International Institutional Environment and Civil War Prevention

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Abstract: We examine the potential of highly structured intergovernmental organizations (HSIGOs) to prevent the escalation of low-level domestic armed conflicts in member states to civil wars. A state's HSIGO memberships alters the bargaining game between the government and rebels by increasing the costs of escalation (e.g., via sanctions) and decreasing the amount of benefits the state hoped to receive from future international cooperation. The anticipation of such consequences provides the government with an increased interest in settling the conflict before it escalates. This in turn also mitigates an important aspect of uncertainty associated with bargaining failure, including enhancing the credibility of commitments. Empirical analyses of all domestic armed conflicts from 1945-2000 provide robust support for the hypothesized conflict management function of HSIGO memberships. Consistent with our theorizing, follow-up tests and illustrative evidence from Indonesia and Ivory Coast show that the findings are driven by those HSIGOs that have the most ability to punish and/or reward member states and that HSIGO memberships help prevent low-level conflict escalation by increasing the likelihood of settlements.

International Institutional Environment and Civil War Prevention

While domestic armed conflicts[1] are one of the most important problems facing the modern world, exceeding militarized international conflicts both in their numbers and fatalities (Harbom and Wallensteen 2010), researchers and practitioners alike have been bewildered for decades by the problem of how to stop them. Furthermore, once a country experiences a full-fledged civil war, the chances of conflict recurrence grow substantially. Causes range from unresolved grievances, war related enmity, desire for revenge, and rebel group splintering, to the negative impact of civil wars on countries' economic and political development, and its educational and public health systems (Ghobarah, Huth, and Russett 2003; Murdoch and Sandler 2004; Murray et al. 2002). Civil war countries often find themselves caught in a conflict trap from which it is difficult to escape.[2] Meanwhile, traditional third party methods of conflict management (e.g. mediation, intervention, peacekeeping) that are supposed to either stop ongoing civil wars or prevent their recurrence do not appear all that effective.[3]

Given the problems posed by civil wars and the difficulty of managing ongoing conflicts, we shift the ontological focus away from civil war management to civil war *prevention*. We approach civil wars from the developmental perspective and divide the life cycle of domestic conflicts into the initial, low-level conflict phase and the later, civil war phase. This allows us to study the process of *conflict escalation*, which is familiar from research on inter-state conflict (Reed 2000) but has not yet been applied in the studies of internal conflict. We see the low-level

[1] We use the term "conflict" below as shorthand for conflict involving armed force.
[2] Blattman and Miguel (2010) offer a review of the economic and social consequences of civil wars.
[3] While traditional conflict management techniques have been shown to be somewhat effective in dealing with inter-state disputes (e.g., mediation, Beardsley 2008), in the realm of domestic conflict management the mediation, intervention, or peacekeeping literatures fail to report robust findings clearly showing the beneficial effects of any of these approaches (see, for instance, Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; and Doyle and Sambanis 2000).

phase as the most opportune time to end the conflict: as prior findings reveal, once conflicts evolve into civil wars, they are difficult to stop and leave many lasting and undesirable consequences. That is, we focus on the question of how to prevent the escalation of low-level domestic conflicts into full-fledged civil wars.

For help with the answer, we turn to the recent political crisis in Ivory Coast, which illustrates attempts by the international governmental organizations (IGOs) to defuse the crisis before it turned into a civil war. Following the presidential elections of November 28, 2010, incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept that he had lost to his rival Alassane Ouattara. Gbagbo's clinging to presidential power – which risked turning the standoff into a civil war – drew sharp rebukes from the international community, including states with interests in the region (e.g., France) and the UN. Yet, what is perhaps less known is that some IGOs to which Ivory Coast belonged went well beyond verbal reprimands and threatened real, tangible costs. As Gbabgo refused to yield, these threats were carried out. For example, the African Development Bank imposed sanctions, citing its worries about a deepening economic crisis caused by political uncertainty and flickering violence; the World Bank similarly suspended aid to the country. With the country teetering on the edge of a civil war, Gbagbo was finally arrested in early April 2011, seemingly placing the country on the road to greater stability.

This episode has noteworthy implications in that it highlights a potentially important role of certain IGOs in shaping the trajectory of domestic conflicts within member states. In the Ivory Coast case, these organizations attempted to reward desirable behavior by promising future benefits. Yet, when their calls were not heeded by Gbagbo, they punished undesirable behavior by carrying out sanctions and transferring the promise of benefits to his political rival whom they were willing to support as long as he did not plunge the country into a full-fledged civil war.

In this study, we go beyond the Ivory Coast case to investigate the more general ability of some IGOs to shape the trajectory of civil conflicts. In international relations research, IGOs have been examined as conflict managers between member states for some time. While it is apparent and well established that IGO-embodied inter-governmental links provide inherent opportunities for resolving conflicts *between* member countries (Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom 2004; Frazier and Dixon 2006; Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum 2003; Russett and Oneal 2001; Shannon 2009), IGOs' abilities to address conflicts *within* member countries are not that well understood. Our argument is that those IGOs with high degrees of institutional depth have the greatest ability to help prevent the escalation of emerging domestic conflicts into civil wars. These highly structured IGOs (HSIGOs) are designed so that established procedures of the IGO cannot be swiftly overridden by single members' policies and can be considered independent, or removed, from members' policy shifts. Such organizations also possess provisions to coerce state compliance with IGO policies, tools for enforcing organizational decisions and norms, and independent administrative and monitoring bodies. Examples of HSIGOs include the IMF, IAEA, Southern African Customs Union, and Inter-American Development Bank.[4]

Our argument maintains that HSIGOs' design and importance to member countries can help address sources of bargaining failure thought to lead to civil wars (Fearon 2007; Walter 1999, 2009). By shaping *expectations* that there will be HSIGO-related costs for continuing to fight (e.g., sanctions, forgoing membership benefits), HSIGOs provide important constraints within which member governments – and to some extent the rebels – are operating. The associated reduction in uncertainty makes conflict-ending compromises easier to reach. Furthermore, the real possibility of losing benefits and incurring costs also provide a potent incentive to honor such compromises down the road. In turn, one of the keys to ending domestic conflicts is to

[4] A complete list is available from the authors.

reduce the uncertainty the disarming rebels face by finding ways to enhance the credibility of the government's commitments not to harm the disarmed rebels (Simmons and Danner 2010; Walter 1999). Empirical analyses across all domestic conflicts from 1945-2000 provide support for the premise that a state's membership in larger numbers of HSIGOs significantly reduces the likelihood that a domestic conflict on its territory will escalate to a civil war. Consistent with our theorizing, follow-up tests show that the findings are driven by those HSIGOs that have the most ability to punish and/or reward member states and that HSIGO memberships help prevent low-level conflict escalation by increasing the likelihood of settlement.

