

Abstract

What causes interstate conflicts to occur? Is it possible to predict the occurrence of violent conflicts? Power Transition Theory (PTT) argues that power parity and state dissatisfaction are the two necessary conditions for a state to initiate a war. However, it can only explain wars among major power states. This study aims to expand the explanatory and predictive power of PTT in two directions. First, it applies PTT to all politically relevant states. Second, it tests the revised hypotheses to explain different levels of conflict. Statistical methods are introduced, so that a holistic relationship between variables can be verified. Two comparative case studies are conducted with Boolean algebra to display the causal mechanisms behind variables. Consequently, this study can determine how the two conditions work and why they seem to fail in some cases.

This study argues that a state will take more violent actions against another state in a politically relevant dyad as the gap in power decreases and as the first state's dissatisfaction increases. The greater the level of the two conditions, the more violent actions that the focal state will take. The greater the level of the two conditions, the more likely that the first state will initiate war. In such a case, PTT becomes a theory of conflict, not just of war. Additionally, this study proposes a new measurement of a state's dissatisfaction with another state. It argues that the better way to measure levels of states' dissatisfaction is to monitor their requests or threats in pre-dispute situations. As demonstrated, this measure performs well in terms of representing a state's dissatisfaction and predicting the initiation of conflict.

The goal of the study is to establish an early-warning system for war using the two conditions. The measurements in this study can be used to regularly monitor states' behaviors in order to issue warning of a possible war in a politically relevant dyad. If peace is desirable, then this alert system is necessary.