significant costs stemming from mediation and domestic audiences may punish leaders if their peace interventions prove to be ineffective. Democracies suffer more from audience costs than autocratic leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005; Tomz, 2007, 2008, 2012; Chiba, Johnson and Leeds, 2015; Tomz and Weeks, 2013, 2020) and, if anticipating the costs of mediation failure, the former are then eager to avoid the more difficult disputes in the first place. Ultimately, I contend that democracies will strategically select themselves into mediating the easier disputes, which are tied to higher chances of success and a lower risk of failure.

To illustrate this, there is some qualitative evidence that is consistent with my argument. The US's involvement in the Middle East peace process eventually proved to be quite costly politically. On one hand, Beardsley and Lo (2013, pp.80) report that President Carter (1982) "felt that his involvement in the Middle East peace process actually hurt him politically because of opposition to how strongly he pushed Israel and because the implementation of the Camp David Accords was more difficult and incomplete than originally hoped." On the other hand, James Baker, the former US Secretary of State, had to conduct four rounds of shuttle diplomacy in 1991 only to get actors agree to the Madrid Conference – which was likely hard to sell as "value for money" to the domestic audience (Beardsley, 2011, p.22). Or consider the civil war in Burundi (1993-2005): while other aspects certainly played a role, it is striking that Western democracies refrained from offering mediation at all in this rather intense dispute (Greig and Regan, 2008, p.764). Beardsley (2011) shows how democratic mediators may be quite reluctant to pursue mediation successfully if an agreement is unpopular "at home," e.g., the Dayton Agreement or the Arab-Israeli conflict. And Norway became increasingly concerned about its involvement in the Sri Lankan peace process in the post-2006 phase: after initial mediation efforts failed, a full-scale war broke out in 2006, and the prospects of achieving any solution became rather low (Sørbø et al., 2011). The Norwegian government was at least partly taking into account that its reputation as a "persistent and patient mediator" (Sørbø et al., 2011, p.62) could be damaged if there was continued intervention, but conflict worsened. My argument helps explaining cases like these and, generally, democracies' mediation in what are probably less challenging disputes instead of the more difficult conflicts.

The empirical analysis focuses on international mediation in civil conflicts since 1946 using the Civil Wars Mediation data set (DeRouen Jr, Bercovitch and Pospieszna, 2011). While I find evidence for a positive effect individually of either third-party democracy or conflict intensity on the probability of mediation, democracies are significantly more likely to mediate

civil conflicts only when casualties are low. With battle-related deaths being higher than about 1,000 fatalities, democracies select themselves no more or less likely into mediation than their non-democratic counterparts. Hence, the positive effect stemming from third parties' democratic regime type disappears. Several robustness checks further increase the confidence in the main result, including the replication of Crescenzi et al. (2011) who analyze interstate conflicts.

This research sheds new light on the persistent selection effects surrounding international mediation (e.g., Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006; Beber, 2012; Melin, Gartner and Bercovitch, 2013), with important implications even for the effectiveness of mediation (e.g., Böhmelt, 2010; Beardsley, 2008). Democracies choose very strategically the conflicts they get involved in, avoiding the more difficult ones. This mirrors democracies' foreign-policy behavior more generally (e.g., Reiter and Stam, 2002; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Chiba, Johnson and Leeds, 2015; Böhmelt and Butkutė, 2018), but it follows that it is probably an overstatement when saying that democracies are the most effective mediators (Dixon, 1993, 1994) – they merely select the "easier" cases. My findings also inform the work on reputation in conflict management (e.g., Keels and Greig, 2019) and, potentially, peacekeeping (e.g., Andersson, 2006). The article concludes with a discussion of policy implications and avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical Argument

When does mediation occur? The general framework for explaining mediation onset focuses on the demand by the belligerents and the supply by at least one third party (e.g., Greig, 2005; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Beardsley, 2011; Crescenzi et al., 2011). The actors eventually involved in a mediation process must have an interest in intervention and the benefits of it must outweigh the costs of continued fighting and mediation as such. Indeed, mediation is