Our study advances the state of knowledge in multiple ways. First, the literature has already started to investigate the issue of domestic conflict management potential of IGOs – most notably by considering interventions and peacekeeping operations (Diehl 2008; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2004). But only few IGOs (often the UN) actually head such high-profile operations. We broaden this interest by arguing that many IGOs have conflict managing potential and by exploring more subtle ways in which IGOs can effectively help alleviate the problem of domestic conflict. Second, our findings show that the benefits of international institutional design (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001) extend beyond the original core IGO mandates to the politics of domestic conflict. This means that there are positive externalities to institutional design. Third, the paper demonstrates the importance of the international institutional environment for the trajectory of domestic conflict processes and thus contributes to the emerging discussion on the transnational dimensions of domestic conflict (Gleditsch 2007). Fourth, studies of low-level conflict and civil war occurrence virtually all search for correlates of the onset of either type of domestic violence. By developing the concept of domestic conflict escalation, we link the two types of domestic conflict and thus help bring together the two

strands of the domestic conflict literature. Finally, from a more practical standpoint, with many international conflicts settled, assessing IGOs' ability to manage domestic conflicts provides insights into the important issues of whether and how IGOs can continue to be relevant from the conflict management perspective.

The study is organized as follows. First, we provide an overview of problems associated with civil wars, including their management. The next section develops the logic behind our expectation that memberships in HSIGOs have important domestic conflict-managing effects. The following sections address research design issues and present our findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of our work.

Causes, Consequences, and Management of Civil Wars

In addition to having taken well over one million lives in the 1990s alone, civil wars have devastating social and economic consequences. Public health institutions and procedures of post-civil war states are often severely disrupted (Murray et al. 2002) and, consequently, populations of such states face higher risks of suffering or dying from various infectious diseases (Ghobarah, Huth, and Russett 2003). Displaced persons fleeing from one conflict can destabilize politically not only neighboring countries but also whole regions (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). More generally, civil wars also inhibit economic growth within affected countries (Kang and Meernik 2005) and their neighbors (Murdoch and Sandler 2004), by harming political stability (Rodrik 1999) and individual households and the labor force (Blattman and Miguel 2010). These ramifications of civil wars are typically stronger than those suffered after inter-state wars. In part due these effects, countries that have experienced civil wars in that past are at an increased risk of civil war recurrence, leading them to become entangled into what has been termed the civil

war trap (Collier 2003; Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2008; Walter 2004).

Despite these grave consequences, the empirically founded consensus on factors that prevent civil war onset is relatively sparse. Scholars have identified a set of structural correlates of the onset of violent domestic conflicts: economic opportunity through available natural resources; economic grievances and poverty; unstable political institutions; ethnic diversity; inaccessible terrain; and others (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). Yet, some of these factors are either geographically/naturally given conditions or represent "chronic" problems plaguing countries in a sense that they can hardly be mitigated and, if so, only slowly.

A more recent literature conceptualizes civil wars as a result of bargaining failure emanating from commitment problems (Fearon 2007; Walter 1999). Here, governments and rebels bargain over the settlement of grievances and demands, but governments in particular often cannot credibly commit to agreements. That is, the rebels face uncertainty that governments will use their power position to renege on deals made after the rebels have disarmed. Scholars have suggested that carefully crafted peace agreements (Mattes and Savun 2010) or stable political institutions may reduce such commitment problems (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Goldstone et al. 2010). Turning to third parties – most prominently IGOs – for help with post-civil war commitment problems, Walter (1999) argues that peacekeepers can help assure the rebels' safety while Simmons and Danner (2010) note that post-civil war governments join the International Criminal Court (ICC) to signal readiness for reconciliation. These strategies are employed mostly in the aftermath of civil wars (to prevent their recurrence), and as such do not address the issue of preventing civil wars in the first place all that well. But the latter two works in particular point to IGOs' positive role in overcoming some causes of bargaining failure. We argue that the ability of IGOs to address causes of bargaining failure can be both broadened and

expanded to the earlier stages of domestic conflict, where escalation to civil war may be prevented.

IGOs as Conflict Managers

Many studies demonstrate that joint memberships in IGOs are associated with lower probabilities of militarized conflict between member states (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001; Russett, Oneal, and Davis 1998; Wallace and Singer 1970). Investigating the causal mechanisms behind these findings, researchers have argued that deeper structural/institutional links provide important tools for consultation, grievance management, and the imposition of constraints on member states (Haas 1992; Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001). The latter feature in particular allows IGOs to help reduce the deleterious effects of commitment problems in the bargaining process (Mitchell and Hensel (2007).[5]

IGOs' international conflict management success, however, does not seem to translate well to the domain of domestic conflict. This is not for a lack of trying: IGOs have led numerous efforts to either stop ongoing civil wars or prevent their recurrence though active conflict management techniques such as mediation, intervention, and peacekeeping. Yet, the literature fails to report clear, robust findings that would unambiguously show the beneficial effects of any of these approaches (e.g., Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Diehl 2008; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2004; Regan 2002; Regan, Frank, and Aydin 2009). From the perspective of conflict escalation we employ in this paper, it is also questionable whether these activities occur

[5] Taking a more constructivist approach, some researchers note that IGOs also help socialize their members into peaceful, cooperative interactions with one another (e.g. Bearce and Bondanella 2007; Greenhill 2010). While it is often implicit to these arguments that stronger ties and deeper levels of integration are associated with greater levels of socialization – and thus peaceful behavior between member states – the applicability of this line of argument to our investigation has its limits. Rebels are not members of IGOs and thus would not have the benefit of becoming socialized into peaceful interactions.

early enough in the life cycle of a conflict to prevent its escalation to civil war. Peacekeeping forces, in particular, are typically deployed after the civil war is over, to make sure that violence does not recur. Similarly, as our follow-up analyses indicate, even mediations and interventions mostly take place later in the life cycle of a domestic conflict; as such, they are arguably not that effective in stopping the conflict process before it reaches the full-fledged civil war stage.

