Continuous Recognition: A Latent Variable Approach to Measuring International Sovereignty of Self-Determination Movements

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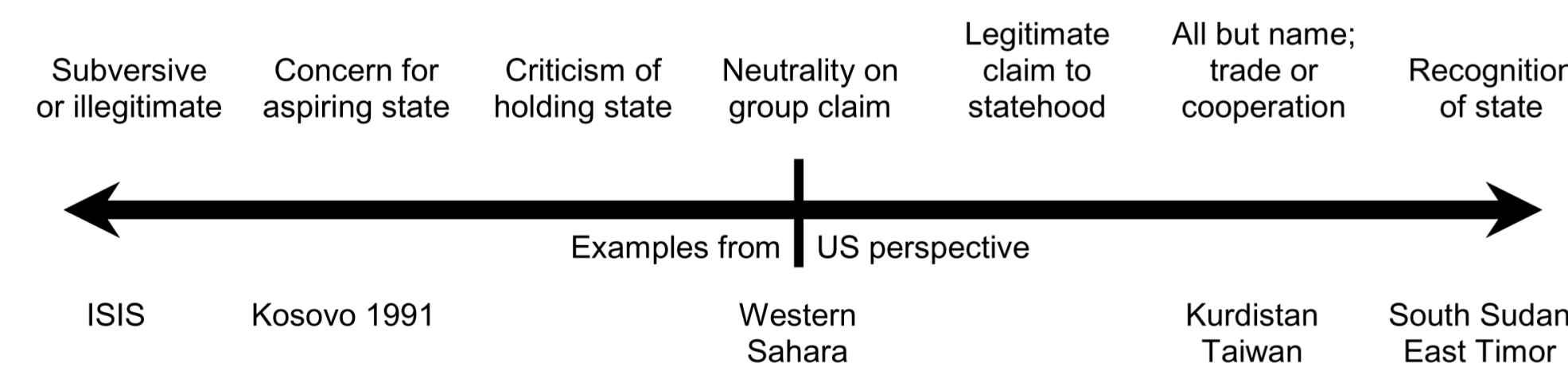SETON HALL UNIVERSITY 1856

Theory

International recognition of states is an important issue in IR, in part due to the increasing prevalence of substate groups asserting claims of self-determination. Prior work focuses on diplomatic recognition by major powers. These works have shared Krasner's assertion that diplomatic recognition is the primary meaningful conceptualization and reflection of international legal sovereignty.

This project treats such a view as only partially capturing international sovereignty. States that are third parties to these conflicts make important diplomatic, military, and economic decisions that can indicate favorable (or unfavorable) stances towards each aspiring state, contribute to the process of increasing (or decreasing) aspiring states' "eligibility" for diplomatic recognition, or both. In practice, third parties adjust to and fro in their orientations towards these conflicts, a trend that is hard to detect with an eye fixed on diplomatic recognition.

To augment the concept of international sovereignty, I conceptualize third-party states as moving along a continuum of recognition of self-determination groups. When third parties actively support self-determination groups, whether through aiding them in conflict or buttressing their domestic sovereignty, they advance their causes. A third party can fall anywhere between considering a separatist group subversive and illegitimate and recognizing them as a new state in the international system. Between the two ends exist multiple positions a third-party state may take regarding a self-determination movement, as well as those towards the ruling government against which separatists stake their claims.

The sovereignty continuum for aspiring states

Subversive or illegitimate	Concern for aspiring state	Criticism of holding state	Neutrality on group claim	Legitimate claim to statehood	All but name; trade or cooperation	Recognition of state

Examples from US perspective

| ISIS | Kosovo 1991 | | Western Sahara | | Kurdistan Taiwan | South Sudan East Timor |

By modeling recognition as a latent trait, I am able to distinguish between the many policy orientations states may take towards these conflicts even while they make no plays for diplomatic recognition. In the figure below, the US scores for four self-determination movements are displayed throughout the 1990s. Not one of these movements is diplomatically recognized by the United States, but there is substantial variation in the level of support each receives in terms of diplomatic, military, and economic aid.

Moreover, one of them sees a large change in score during this period; specifically, after the Kosovo conflict escalates substantially in 1996, the US moves towards recognition (eventually extending official recognition in 2008). Detecting these subtler shifts in policy, short of diplomatic recognition, both justifies and allows for addressing the question of international sovereignty with greater emphasis on nuance in foreign policy than has been possible in prior work.