costly – both for the belligerents who have to agree on some outside intervention that cuts into their sovereignty and the mediator. For the latter, third parties mostly face physical, political, and reputational costs, particularly if mediation is ultimately not successful (Beardsley, 2010; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Greig, 2005; Chatagnier, 2019). Norway was clearly concerned about any negative impact on its international reputation as a peace broker, which was also rooted in their earlier involvement in the 1980s and 1990s (Sørbø et al., 2011, p.117), during their Sri Lankan mediation post 2006. However, there are also benefits to mediation, which – if they outweigh the costs of intervention – increase the chances that third parties eventually get involved. As discussed in Beardsley and Lo (2013, p.78), third parties directly benefit from mediating when they are able to reduce negative externalities, when there are humanitarian benefits, when they have a direct stake in a conflict, and when there are possible reputational gains. Greig (2005, p.251) argues in light of this that the likelihood of mediation success, the characteristics of the disputants and the conflict, the previous conflict management history, and outside threats are the most important influences behind demand and supply. The main interest of this research lies in two factors that pertain to the likelihood of mediation success and the conflict characteristics: the regime type of the potential mediator and the intensity of a dispute.

First, it is well established that particularly democracies mediate conflicts (e.g., Crescenzi et al., 2011; Hellman, 2012; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Yazici, 2020). On one hand, democracies follow certain practices and norms in their domestic-level political decision-making processes, including the ideas of compromise and non-violent conflict resolution (Dixon, 1993, 1994). In turn, when democracies engage in international mediation, they simply transfer these domestic norms and values to the intervention setting, making the overall process potentially more effective (Dixon, 1993, 1994; Andersson, 2006; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016). Consider, for example, Dixon (1993) who argues that democratic interveners

are likely to be more effective as "they operate under a norm of bounded competition that favors the use of compromise" (Böhmelt, 2011, p.868). On the other hand, democracies are also seen as more credible as they "face greater audience costs for deception in the conflict management process because they face greater scrutiny in the free press and because they pay domestic costs for foreign policy failure" (Crescenzi et al., 2011, p.1089). More credibility is associated with higher effectiveness, which makes the fighting parties more likely to demand democratic third parties than other types of interveners (Hellman, 2012).

Second, mediation is more likely to occur in the more difficult conflicts (e.g., Bercovitch and Jackson, 2001; Greig, 2005; Greig and Regan, 2008; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Melin and Svensson, 2009; Beardsley, 2010; Hellman, 2012; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016; Böhmelt, 2016; Keels and Greig, 2019; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020). In general, these cases are the ones requiring assistance from third parties (see Mehrl and Böhmelt, 2020), since belligerents can solve their differences more often by themselves in the "easier," i.e., less intense disputes. It is particularly violence that shapes conflict intensity (Bercovitch and Langley, 1993; Böhmelt, 2016). Violence drives the "immediate, current costs of conflict experienced by the warring parties" (Greig and Regan, 2008, p.772) and it may even be suggested (e.g., Bercovitch and Houston, 2000) that violence is the only conflict characteristic sufficiently visible to inform the antagonists and (potential) mediators that a conflict is now "ripe" for intervention (see also Böhmelt, 2016). In the words of Bercovitch (2004), "a ripe moment describes a phase in the life cycle of the conflict where the parties feel exhausted and hurt, or where they may not wish to countenance any further losses and are prepared to commit to a settlement, or at least believe one to be possible" (see also Greig and Regan, 2008). Hence, conflict intensity is strongly linked to conflict ripeness and the chances of mediation (see also Böhmelt, 2013).

Against this background, one may find it plausible that the combination of a democratic third party and high conflict intensity makes mediation even more likely. Instead, however, I develop the argument that international mediation is only more likely when conflict intensity is low. The starting point for this claim is that mediation, and especially mediation failure, is costly for the third party (Beardsley, 2010, 2011; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Greig, 2005; Chatagnier, 2019). In what follows, I am particularly interested in reputational costs and the fact that the domestic audience "at home" can be "concerned with their state's reputation" (Chiba, Johnson and Leeds, 2015, p.968). Conflict intensity and, in turn, the (anticipated) outcome of an intervention determine the substance of these costs. On one hand, the more difficult cases are precisely those that need outside assistance. On the other hand, these disputes are also more difficult to solve, making mediation failure more likely and an intervention more costly to begin with. That is, if mediation eventually fails, a mediator risks its reputation as it will seem to be incompetent (Bercovitch and Schneider, 2000; Beardsley and Lo, 2013). Note that this mechanism affects all potential mediators in the same way, independent from their form of government, which raises the question what role democracy plays then.