Yet, IGOs need not necessarily be actively involved in problematic domestic situations in order to make a difference. Consistent with the argument that IGOs function as commitment devices for states (Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; Pevehouse 2002), post-conflict governments appear to join the ICC to signal readiness for post-conflict reconciliation, among other reasons (Simmons and Danner 2010). Hafner-Burton (2005) demonstrates that economic integration in the form of preferential trade agreements with human rights clauses leads to significant improvements in the human rights practice of signatory states, while Donno (2010) finds that under some circumstances, states' memberships in regional IGOs are a significant commitment device that can draw enforcement with regard to electoral fraud. This research suggests that states' international commitments reduce the likelihood of domestic conflict, and is consistent with Thyne's argument (2006, 2009) that third party signals in general have an appreciable impact on domestic conflict trajectories.

Following the idea that the commitments states make to IGOs can in turn constrain their activities in the realm of domestic politics, we investigate the broader issue of whether IGOs could passively alter the conditions that lead to the development of civil wars. In doing so, we build on the literature on civil war as a bargaining failure and propose that states' membership in certain IGOs reduces uncertainty within the domestic conflict bargaining game – by changing the *expectations* of domestic conflict parties (i.e. government and rebels). As explained below,

HSIGOs' institutional structure, membership benefits, and leverage over member states allow them to significantly alter the anticipated consequences of domestic conflict for the disputants. In turn, this reduces uncertainty and helps address problems associated with bargaining failure.

Theoretical Argument

Generally, not all IGOs are expected to affect state behavior alike. Loose, ad-hoc type institutions with little independent decision-making power, no central monitoring, or weak enforcement capabilities are unlikely to exert strong constraints on states' behavior. In contrast, more institutionalized IGOs are a much more potent element of states' international environment. Like others who have explored variation in the effects of differently designed IGOs (foremost Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom 2004; see also Abbott et al. 2000), we focus on the degree to which an IGO can be considered independent, or removed, from members' policy shifts. HSIGOs are designed such that established procedures of the IGO cannot be swiftly overridden by a single member's policies. Some features of this design include not only fixed mechanisms for mediation, arbitration, adjudication and conflict resolution (Abbott et al. 2000; Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom 2004), but also provisions to coerce state compliance with IGO policies, tools for enforcing organizational decisions and norms, or independent administrative and monitoring bodies.[6] That states voluntarily join organizations with leverage over them suggests that states value this membership and its benefits – resources that can be withheld as punishment for misbehavior. HSIGOs are thus well placed to help manage conflicts between member states by imposing costs on otherwise cheap signals, and strengthening the credibility of commitments.

[6] In defining this concept, we follow Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom's distinction between three ideal types of IGOs with high, medium, and low degrees of institutionalization – but focus on the IGOs with the greatest degree of institutionalization.

The concept of a "highly institutionalized international environment" follows from these definitions. It expresses the degree to which a state has tied itself to international bodies that can exercise some control over the state. In a rationalist-institutionalist logic, embeddedness in highly institutionalized IGOs directly affects the cost calculation of states with regard to its domestic and international policies. This effect is similar to what Abbott and Snidal (2000) argue to be the effects of hard law as a tool for cooperation:

> "By using hard law to order their relations, international actors reduce transactions costs, strengthen the credibility of their commitments, expand their available political strategies, and resolve problems of incomplete contracting. Doing so, however, also entails significant costs: hard law restricts actors' behavior and even their sovereignty." (422)

We argue that the cost-benefit logic of highly institutionalized IGOs is not only relevant for issues of inter-state cooperation such as tariffs or environmental protection. Constraints and behavioral expectations that flow from HSIGO memberships also affect how states conduct themselves domestically, even if many HSIGOs' mandates may not be directly tied to conflictual issues within member states.[7] We return to these issues after examining the process of civil war development.

Conceptualizing the Development of Civil Wars

Civil wars rarely occur over night, but rather build up over time. For simplicity's sake, we conceptualize this process in two stages, with a low-level conflict phase and full-fledged civil war stage. Most domestic conflicts arise between governments and domestic rebel groups – minorities, political movements, or other insurgent groups. Rebels may attack first to press their demands for protection from government repression, better minority treatment, economic benefits, or territorial autonomy or independence. Alternatively, the government may use force

[7] Note that structure is the source of our argument here, and that HSIGOs need not be regional, issue-specific or umbrella organizations, or small in the number of their member states to have the hypothesized effect.

against a domestic group that is acting against the government's preferences, e.g., through organizing, seeking political influence, arming, putting up barricades, or refusing to implement a government policy. Clashes where rebels violently challenge governments, or where governments use force against domestic opponents, are likely to result in at least a limited number of fatalities. In purely quantitative terms, a threshold of, for instance, 25 casualties that satisfies the criteria for low-level armed conflict according to the PRIO/Uppsala project (Gleditsch et al. 2002) can be reached relatively quickly.[8]

After such eruptions of violence, which characterize the first stage of conflict, governments and rebels typically face the choice of mobilizing further or of trying to accommodate each other's demands without significant further use of force. If the sides want to press their case, they risk escalation of the conflict to the second, civil war stage. While the first phase of conflict may sometimes be unexpected or unplanned, the transition to the second, civil war phase typically takes more concerted action: the second phase takes more resources, planning, strategizing, and recruiting.

Importantly, the low-level phase of domestic violence offers an opportunity to manage the conflict before it reaches the civil war stage. In a sense, the first phase of the conflict can be stumbled into unexpectedly, and take place quickly, before conflict management efforts such as mediations or interventions can be usefully employed. Yet, we argue that it is precisely in the first phase of the conflict that the HSIGO memberships can make the most difference. The bargaining scenario outlined below illustrates how a state's embeddedness in the international institutional milieu can help prevent the escalation of low-level conflicts to civil wars.

[8] For example, when the East German government, together with Soviet forces, deployed troops to crush workers' demonstrations in 1953, more than 150 individuals were killed within essentially one day. Similarly, the British forces' violent crackdown on Irish protesters on Bloody Sunday in 1972 – and the resulting violence in that year – resulted in a few hundred deaths.

HSIGOs and Prevention of Domestic Conflict Escalation

As conflict managers, (HS)IGOs are typically expected to help address domestic conflicts by performing proactive tasks, such as mediation, intervention, sanctioning, and peacekeeping. Yet, these active functions are not necessarily fast enough to forestall escalation. They often take place only after the conflict has reached the civil war stage and is attracting considerable international attention. We argue that HSIGOs can play an important but comparatively more passive conflict management role that can pay dividends considerably earlier, during the first stage of a conflict. In government-rebel interactions as a bargaining game, HSIGO memberships help alter the game's incentive structure away from conflict escalation. Specifically, HSIGO memberships indicate that conflict escalation entails the risk of suffering punishment and of foregoing fruits of future international cooperation. Because the government – and to some extent the rebels – expect there to be HSIGO-related costs on the state associated with conflict escalation, these *expectations* themselves act as potent incentive-restructuring devices against escalation. This logic, explained more fully immediately below, is consistent with (a) the rationalist view of IGOs, whereby membership steers actors toward desirable behavior by decreasing costs and providing rewards for "good" behavior and simultaneously increasing the costs of undesirable activities (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Martin 1992). Moreover, (b) the argument echoes the off-the-path-behavior logic (Weingast 1996), whereby the mere presence of institutional structures that punish misbehavior acts as a deterrent; this deterrent can be so effective that the actual, active involvement by the institution in the problem is rarely – if ever –

observed.[9] A more detailed exposition of our argument follows.