### What diplomatic recognition misses: US stance toward four separatist groups
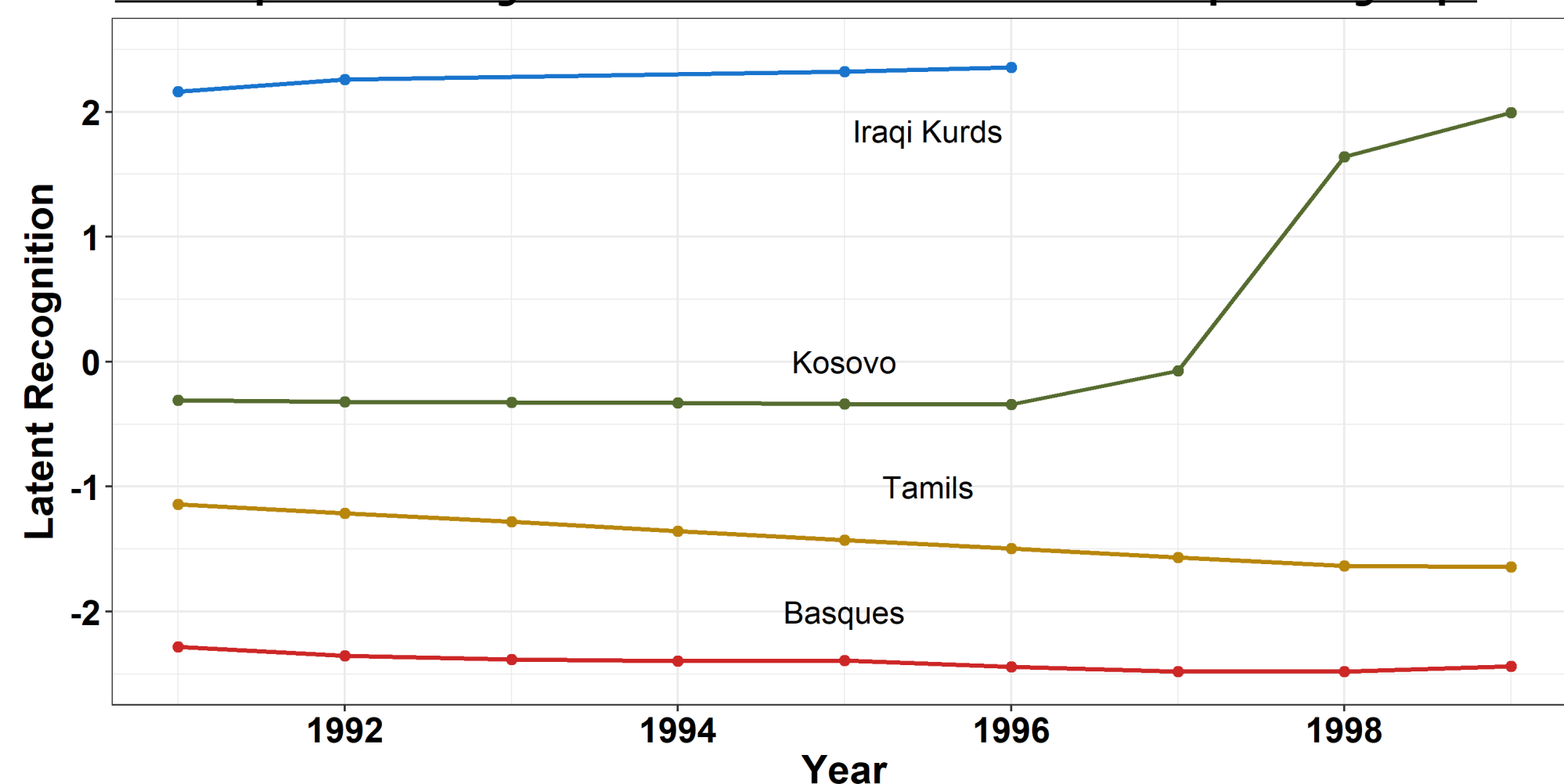
Abstract