I assume that political leaders want to retain power and, to this end, implement policies to extend their stay in office (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005). These are policies that are favorable to those citizens that a leader needs for gaining and staying in office. Successful mediation attempts where the leader or their government produce real benefits for themselves and the country may well apply here. Recall Beardsley and Lo (2013, p.78) who outline that mediators, if successful, directly benefit as they can reduce negative externalities, reap humanitarian benefits and preserve their direct stake in disputes, and boost their reputation. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005) defined the terms of the "selectorate" and the "winning coalition" in this context. The former pertains to those who participate in the selection process for a political leader. The latter stands for that selectorate share, which keeps a leader in power. When com-

paring democracies with other forms of government, authoritarian regimes tend to have smaller winning coalitions relative to the selectorate. Democracies, in fact, are generally characterized by larger groups that must be pleased in order to prolong political survival. What is more, democratic citizens can participate more directly in the leader-selection process and leaders in democratic countries can be removed from office more easily than non-democratic ones if the domestic audience does not favor their policies Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005).

This induces a "democratic self-selection mechanism." Political leaders, when considering to mediate a conflict, surely do anticipate some problems over the course of a possible intervention. In the worst case, mediation fails, which raises the costs of engagement significantly and could make the domestic audience less supportive of the leadership. While domestic issues are clearly more visible than international mediation efforts, there is ample of research demonstrating that voters care about their countries' foreign policy, their international reputation, and that they will punish the leadership if they are dissatisfied with how their state acts in the international arena (Tomz, 2007, 2008, 2012; Chiba, Johnson and Leeds, 2015; Tomz and Weeks, 2013, 2020; Tingley and Tomz, 2020). McGillivray and Smith (2008) even demonstrate that domestic audiences benefit from punishing their leader in the event of reputational damage caused. To this end, the domestic audience may well be interested in its country's mediation efforts abroad and to have a positive, successful reputation in this regard. If this reputation is damaged by, e.g., a failed mediation attempt of the state leader or members of the government and state bureaucracy (Beardsley, 2011; Beardsley and Lo, 2013), the public could become less supportive of the executive (see also Chiba, Johnson and Leeds, 2015, p.971).

As indicated above, removing a leader from office is less costly and can be done more quickly in democracies, while democratic state executives are more strongly dependent on larger parts of the population for their political survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005). In the words of Chiba, Johnson and Leeds (2015, p.971), "having sullied a state's reputation has a greater

likelihood of having negative consequences for a leader's ability to stay in power in a democratic state than in a non-democratic state." Mediation failure and the costs associated with this may not be an exception here. Thus, democracies face higher costs stemming from, primarily, domestic audiences when mediation fails, which makes it likely that democratic leaders will be more careful in terms of selecting the conflicts they offer their mediation services to. In turn, democratic third parties should seek to avoid challenging cases that make mediation failure more likely, but instead opt for intervening in those disputes where tangible benefits can be more easily achieved at a lower risk[1] As a result, I expect democracies to mediate only those cases which they anticipate are easy to solve, and they should be less likely to commit to mediating the more difficult disputes.

3   Research Design

The main data source for my empirical analysis is the Civil Wars Mediation (CWM) data set (DeRouen Jr, Bercovitch and Pospieszna, 2011). Based upon the definition of civil conflict by the UCDP Armed Conflict data set (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Pettersson and Eck, 2018), the latest version of the CWM data have information on mediation incidences in all intrastate disputes between 1946 and 2011. Using these data, I first disaggregate the information into conflict years, i.e., I create yearly observations for each dispute. A conflict leaves the data as soon as it is terminated either militarily or peacefully. In turn, each conflict year is paired with any state in the international system (except for the country at war) as these constitute the universe of cases of potential mediators. The unit of analysis I employ is then the conflict-potential-mediator year and, without missing values, there are initially 294,807 observations in total since

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[1]Bättig and Bernauer (2009, p.303) state here as well that democratic leaders "who promise more than they can implement experience political costs, for example an increasing risk of losing elections" (see also Böhmelt and Butkutė, 2018).

1946. According to the CWM data, 0.14 percent of those cases ultimately saw mediation. This information on third-party mediation onset is used as my dependent variable and, due to its binary nature, I rely on logistic regression models. To account for temporal dependencies in mediation, I include the cubic-polynomial approximation (Carter and Signorino, 2010) of the time since the last mediation attempt (if any) in all models. In essence, the cubic polynomials capture how much the time since the last intervention (if any) shapes the likelihood of mediation. Including these variables also allows to control for the argument that prior mediation is a strong predictor of mediation: third parties that have previously mediated a conflict are more likely to do so in the future.