An important feature of the domestic-level rebel-government bargaining game is that it takes place between at least formally unequal actors. Governments usually have access to a number of resources that rebels can hardly procure: police forces, the military, international sovereignty, diplomatic channels, fiscal authority, and others. This is not to say that governments are always overall stronger than rebels, but the asymmetry of domestic politics may provide the government with some inherent advantages. Consequently, the rebels' strategy and resolve is dependent on their expectations about governments' preferred and most likely choices vis-à-vis the rebels.

Yet, countering this asymmetry somewhat, in addition to the variety of domestic factors (relative strength of forces, popular support, resources, the ability to control territory, etc.), governments are affected by an international environment made up of other states as well as IGOs of which they are members. Compared to other IGOs, HSIGOs have a particular ability to constrain member states in their behavior – by being more important to and having multifaceted leverage over member states. Due to the relative ease with which the first stage of conflict may occur, the institutional environment likely has little effect on it.[10] Yet, we expect the institutional framework to significantly alter the likelihood of escalation by changing the calculus of anticipated costs and benefits of continued fighting. Membership in the framework thus reduces uncertainty and in turn helps overcome sources of bargaining failure in the interaction between

[9] This logic is frequently applied in studies of American politics. For example, the presidential veto power in the United States represents a similar "deterrent" for Congressional voting behavior – merely by the veto threat and independent of its actual use (Cameron 2000).

[10] One may argue that HSIGO member states should experience less initial, first-phase conflict, perhaps because HSIGO memberships provide constraints against all violence or because only peaceful states join HSIGOs. We maintain that the HSIGO structure is better at preventing escalation than low-level conflicts in general, given the relative ease with which "insurgency can be successfully practiced by small numbers of rebels under the right conditions" (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 76); that is, the rebels can have the first mover advantage when it comes to the use of force. Also, potential HSIGO members cannot reliably guarantee that they will not have to deal with a rebellion at some point in the future. In any case, the issue of whether HSIGO member states indeed experience less first phase, low-level conflict is investigated empirically below.

the government and rebels.

Because instability within member states may hamper HSIGOs' missions (e.g., stifled economic activity and growth hurt international trade), member governments are expected to address grievances of (potential) rebel groups and avoid the path toward civil war. If the state pursues the fight, it risks IGO sanctions and the denial of membership privileges. Those governments with ties to HSIGOs face significant losses from such action: the membership is valuable to the government, and it gives the IGOs power to impose penalties on the misbehaving member. For instance, the purpose of regional trade organizations or development banks is to tie states' hands to enable cooperation *between* states, providing a stable, predictable environment in which trade and investment can flourish. Yet, the instability from *within* member states can create uncertainty that investors frown upon and thus damage the institution's goal. Member governments that permit domestic unrest to escalate into a civil war can therefore expect serious sanctions as the organization is trying to protect its mission and restore confidence and normalcy. Our initial example demonstrates that this threat is real: as civil unrest began to unfold in Ivory Coast in early December 2010, HSIGOs such as the World Bank and a regional development bank were quick to pressure the country to settle its crisis peacefully lest their aid be withheld indefinitely (BBC News 2010a). Because member states are aware of these consequences, this results in a constraining effect when it comes to making choices to escalate or contain domestic violence – and for rebels, the constraints are publicly visible through the states' HSIGO portfolio. In contrast, an isolated government with little to lose on the stage of international cooperation faces few constraints not to pursue the fight.

Conversely, a state's involvement in HSIGOs signifies the prospect of future gains through cooperation in economic and other affairs, as long as the state itself can remain a stable and

reliable partner within the institution. This highlights the role of "carrot" incentives for de-escalating the tense domestic situation to reap the benefits of inter-state cooperation. The government could potentially use some portion of anticipated fruits of cooperation to appease the rebels and make conflict escalation less desirable from their perspective. Others (e.g., Collier et al. 2003) have previously pointed to the importance of prospective economic development as a political stabilizer. External trade plays a particularly important role in this regard, per Collier and Hoeffler (2004). But benefits from trade, foreign aid, foreign investment, and other economic exchanges require signals that the society will remain a stable host and partner. These carrots of course require the rebels and government to resolve their differences, which may be no easy feat. Nevertheless, unlike states that are only poorly integrated into international structures, HSIGO member states face tangible incentives for forgoing conflict escalation. Again, current events in Ivory Coast illustrate this process. After Laurent Gbagbo's arrest and the transition of power to Alassane Ouattara, several HSIGOs (the World Bank, IMF, and African Development Bank) all promised quick help in mid-April 2011.

The alteration of the anticipated cost-benefit calculus of continued fighting also affects the rebel-government bargaining in another important way – which can help prevent conflict escalation. Much domestic conflict scholarship reports that conflicts tend to endure because the adversaries simply do not trust each other (Walter 1999; see also Hoddie and Hartzell 2003; Fortna 2004). The government and rebels may be willing to agree in principle on the terms of ending their dispute in the initial stage of the conflict. But mistrust about each other's intentions and future behavior makes actual agreements hard to reach (and implement) as the bargaining is clouded with much uncertainty in terms of the willingness to commit to promises made by each side. Consequently, rebels in particular face a strong challenge in believing governments'

promises and acting accordingly, i.e., laying down the weapons that make up their only insurance against government forces if governments choose to break their commitments and attack the now vulnerable rebels.

Conversely, empirical and formal works in the domestic conflict literature conclude that credibility-enhancing factors significantly contribute to the prevention of serious conflict (Addison and Murshed 2002; Powell 2006; Walter 1999). We argue that HSIGO memberships can help increase the credibility of government commitments to end the fight, which are necessary to avoid conflict escalation. As explained above, governments face tangible incentives to settle the fight with the rebels. Reneging on commitments made to the rebels in the context of a peace deal would mean resumption of hostilities, which in turn would be problematic for the government in terms of HSIGO-imposed costs and forgoing benefits of future cooperation. Knowing that the government faces this constraint helps reassure the rebels that the government has a meaningful incentive to abide by the peace deal.[11] A state's participation within HSIGOs is therefore a tangible and credible signal to domestic groups that the government is a more reliable partner in avoiding conflict escalation, directly or indirectly. For instance, the World Bank's and other HSIGOs' role in the road to East Timor's independence was a notable factor in managing its split from Indonesia.