The successful progression of separatist and self-determination movements from status as a nascent movement to one of eligibility for international recognition is a poorly understood process. Two disjoint literatures, one on partially recognized states and one on diplomatic recognition, speak to the topic, but neither has been focused much on how these states accrue international sovereignty en route to recognition. Official recognition, the dominant measure, reflects only the final stages of a long process. Before officially recognizing aspiring states, third parties tacitly recognize them by other important means: foreign aid, military partnerships, and other forms. To fill in this gap, I create a latent variable model of third-party recognition, using data on military and economic aid, diplomatic exchange, IGO voting, sanctions, opposition to and support of governments facing separatists, and official recognition. With this new measure, I test several theoretical predictions about recognition, finding: (1) that third parties move towards recognition of separatist groups when other powers stake out positions, (2) that extant violence in separatist conflicts has a direct positive effect on movement towards recognition, (3) that states move away from recognition when they share security interests with the party standing to lose territory, and (4) that successful seizure and control of territory by separatists has no effect on movement towards international recognition.

Summary of data and model

Dataset	Percent cases with data
Voeten UN voting	17.92
Uppsala Intervention	20.43
Kisengani (IMI)	35.86
Arms Transfers (SIPRI)	74.91
Diplomatic Exchange (COW)	11.83
Sanctions (TIES)	76.7
MIPS	8.6
USAID (to Host or Aspiring State)	83.15
Coggins (2014)	100

Latent variable model of recognition illustrated
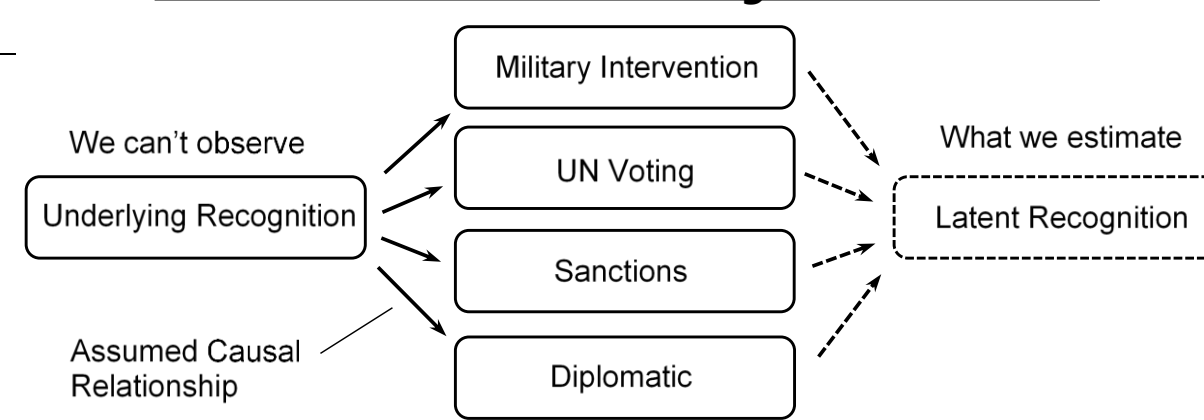
Variable (across case years)	Mean	SD	Min.	Max	Num. cases including variable
Num. datasets in addition to Coggins (2014)	2.4	1	0	5	279
UN "for" voting	0.61	0.19	0.18	0.93	50
UN "against" voting	0.12	0.12	0	0.44	50
Sanctions (incl. diplomatic) (2 datasets)	0.03	0.05	0	1	279
Military aid (5 datasets)	0.52	0.4	0	1	189

Model

I conceptualize support for recognition as a latent trait, assuming there is an underlying characteristic of support for international sovereignty that cannot be measured directly, but which influences the other measurable traits summarized in the tables above. Those observed outcomes are used to estimate and compare levels of the latent trait across countries and time periods, as well as develop and test ideas about changes in the theoretically important variable. Following the examples of Schnakenberg and Fariss and Reuning et al., recognition is modeled

through a dynamic item response theory (D-IRT) framework. A parameter is estimated for each manifest variable's "difficulty" and ability to "discriminate." The idea is that there are certain foreign policy decisions that certain actors have a lower baseline ability to do, making them more difficult. Each variable also discriminates among cases, so that certain foreign policy decisions towards separatists are more informative of how much a state supports recognition.

The priors and likelihood function are shown here.