The core explanatory variables of interest pertain to the potential mediator's regime type, conflict intensity, and an interaction of the two items (Brambor, Clark and Golder, 2006; Berry, Golder and Milton, 2012). First, for each potential intervener, I code a binary variable receiving a value of 1 if it is democratic in a given year (0 otherwise). For defining democracies, I employ the Polity IV data (Marshall and Jaggers, 2018) and use the commonly used cut-off point of 7 (Jaggers and Gurr, 1995; Goldsmith, Chalup and Quinlan, 2008; Bogaards, 2012): countries scoring 7 or higher on the -10 to 10 *polity2* scale are coded as democratic. Second, conflict intensity is usually defined by fatalities (DeRouen Jr, Bercovitch and Pospieszna, 2011; Hellman, 2012; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016; Böhmelt, 2016; Mehrl and Böhmelt, 2020) and I draw on the PRIO Battle Deaths data set (Lacina and Gleditsch, 2005; Lacina, Gleditsch and Russett, 2006) to this end. The most current version (3.1) was released in 2017 and covers the conflict-years between 1946 and 2008. I employ a variable capturing the number of battle-related deaths in a given conflict-year as these are likely more visible in the international arena than a cumulative measure. The variable is also temporally lagged to address some endogeneity concerns. Finally, due to the skewed distribution of this item, I log-transform it for the analysis. Both the democracy variable and the battle-deaths item, introduced to the

models and examined individually, should be positively signed, i.e., thus raising the probability to see mediation. Jointly considered via an interaction, however, I expect to see a negative effect. The binary operationalization of regime type facilitates a direct interpretation of the corresponding regression table entries. But as any coefficient in non-linear models like logistic regression cannot be interpreted as marginal effects, I present substantive quantities of interest of the interaction specification and the control variables as well.

Coming to these confounding factors, I follow existing scholarship and model mediation onset as a function of supply and demand (e.g., Greig, 2005; Greig and Regan, 2008; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Beardsley, 2011; Crescenzi et al., 2011; Keels and Greig, 2019; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020). In light of this, the controls pertain to other (potential) mediator characteristics besides regime type, features of the belligerents (mainly the state-representing governmental actor in a civil war), and aspects of the conflict next to intensity. First, I control for third parties' power as measured by the Correlates of War's Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score (Singer, 1988) as well as population and GDP per capita. The latter two are log-transformed and originally taken from the World Bank Development Indicators.[2]

Second, demand and supply are also captured via the ties connecting a conflict party and a potential mediator. On one hand, I include the logged capital-to-capital distance between the third party and the civil-war state (see also Crescenzi et al., 2011). Smaller distances are likely tied to greater willingness and opportunity to intervene, making mediation more likely. On the other hand, I created two indicators on states' joint memberships in international organizations (Melin, 2011). The variable *Allies* is binary and receives a value of 1 if the civil-war country and a third party share at least one alliance membership, the latter being defined by the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) data (Leeds et al., 2002). The item *IGO Memberships* is the number of co-memberships in international organizations as coded by

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[2]Available online at: `https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators`.

the Correlates of War Project (Pevehouse et al., 2020). More joint memberships between two states signal common norms and interests in foreign affairs, which may be positively associated with mediation demand and supply. In the appendix, I also consider colonial and ethnic ties, respectively.

The variables I employ to characterize belligerents' characteristics largely mirror the ones for the third party. Hence, there are items for the civil-war state's regime type (operationalized the same way as the binary regime-type indicator introduced above), its CINC score, its population, and its income. Finally, I include a variable on the duration of a conflict until a given year, which I calculated using the information in the CWM data set (DeRouen Jr, Bercovitch and Pospieszna, 2011). Table 1 summarizes the variables' descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min.	Max.
Mediation	104,380	0.003	0.053	0	1
Democratic Mediator	104,380	0.340	0.473	0	1
Battle-Related Deaths (log)	104,380	6.717	1.868	3.219	12.766
Mediator CINC Score	104,137	0.006	0.019	0.000	0.319
Mediator GDP per capita (log)	88,819	8.049	1.541	4.885	11.663
Mediator Population (log)	99,324	15.877	1.588	11.779	21.009
Belligerent Democracy	90,453	0.373	0.484	0	1
Belligerent CINC Score	104,380	0.015	0.025	0.000	0.168
Belligerent GDP per capita (ln)	83,456	7.408	1.352	4.898	10.447
Belligerent Population (log)	91,133	17.243	1.861	12.851	20.829
Distance (log)	103,724	8.699	0.739	3.367	9.895
IGO Memberships	104,380	9.083	14.159	0	95
Allies	104,380	0.079	0.269	0	1
Duration	104,380	10.655	11.304	0	57

Interaction term and variables for temporal correction omitted.