Extending this logic to the rebels implies that the HSIGO membership may constrain them as well. As the disadvantaged actor in the asymmetric domestic bargaining situation, the rebel group hopes that the HSIGOs can help even the playing field by providing constraints on the government. Yet, if the rebels renege on their conflict-ending commitments, they lose credibility

[11] Consistent with our logic, one could also argue that HSIGO member states have a more general interest in protecting their reputations. HSIGO member governments face external reputational costs if they renege on commitments made to pacify domestic unrest; this will make it more difficult for the state to remain an HSIGO member in good standing, as other member states distrust its willingness to honor its commitments. Thus, the state has a vested interest in protecting its standing abroad by honoring its commitments at home.

and the HSIGOs may cease bearing pressure on the government and tilt more in its favor. With this, the rebels lose a significant counterweight to the government's advantages and find themselves back in the unenviable asymmetric bargaining position. In short, by increasing costs for reneging, HSIGO memberships reduce uncertainty for both sides in the conflict and ultimately help contain the conflict to the initial, low-level stage.

While each HSIGO can contribute to conflict management, we expect that the conflict management effects will be the greatest when a state is simultaneously a member of multiple HSIGOs. More memberships in HSIGOs suggest that a state is more embedded in a network of highly structured institutions. This embeddedness will help reinforce each HSIGO's conflict management function, make penalties more multifaceted and severe, provide more rewards for desirable behavior, and simply increases the chances that at least one HSIGO will take interest in the conflict – strengthening the anticipation that actual sanctions will be forthcoming and decreasing the uncertainty with respect to commitment issues. Our key expectation is therefore that states more embedded in the HSIGO environment will have greater incentives to constructively deal with emerging domestic conflicts – compared to states that are less integrated into HSIGO structures. Our primary hypothesis is thus,

> H1: Domestic low-level armed conflicts are less likely to escalate into civil wars in those states that are more embedded in the HSIGO environment.

Research Design

The Universe of Cases, Unit of Analysis, and the Dependent Variable

We test this hypothesis on all cases of domestic armed conflict that took place anywhere in the world from 1945 to 2000. In keeping with standard practice, we define an armed conflict as the occurrence of politically motivated violence within one country resulting in at least 25 battle

deaths within one year (Harbom and Wallensteen 2010). To distinguish between multiple conflicts that are ongoing within one country at the same time, but in different regions and/or between the central government and substantially different rebel groups/movements, we specify as the unit of analysis a *coherent dyadic episode of domestic armed conflict*.[12] These criteria are applied in the *Expanded Uppsala Armed Conflict Data* (EACD; Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009), which are a more specific version of the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Table. With these criteria in mind, there are 291 instances of armed conflict.[13]

Our dependent variable, escalation to civil war, delineates whether an armed conflict episode escalated into a full-fledged civil war. Escalation is coded as 1 in those cases where the conflict reached or surpassed the threshold of 1,000 casualties; otherwise, if the conflict episode ended (per UCDP/PRIO criteria) without reaching the threshold, it is coded 0. These coding decisions were made based on data from the Correlates of War civil war list (version 3.0, Sarkees 2000) and the PRIO Battle Deaths dataset (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005). Although an admittedly rough measure, the 1,000 casualties cut-off follows a long-standing standard practice in the literature on denoting civil wars (e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003). Based on this coding rule, about one-third of low-level armed conflicts escalate to civil wars.

Embeddedness in the (HS)IGO Environment

To assess the degree to which a state is embedded in a network of HSIGOs, we use a straightforward measure. The more such IGOs a state is an active member of, the more

[12] We also distinguish between conflict episodes if violence had stopped between the episodes and if the rebel groups in each episode are different. For instance, the UCDP/PRIO data list phases of political violence in Bolivia in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s as collapsed under one conflict. For our purpose, these are three observations.
[13] Unlike the EACD data, however, we restrict ourselves to conflict dyads as observations; we do not distinguish between dyad periods if it is clear that several periods are part of one consistent conflict between one regime and one rebel group or movement. Thus our criteria yield fewer observations than the EACD data.

embedded it is. This requires a distinction between HSIGOs and those IGOs whose institutional framework is more shallow and ad-hoc. This item is provided by Boehmer et al. (2004), who classify IGOs[14] by their structure and institutionalization into three categories:

> "1. Minimal organizations contain plenary meetings, committees, and possibly a secretariat without an extensive bureaucracy beyond research, planning, and information gathering. [low structure IGOs (LSIGOs) in this study]
>
> 2. Structured organizations contain structures of assembly, executive (nonceremonial), and/or bureaucracy to implement policy, as well as formal procedures and rules. [medium structure IGOs (MSIGOs) in this study]
>
> 3. Interventionist organizations contain mechanisms for mediation, arbitration and adjudication, and/or other means to coerce state decisions (such as withholding loans or aid), as well as means to enforce organizational decisions and norms" [HSIGOs in this study] (18).

All three types of IGO memberships enter the analyses as separate variables, essentially capturing the entire IGO portfolio of each conflict-ridden state under scrutiny – but dividing it according to the level of institutionalization.[15] This way, we can directly observe the extent of conflict management effects that arise from all three types of IGO membership. If less structured IGOs also provide important conflict-management benefits, IGO memberships in general may be related to a state's ability to prevent conflict escalation – and IGO structure would be irrelevant. These variables are measured in the year in which the political conflict starts.[16] On average, states in our data set have 15 LSIGO memberships – relatively widely spread, with a standard deviation of 9 and a maximum of 38 memberships; 6 MSIGO memberships (standard deviation of 4 and maximum of 24); and about 12 HSIGO memberships (standard deviation of 4 and maximum of 26). Almost all states have at least one membership in each IGO type.

[14] The IGOs and state memberships originally used for this classification come from the COW-2 International Organizations dataset (Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004) .
[15] There are no sovereign states with no IGO memberships, as each one is at least a member of the UN.
[16] Because the IGO data are only available in 5-year intervals before 1966, we performed simple linear interpolations for missing years in the 1945-65 period and used rounded integer figures.