Priors and likelihood function

$$\theta_{i1} \sim N(0,1) \; \forall i \in [1,N]$$
$$\theta_{it} \sim N(\theta_{i(t-1)}, \sigma) \; \forall i \in [1,N] \text{ and } \forall t \in [2,T]$$
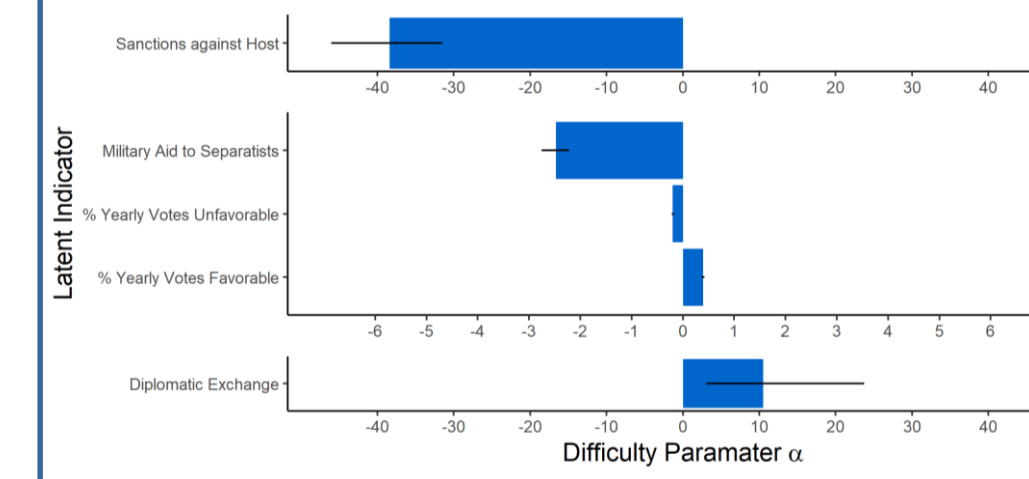$$\sigma \sim \Gamma(1,1)\mathbf{I}(\sigma > 0)$$
$$\alpha \sim N(0,10)$$
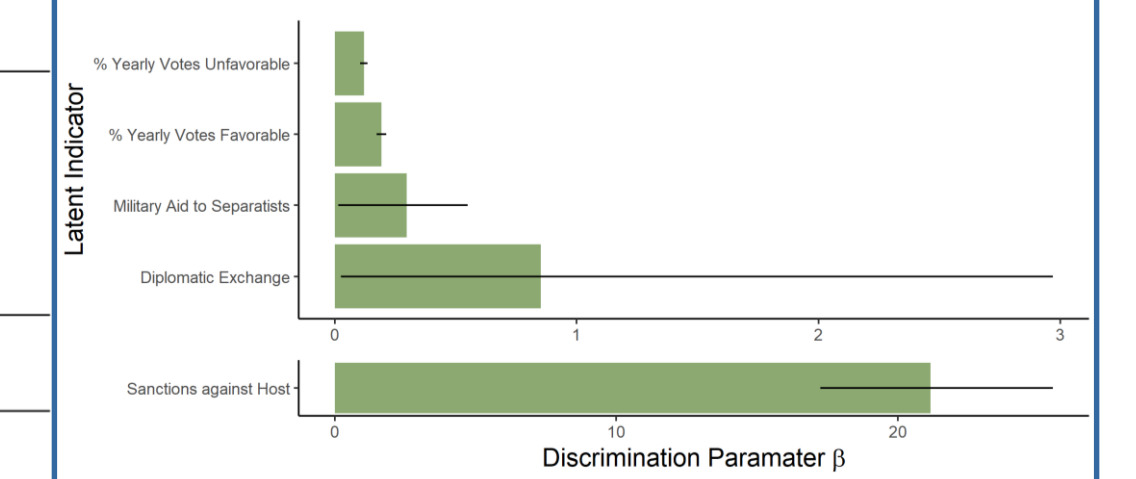$$\beta \sim \Gamma(1,1) \text{ for dichotomous variables}$$
$$\beta \sim N(0,10) \text{ for continuous variables}$$
$$\mathcal{L} = \prod_{i,t=1}^{N,T} \prod_{k=1}^{K} \Lambda(\alpha_k - \beta_k\theta_{it})^{y_{itk}}(1 - \Lambda(\alpha_k - \beta_k\theta_{it}))^{1-y_{itk}}$$