4   Empirical Analysis

The main models of the analysis are summarized in Table 2: Model 1 only incorporates the core variables of interest (next to the temporal controls), but not the interaction term. The control covariates are then introduced in Model 2, albeit the multiplicative specification is still missing. Finally, Models 3 and 4 comprise *Democratic Mediator × Battle-Related Deaths (log)*, while the latter is my full specification with the control variables included as well. The table entries allow only for a direct interpretation of the signs and significance levels, but not the strength or substance of an effect. Thus, I show average marginal effects and first difference estimates in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively.

I begin by discussing Models 1-2, which do not incorporate the interaction term *Democratic Mediator × Battle-Related Deaths (log)*, but introduce the variables for third parties' regime type and conflict intensity individually. The inclusion of the control variables does not alter the effect direction of either *Democratic Mediator* or *Battle-Related Deaths (log)*, but it changes the statistical significance: *Democratic Mediator* is no longer significant in Model 2, but *Battle-Related Deaths (log)* now is. Generally, though, and in line with previous research (e.g., Bercovitch and Jackson, 2001; Greig, 2005; Greig and Regan, 2008; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Melin and Svensson, 2009; Beardsley, 2010; Crescenzi et al., 2011; Hellman, 2012; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016; Böhmelt, 2016; Keels and Greig, 2019; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020; Yazici, 2020), the first two models suggest that democratic states can be more likely to mediate, and that more intense disputes are more likely to attract mediation.

The positive effects of the individual items pertaining to third-party democracy and conflict intensity remain when including the multiplicative term in Models 3-4. Given the latter component that is included now, however, they can only be interpreted with the other term

Table 2: Democracy and Mediation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democratic Mediator	0.469***	0.120	1.044***	1.464**
	(0.116)	(0.235)	(0.355)	(0.680)
Battle-Related Deaths (log)	0.012	0.181***	0.048	0.294***
	(0.025)	(0.052)	(0.031)	(0.073)
Dem. Mediator × Deaths (log)			−0.085*	−0.202**
			(0.050)	(0.099)
Mediator CINC Score		9.919***		9.308***
		(2.906)		(2.929)
Mediator GDP per capita (log)		0.378***		0.383***
		(0.083)		(0.085)
Mediator Population (log)		0.297***		0.316***
		(0.080)		(0.081)
Belligerent Democracy		−0.693		−0.684
		(0.455)		(0.467)
Belligerent CINC Score		−35.265		−40.633
		(24.550)		(27.491)
Belligerent GDP per capita (log)		−0.156		−0.132
		(0.097)		(0.100)
Belligerent Population (log)		0.306**		0.303**
		(0.138)		(0.142)
Distance (log)		−0.859***		−0.862***
		(0.114)		(0.113)
IGO Memberships		0.011**		0.010*
		(0.005)		(0.005)
Allies		0.515*		0.542*
		(0.290)		(0.293)
Duration		0.128***		0.127***
		(0.008)		(0.008)
Mediation Years	−1.004***	−0.499***	−1.003***	−0.496***
	(0.134)	(0.076)	(0.134)	(0.076)
Mediation Years^2	0.046***	0.016***	0.046***	0.016***
	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.004)
Mediation Years^3	−0.001***	0.000***	−0.001***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	−2.712***	−11.075***	−2.961***	−12.257***
	(0.262)	(3.607)	(0.292)	(3.689)
Observations	104.380	72.540	104.380	72.540