Domestic Conflict Control Variables

We control for a number of factors drawn from the literature on domestic conflict, noting that the literature on conflict *onset* offers empirically comparable predictors of conflict *continuation* as well (Bleaney and Dimico 2011). All these variables are measured in the start year of low-level conflict. *Economic development* is a proxy for several grievance-related issues. For instance, governments with more funds at their disposal should be more capable of addressing grievances and protests if they arise. We measure economic development as the log of GDP per capita, using data from Gleditsch (2002).

To account for effects of *domestic institutions*, we include a country's Polity IV score as well as the squared Polity IV indicator (Marshall and Jaggers 2002) to capture stable and consistent democracies and autocracies. Two arguments are at play here (see Hegre et al. 2001). First, democratic institutions provide means and incentives to settle disagreements without violence. Second, autocracies possess coercive tools to deal with domestic protests, so dissent that could lead to significant violence is either put down quickly or deterred.

The *size of the population* indicates opportunity: larger populations might consist of more potentially deprived groups, and certainly offer a higher numerical probability for the civil war casualty thresholds to be surpassed. We control for this factor by including the log of a state's population, drawn from Gleditsch (2002).

We include three control variables from the civil war onset literature to capture additional dynamics if they are present. Fearon and Laitin (2003) find *mountainous terrain* to be statistically linked to a higher risk of civil war onset. Greed-based explanations of domestic conflict often refer to the presence of easily extractable natural resources as a catalyst for

struggles between rebel groups and governments. We capture this with a dummy variable for instances in which more than one third of export revenues were generated by *fuel exports*. Lastly, we address Huntington's (1996) point that domestic tensions are often prevalent in societies with large Muslim segments of the population, due to cultural or demographic factors, with a variable that estimates the *percentage of Muslims* of the overall population. All three of these control variables are taken from Fearon and Laitin (2003). The next section explains how these last three control variables enter our models.

Methods of Analysis

We evaluate the hypothesis with two different statistical approaches. First, given the dichotomous structure of the dependent variable, we estimate a logistic regression model. Robust standard errors are employed to account for the fact that observations from the same country may be related. The logit analyses of escalation represent our main findings.

Second, our main findings are verified with an alternative estimation technique. We note that the main estimation is unbiased only if the universe of the cases in which low-level conflict occurs is a random draw from the population of all countries in the respective time period. Because this assumption of randomness is not necessarily reasonable, we estimate a probit selection model (Heckman 1979). The use of the selection model helps alleviate concerns about false inferences from a possibly non-random sample of countries that experienced low-level political armed conflict. That is, the Heckman model allows us to assess HSIGOs' conflict management impact on escalation, all the while simultaneously accounting for the process that leads to the emergence of low-level violence in the first place. This stepwise empirical process is expressed in the joint estimation of two equations, one for the selection (into low-level armed

conflict) and one for the ultimate outcome (escalation to civil war).

In the second set of analyses country-year becomes our unit of analysis; control variables remain unchanged, except that their values are now recorded for each year under scrutiny. We would expect that some control variables are particularly important for the occurrence of low-level conflict, but probably less so for the question of escalation. *Fuel exports* is a structural factor that, because of the windfall gains to be made from it, renders political violence a more viable strategy than peaceful political contest. Similarly, Huntington's argument about the structural predisposition of *Muslim societies* for violent political struggle also applies to the occurrence of armed conflict, but does not speak directly to the escalation of civil wars. Thus, for theoretical reasons, these two variables are included only in the selection equation because they may explain low-level armed conflict, but provide little information about its escalation. To be on the safe side, we also ran additional tests with these two variables included in the escalation equation, with no appreciable impact on the findings (see notes #22 and #25).

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 presents the results. Initial evidence in favor of the hypothesis can be seen in Model 1, where the HSIGO coefficient is negative and significant: greater embeddedness in HSIGO environment makes a country less likely to experience escalation of lower-level armed conflict into civil war.[17] As argued above, HSIGOs provide the state with several carrot-and-stick type incentives to avoid conflict escalation and can assist in changing the nature of the bargaining game between the rebels and government by decreasing uncertainty, and helping make commitments more credible. And when a state is simultaneously a member of multiple HSIGOs,

[17] Exploring the notion of diminishing returns from IGO memberships, replacing the HSIGO count variable with its natural logarithmic transformation did not change the findings.

various HSIGOs' conflict management functions will reinforce one another, making penalties for escalation more multifaceted and severe and providing more rewards for desirable behavior.

(Table 1 about here)

Evidence of this pattern is found in, for example, the conflict between the ETA and Spanish government. While low-level violence erupted in 1980-81, 1987, and 1991-92, the conflicts never escalated to civil war; in these time periods, Spain had between 21 and 26 HSIGO memberships, well above the global mean of 12. A similar pattern is observed in the UK's conflict with the IRA, which, despite its longevity from 1970-93, did not escalate to civil war; at the onset of the dispute UK's HSIGO memberships stood at 21 and eventually increased to 25. This pattern is not confined only to the developed world.[18] For instance, Venezuela's conflict with splinter military groups, Mexico's fight with the EZLN, and Peru's conflict with the MRTA all stopped short of civil war, with each country having 20 HSIGO memberships. In Africa, Ghana and Cameroon each experienced conflicts with renegade factions of their militaries that did not escalate; each country had 17 HSIGO memberships at the time. Benefits of HSIGO memberships are evident even in countries dealing with multiple rebel movements, such as India. Despite two of the conflicts escalating to civil war (Kashmir insurgency and Sikh rebellion), 11 other conflicts did not escalate. This suggests that even though HSIGO memberships are not a foolproof method of preventing conflict escalation, their impact is nevertheless palpable.

Conversely, countries experiencing rebellions that are poorly integrated into HSIGO structures are at much greater risk of escalation of those conflicts to civil war. Some examples would include Bosnia (Serb minority), Mozambique (Renamo), Angola (UNITA), North Yemen (political opposition; Royalists), and China (PLA); in each case, the country had 5 or fewer

[18] Excluding the low-level conflicts in the UK (Northern Ireland), Spain (ETA), and the United States (Puerto Rico, 1950) from the sample did not alter the results.

HSIGO memberships. Instances of escalation to civil war can also be found in cases of countries slightly more embedded in HSIGO networks – Tajikistan (UTO, 6 HSIGO memberships), Georgia (Abkhazia, 8), Rwanda (Watusi, 6), and Laos (Pathet Lao, 7) – and of other countries with below average number HSIGO memberships – Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh, 10) and South Yemen (Socialist Party faction, 10).