Difficulty Parameters of Indicator Variables

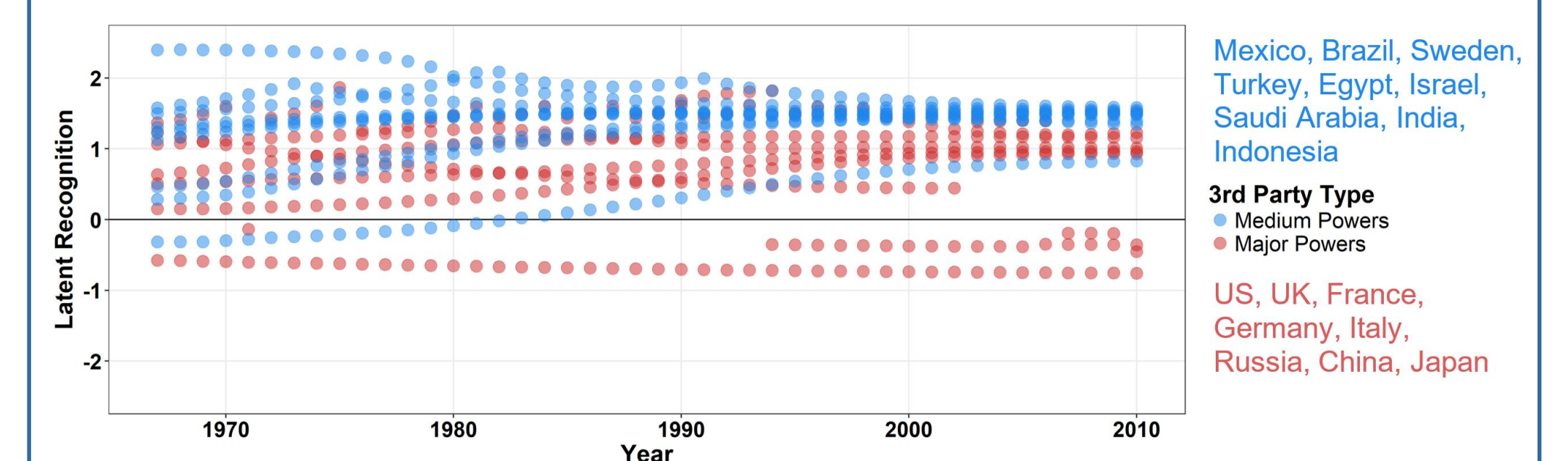### Discrimination Parameters of Indicator Variables

Analysis

The estimated difficulty and discrimination parameters are given above. Sanctions against host states for fighting separatists constitute both the most difficult and the best discriminating variable. Military aid and support in the UN have the next biggest influence on the estimated levels of support.

To demonstrate the performance of the model, below are shown the latent recognition scores of 18 powers towards Palestine. Since 1967, most countries have converged on similar scores towards Palestine. They tend to favor Palestine overall, with positive scores throughout most of the period. This score has been, on average, increasing steadily over time. Note that medium

sized powers have tended to favor Palestine in their positions more than major powers have.

Below that is shown a table revisiting some key hypotheses about recognition. The first column shows the results of a fixed effects regression model using the latent recognition variable. The second column displays the Cox Hazard Ratio tests from Coggins (2014). Major powers increase in support of sovereignty when levels of violence are higher, when separatists win in battle, when they face separatist challengers of their own, and when they are in conflict with the host states. They decrease when the self-determination group is an ethno-federal unit and when both they and the host are autocratic.

Latent recognition of Palestine by 18 countries

Mexico, Brazil, Sweden, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia

3rd Party Type
- Medium Powers
- Major Powers

US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, China, Japan

Comparing effects: Latent and diplomatic recognition

Model:	Dyadic Fixed Effects		Coggins (2014) Cox Hazard Ratio[a]
Domestic			
Ethnic Federation	-.12 (.02)***	(+)	5.35 ***
Violence level >999 deaths	.09 (.02)***	(-)	.7 ***
War Victory	.12 (.04)**	(+)	5.33 ***
International			
Number of Challengers	.002 (.000)**	(-)	.76 [b]
Prior recognition by other great power	.003 (.002)	(+)	28.16 ***
MID b/t 3rd party and host state	.03 (.01)*		
Mutual autocracy	-.02 (.01)***	(-)	.2 ***
Mutual democracy	-.02 (.007)	(+)	1.22
Constant	-.15***		
N [c]	1947		1334

p-values are * .05, ** .01, *** .001; standard errors in parentheses
[a] Ratios >1 are interpreted as an increased likelihood of recognition; <1 a decreased likelihood
[b] Coggins' was a dummy variable for "unusually high number" of challengers
[c] Difference in Ns due to different clustering techniques between Cox and fixed effects models.

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