* $p < 0.10$,**$p < 0.05$,***$p < 0.01$
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 1: Marginal Effects of *Democratic Mediator* Conditional on Conflict Intensity
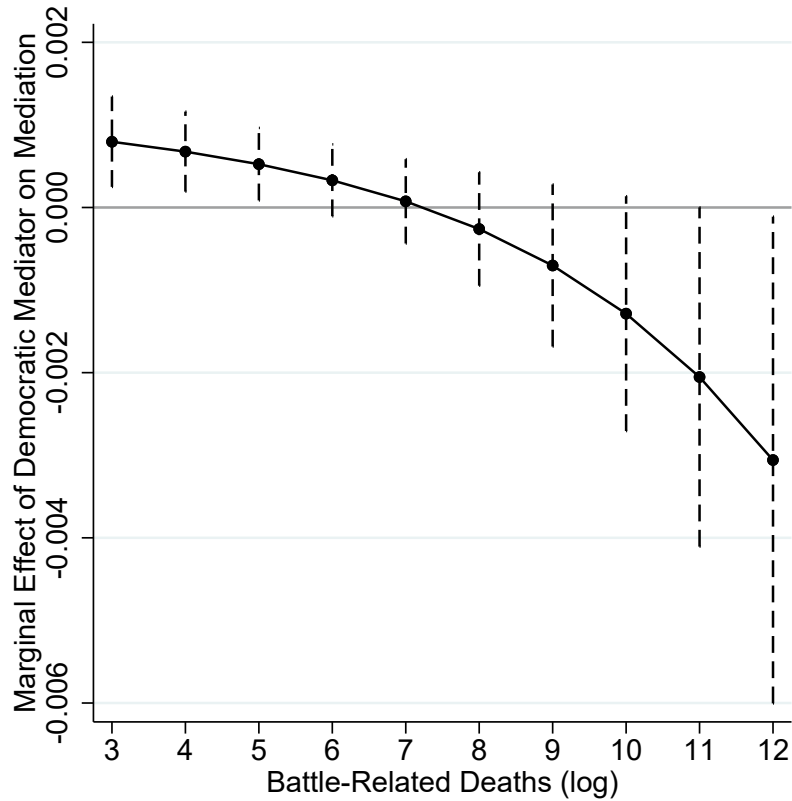
Note: Graph displays average marginal effects of *Democratic Mediator* on the likelihood of mediation conditional on values of *Battle-Related Deaths (log)*. Average marginal effect of 0 marked with grey horizontal line. Vertical dashed bars capture 95 percent confidence intervals of marginal-effect point estimates. Values are calculated for Model 4 while holding all other covariates constant at their means.

set to 0. For instance, keeping *Battle-Related Deaths (log)* constant at 0, *Democratic Mediator* has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of mediation – the coefficient estimate is 1.464 in Model 4. Nonetheless, the interesting aspect of Models 3-4 – and the actual test of the theoretical argument – is *Democratic Mediator × Battle-Related Deaths (log)*. As expected, the coefficient is negatively signed and significant. That is, democratic third parties are likely to be associated with a *lower* likelihood of mediation when dispute intensity is high. A direct, substantively meaningful interpretation of this coefficient estimate is difficult with the table entries

alone, but I have calculated average marginal effects for the interaction term that are displayed in Figure 1. As shown there, the positive and significant effect of *Democratic Mediator* persists – but only for low to medium levels of *Battle-Related Deaths (log)*. The likelihood to mediate is higher by about 0.1 percentage points for democratic third parties when a conflict has seen about 20 deaths. While this may seem like a small effect, recall the relatively large sample size and that mediation is a rare phenomenon in general: given these two characteristics, any effect is likely to be rather small to begin with. Returning to Figure 1, the impact of *Democratic Mediator* decreases and, eventually, becomes indistinguishable from 0 with a larger number of fatalities. According to Figure 1, democratic third parties are not more or less likely to mediate than non-democracies when fatalities are higher than about 500-1,000.

Connecting these findings back to the theoretical argument and existing literature, I do find support for earlier results reporting that it is especially the more difficult cases that attract mediation and that democratic third parties are particularly more likely to intervene (e.g., Bercovitch and Jackson, 2001; Greig, 2005; Greig and Regan, 2008; Beardsley and Greig, 2009; Melin and Svensson, 2009; Beardsley, 2010; Crescenzi et al., 2011; Hellman, 2012; Beardsley and Lo, 2013; Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014; Bakaki, Böhmelt and Bove, 2016; Böhmelt, 2016; Keels and Greig, 2019; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020; Yazici, 2020). However, the joint, interactive effect is negative, thus shedding light on quite a few instances of difficult conflict circumstances, where democracies did not mediate. Specifically, my results are consistent with the claim that democratic leaders will anticipate the costs of mediation, which are especially high when interventions fail. As democracies suffer more from audience costs, particularly domestic ones, than authoritarian regimes, they select themselves only into those conflicts where the chances of success are *a priori* higher – namely, the low-intensity, low-fatality disputes (see also Greig, 2015). The more difficult cases are avoided, though, as these might be more challenging to solve, hence raising the costs and, ultimately, threatening leader survival in power.