Returning to Table 1, Model 1, we find no association between escalation and states' embeddedness in IGOs with less institutionalized structures; both the MSIGO and LSIGO coefficients are insignificant.[19] This implies that conflict management benefits apply specifically to HSIGOs and are not a function of just the sheer number of IGO memberships of a state experiencing low-level armed conflict.[20] Further confidence in our theorizing is thus obtained.[21]

Importantly, the HSIGO finding holds while controlling for several factors that may affect the likelihood of conflict escalation. As anticipated, established political institutions also prevent escalation. The other control variables are insignificant, however, with the escalation-mollifying effect of economic development being the closest to the conventional threshold of significance. In Model 2, we include the control variables for population size and ethnic fractionalization, but find no relationships with conflict escalation. Finally, in Model 3, we add the mountainous terrain control variable, but its escalation-boosting effect also falls just below the conventional

[19] Simultaneous inclusion of all three IGO structure variables raises concerns about collinearity unduly affecting our inferences, but further tests alleviate these concerns. The variance inflation factors for each of the three IGO variables in the models below are between 4 and 4.5, below the usually suggested cut-off values of 5 or 10. Additionally, regardless of whether all three IGO variables are included simultaneously or the HSIGO variable is used by itself, the estimated negative coefficients for HSIGOs remain significantly different from 0. Finally, if only the MSIGO and LSIGO variables are included in the model, whether together or separately, we find no significant association between either IGO type and the likelihood of escalation.

[20] We addressed potential disturbance through temporal growth patterns in HSIGOs in the international system by adding a count variable for the number of years since 1945 as well as a dummy variable for all post-Cold War cases. None of these model results differed from the ones presented here.

[21] To verify that IGO structure is the driving force behind the findings – and not the IGO mandate – we also repeated all analyses with count variables for states' memberships in IGOs with different types of mandates (security, economic, social), following Boehmer et al. (2004). None of these IGO types displayed any relationship with the escalation of domestic conflict.

significance levels. Meanwhile, the addition of the variables has no impact on our main finding, as the HSIGO coefficient remains negative and significant in Models 2 and 3.[22]

Concerning the substantive impact of our main variable, Figure 1 presents the predicted probability of escalation conditional on the extent of a state's HSIGO memberships, based on Model 3. As HSIGO memberships increase, the risk of escalation decreases continuously. States with HSIGO memberships over 12, the variable's mean and median, are at a significantly lower risk of escalation than states with very few memberships in these institutions. If HSIGO memberships move from the 20th to the 80th percentile (from 9 to 16), the probability of escalation is cut in half (from 50% to 25%).[23] In the remainder of this section, we discuss several follow-up analyses that probe the robustness of our main finding and component parts of our argument.

(Figure 1 about here)

Selection Effects

We start the follow-up analyses by addressing the issue of selection effects. In the Heckman selection models (Table 1, Models 4-6) using the same set of predictors for the outcome (escalation to civil war) equation as in the previous logit models and a full set of predictors for the selection mechanism (low-level conflict occurrence) reveals that memberships in HSIGOs remain negatively and significantly associated with escalation to civil war. Meanwhile, the MSIGO and LSIGO coefficients are insignificant. As these findings mirror the ones from the discussion of Models 1-3, our hypothesis receives further support.

[22] Adding the fuel exports and/or the share of the Muslim population variables did not change the results with regards to the HSIGO variable. Controlling for a government's repressive capacity as measured through its CINC score, military expenditures, or military personnel (all gathered from the EUGene software, cf. Bennett and Stam 2000) did not yield any significant results, while the HSIGO coefficient remained significant.
[23] SPost (Long and Freese 2005) was used to calculate predicted probabilities.

In the estimations of occurrences of low-level violent conflict, however, the HSIGO coefficient is insignificant. Suspecting that HSIGOs may be exercising countervailing pressures as far as the onset of low-level domestic disputes is concerned, the finding is not entirely surprising. While a state's memberships in HSIGOs may help reduce grievances (discrimination, repression, etc.) that motivate rebellion, potential rebels may also view the state's HSIGO memberships as a means to attract international attention and extract concessions from the government. That is, seeing a minor strategic advantage and acting opportunistically, a dissatisfied group may engage in (or provoke) sporadic acts of violence, hoping that the instability will attract HSIGOs' attention. These IGOs will then sanction the state, providing the rebels with some ability to advance their cause. Because the state is forced to compromise and because escalatory activity by the rebels would be seen particularly unfavorably by the HSIGOs and thus hurt their agenda, escalation to civil war is unlikely. This pattern fits with some well-known cases of countries deeply embedded into HSIGO structures that nevertheless experience low-level violence, such as the United Kingdom and Spain.[24]

In the Heckman outcome equations, countries with larger populations are less likely to slip into civil war after low-level political violence has occurred. The direction of this relationship is somewhat surprising given prior findings about population size and the probability of violent conflict (e.g., Brückner 2010; Raleigh and Hegre 2009). This puzzle is solved, though, when one considers the selection equation. Here, we find that more populous countries are at a higher risk of experiencing lower-level violence, and that established democracies and autocracies are less likely to experience political violence in the first place. Additionally, economic development decreases this risk, as one would expect from prior scholarship.

[24] Observing interactions among post-Communist countries, Fausett and Volgy (2010) similarly find that IGO memberships can invite (low-level) conflict by providing a venue for airing of grievances.

We also suspect that some additional control variables may be potentially related to the occurrence of low-level conflict. Here (see the selection equations of Models 4-6), we find that an economy's reliance on fuel exports is significantly related to a higher risk of low level conflict, as the greed argument suggests (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).[25] Mountainous terrain, the structural catalyst for the occurrence of rebellion, performs similar to Fearon and Laitin's findings, but it just misses the conventional levels of statistical significance (and is not significant in the outcome equations). Much like Fearon and Laitin, we find no evidence for a link between Muslim populations and conflict.

Turning briefly to the issue of a suspected unobserved selection bias operating in the logit Models 1-3, in the Heckman Models 4-6 we find no evidence for a correlation ρ between selection and outcome equations ($p = .782$, .143, and .156, respectively). This leads us to reject the possibility that severe selection bias in lone-standing equations presented in Models 1-3 unduly influenced our findings for the HSIGO variable and hypothesis H1.