This result is also in line with an implication in (Beardsley and Lo, 2013, p.80), namely that "democratic neighbors will be especially more likely to become involved as conflict managers as salience increases and the possibility for settlement remains feasible."

Figure 2: First Difference Estimates
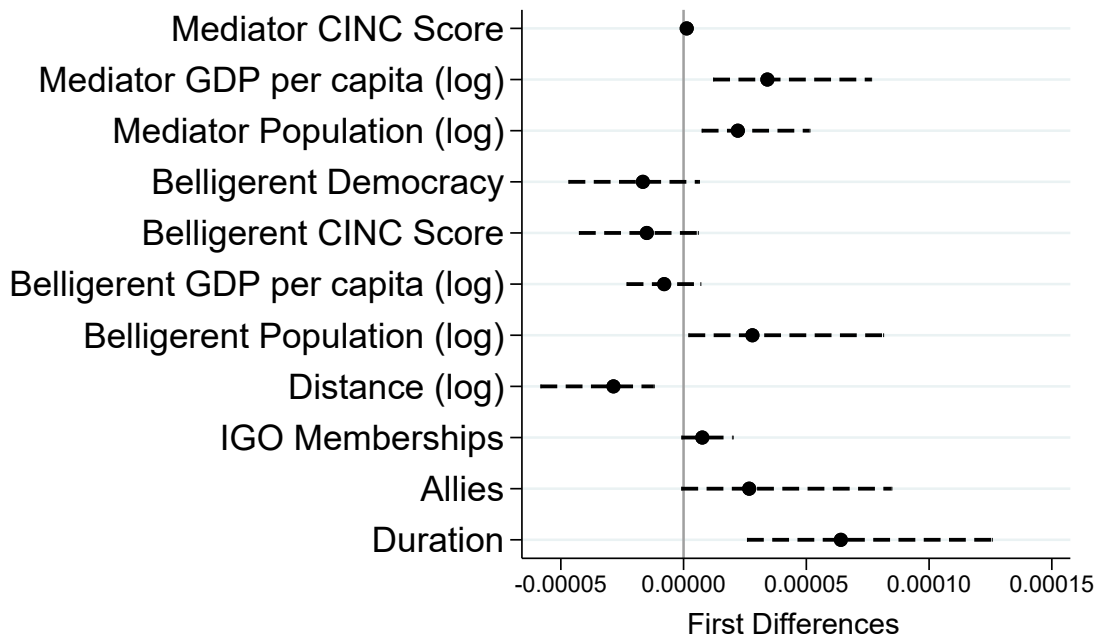
Note: Graph displays first difference estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals. Calculations are based on Model 4 and done when changing a variable from its 25th percentile to its 75th percentile (minimum to maximum for dichotomous items). All other variables held constant at their means.

Coming to the control variables, their effects are consistent across model specifications and also mirror what earlier research has reported. First, more powerful third parties are more likely to mediate. This is evidenced by the positive and significant effects for *Mediator CINC Score*, *Mediator GDP per capita (log)*, and *Mediator Population (log)* in Models 2 and

4. In general, these findings echo the rationale that belligerents particularly demand mediation from stronger actors as these might be better able to provide material incentives for settling a conflict (e.g., Bercovitch and Schneider, 2000; Böhmelt, 2010). At the same time, from a supply-side perspective, more powerful actors have more means for intervention. Second, all variables pertaining to the state actor in a civil war are mostly statistically insignificant and not substantively meaningful. The only exception according to Table 2 and Figure 2 is that more populous belligerents are more likely to see mediation.

Third, ties binding third parties and antagonists are also found to be crucial. Smaller distances between and joint memberships in international organizations of state actor and third party increase the likelihood of mediation, although military alliances have a more substantive impact. Links via any IGO are also positively signed in Table 2 and Figure 2, but not as substantively important as the allies item. In fact, *Allies* exerts one of the strongest effects in the models. Finally, there is *Duration*, which is statistically significant in Table 2. This is mirrored by a first difference in Figure 2.

In the Supporting Information, I discuss additional analyses and a series of robustness checks that further increase the confidence in my core finding. Most importantly, I replicate one of the most influential studies on mediation in interstate conflicts (Crescenzi et al., 2011) and find a pattern that mirrors what I argue here: democratic third parties avoid difficult conflicts. Hence, my argument's scope conditions are not limited to civil wars, but all sorts of disputes. Second, I summarize a model based on a non-lagged intensity variable and plot the temporal dependence in mediation onset to show that the likelihood of third-party intervention drops quickly over time as it approximates 0 after about 5 years. Third, I alter the cut-off points for third parties to be defined as democracies and I use the original version of the *polity2* scale (Marshall and Jaggers, 2018). I control for the presence of other third parties and consider colonial as well as ethnic ties. Finally, I focus on politically relevant third parties only. The

corresponding models and graphs are summarized in the appendix.

5   Conclusion

Existing scholarship consistently reports that, all else equal, democratic third parties are more likely to intervene as mediators in conflicts, while especially the more difficult ones attract mediation. I do not question these findings and, in fact, I do find support for these claims in this research, too. However, I advance the argument that a non-positive impact is likely to be exerted on mediation onset once we consider third-parties' regime type and their form of government jointly. Specifically, democracies are more vulnerable to audience costs. After all, when dissatisfied with their government's performance, a democratic audience will find it easier to remove a leader than an autocratic one (and doing this more quickly). The crucial point here is that democratic leaders will then want to avoid policies or outcomes that may not please their primarily domestic audiences. Mediation failure could be one of those policies leaders would want to circumvent as ineffective mediation interventions have the potential to impose high costs. While these costs do exist for autocratic leaders as well, they are more damaging in the case of democracies. The core of my theory states that democratic leaders likely anticipate all this and, thus, will try to avoid the more difficult cases. Instead, democratic leaders select themselves into the easier disputes, as these are more likely to be mediated successfully and, hence, are less costly.

I find strong and robust support for this argument. On one hand, the main empirical analysis makes use of the CWM data set, covering civil wars and mediation attempts since 1946. On the other hand, I also examine the validity of my theory with data on interstate conflicts in the Supporting Information. The findings from these analyses do point to the same pattern: democracies are more likely than non-democracies to mediate low-intensity disputes, but the

positive impact on mediation onset vanishes once conflict intensity reaches higher levels. This result has important policy implications and may inform future scholarship on international mediation. On one hand, this article sheds additional light on the persistent selection effects surrounding mediation (e.g., Gartner and Bercovitch, 2006; Beber, 2012; Melin, Gartner and Bercovitch, 2013; Böhmelt, 2010; Beardsley, 2008). It follows from there that belligerents may want to re-consider a mediation offer from a democracy as third-party intervention: the antagonists could well be able to settle a conflict on their own and a third party may have merely offered their services as it is an "easy" case. On the other hand, it is particularly when democracies do not want to mediate that third-party intervention is necessary. And given that democracies are also seen as the more effective mediators (Dixon, 1993, 1994), the international community may want to provide extra incentives for them to move in and try settling a dispute peacefully. Having said that, the high rate of effectiveness commonly associated with democratic mediation could simply be driven by their self-selection into the less difficult cases. When accounting for this selection process, democratic third parties may be no more or less successful than their autocratic counterparts (see also Böhmelt, 2011).

Future research on this topic could address the following issues. First, new data collection efforts are necessary. Mediation remains to be a popular conflict-management technique (but see also Lundgren and Svensson, 2020), but data availability is limited and not updated for the most recent interstate and intrastate disputes. Second, the scope conditions and generalizability of the mechanism I postulate are quite broad, and it may be an effort worth making to examine whether peacekeeping is also affected by the identified selection problem (see Andersson, 2006). Third, recent research intensified the efforts to examine the reputation of actors involved in mediation attempts (Keels and Greig, 2019). Given my results, one could examine the reputational concerns of (potential) mediators more thoroughly than it is possible here. Fourth, if costs, accountability, and political-survival considerations matter for mediation, sharing the

burden of an intervention could be an option: this leads to the interesting question of how the democratic self-selection into easier disputes works under multiparty mediation (Böhmelt, 2011, 2012). Finally, not all democracies are created equal. Disaggregating democratic regime type and re-analyzing the mechanism discussed here could further our understanding of conflict resolution and international mediation significantly.

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