Another potential criticism of our main findings is that HSIGO memberships may themselves be a function of factors such as prior conflict experience. If relatively peaceful countries are more likely to join HSIGOs, it would falsely appear that HSIGOs are effective conflict managers when in fact it is the same conditions that lead to both HSIGO memberships and a reduced risk of conflict. Analyses of the empirical evidence suggest that this is likely not the case. Comparing the distribution of HSIGO memberships between states that did and did not experience armed conflict reveals that both sub-groups have a mean of about 12 memberships, with no statistically significant difference ($p = .39$). Armed conflict experience is also not a significant predictor of

[25] If the variables for fuel exports and/or the share of the Muslim population are included in both equations of the Heckman probit model, the results with regards to the HSIGO variable did not change. Both fuel exports and the Muslim population variables are positively and significantly associated with the onset of violent conflict, but not with escalation. Larger shares of Muslims in the population are, in fact, related to a lower risk of escalation. These additional results are available from the authors.

HSIGO memberships in a regression equation (p = .124).[26]

Mediation and Intervention

A potentially important critique of our findings is that typical but hereto excluded conflict management approaches, such as mediation and/or militarized interventions, are responsible for escalation prevention. Above, we assumed that the initial, low-level phase of armed conflict takes place relatively quickly (and sometimes unexpectedly), so that third parties have little time to react before the conflict escalates. This is consistent with our argument that HSIGO conflict management benefits in preventing escalation are related more to HSIGOs' passive functions of escalation deterrence than to proactive involvement via more traditional methods of mediation and intervention.

Probing the validity of our assumption that relatively few mediation and intervention attempts take place during the low-level phase of the conflict is complicated by the lack of data covering all post-WW II low-level conflicts. For the best coverage, we use the two standard-bearing studies of external interventions and diplomatic mediation initiatives (Regan 2002; Regan, Frank, and Aydin 2009). These sources include a much more limited universe of domestic conflicts, as they cover only those conflicts that have resulted in a minimum of 200 battle deaths. Having to drop conflicts with 25-199 battle-related fatalities from our analyses in order to incorporate the mediation and intervention data is not ideal, but provides us with an opportunity for some preliminary insights.

[26] A related concern is that HSIGO membership may be affected by wealth and/or regime type, factors that have been found to influence the likelihood of civil war onset; this may make HSIGOs' influence epiphenomenal. We investigate this possibility with an instrumental variable approach and using Polity and squared Polity scores, GDP per capita, trade openness, and conflict experience as instruments for number of HSIGO memberships. The estimated instrument remained a significant predictor of a reduced escalation risk while the Wald statistic did not return significant evidence for endogeneity with the instruments we used (p = .22), suggesting that HSIGOs have an independent conflict management impact.

First, examining the issue of intervention and mediation timing reveals that these activities typically (i.e., the median) take place 23 months and 48 months into a conflict, respectively. Comparing these numbers with the median duration of non-escalated conflicts of just under 12 months strongly suggests that both mediations and interventions are more likely to take place in the civil war, as opposed to the low-level phase of the conflict. We interpret this as support for our argument that HSIGOs are likely to help prevent conflict escalation more by their passive, deterrent rather than active roles.

Second, we add variables reporting the number of mediations and military interventions that took place before the conflict escalated[27] into our multivariate analyses of escalation. In Table 2, Models 7 and 8, which are reduced forms of the logit models from Table 1, demonstrate that even in the smaller sample – due to Regan et al.'s higher fatality threshold for coding conflicts – the association between HSIGO embeddedness and escalation prevention holds. Model 9 shows that the inclusion of the mediation and intervention variables does not affect the conflict-managing impact of HSIGOs on escalation. While the interventions coefficient barely misses conventional significance levels, its positive sign indicates a higher risk of escalation; this is not entirely surprising given the finding that interventions often prolong domestic conflicts (e.g., Regan 2002; see also Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000). Mediations display the opposite, beneficial association and statistical significance.[28] Yet, their impact is substantially very small, with a marginal effect of a change from the 20th to 80th percentile of mere -2%. Meanwhile, the marginal effect of the HSIGO variable is -50%.

[27] To determine the escalation cutoff, we used yearly data on battle deaths (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005) and additional sources where possible to identify the time at which the battle-related deaths in the armed conflict exceeded 1,000.

[28] Due to concerns about the performance of maximum likelihood estimation in small sample sizes, we also estimated a Bayesian logit model to compare the results. The posterior distributions of all coefficients passed standard convergence tests and report the same significant relationships as displayed in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here)

While it is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a thorough examination of the impact of mediation and intervention on conflict escalation, our preliminary evidence suggests that these approaches are not all that effective. While mediations appear to be of limited use, interventions are possibly counterproductive. This renders active conflict management efforts such as mediation and/or intervention less important for the question of whether conflicts escalate and implies that where the traditional conflict management techniques may fail, HSIGO memberships can have an appreciable positive impact.

HSIGO Characteristics

The causal mechanism behind HSIGOs' anticipatory conflict management effects invokes the ability of these organizations to actually withhold benefits and impose costs on its members. Because some HSIGOs perform only coordinating functions (e.g. setting standards), we restrict our HSIGO variable to organizations that provide specific material benefits, such as economic assistance, to their members or that have the ability to impose costly measures, such as sanctions, on non-compliant members. Replacing the original HSIGO variable with these "cost-benefit" HSIGOs continues to provide a negative and significant coefficient ($p = .01$) in our analyses. This finding buttresses the credibility of our argument, suggesting that HSIGOs' conflict managing effects likely rest on the organizations' ability to reward and sanction member states.

Credible Commitments and Settlements

To probe further the causal mechanism behind our main findings, we evaluate whether HSIGO memberships are indeed linked with desirable conclusions of domestic conflicts (e.g.

formal or informal settlements). After all, some low-level conflicts may not escalate because one of the sides achieves a decisive military victory prior to escalation. Evidence that HSIGO memberships are associated with low-level conflicts ending in settlements would increase confidence in our theorizing that HSIGO memberships create cost anticipation that helps overcome credible commitment problems and reduce uncertainty. That is, if governments with strong HSIGO ties are indeed more credible opponents in low-level domestic conflicts, it should follow that these conflicts should not only *not* escalate, but that they can be settled successfully. Accordingly, we coded our data to distinguish between two types of low-level conflict outcomes: (1) decisive military victories and escalation vs. (2) conflicts ending before escalation through peace agreements or ceasefires (using the UCDP Conflict Termination data from Kreutz 2010). The analysis reveals that HSIGO memberships significantly increase the likelihood of the latter outcomes ($p < .01$).[29] Moreover, the substantive impact is notable; as shown in gray in Figure 1, states experiencing low-level domestic conflicts triple their chances of ending the conflict before escalation through a settlement if their HSIGO memberships move from the 20th to the 80th percentile. The finding corroborates the argument about HSIGOs' role as a commitment device in domestic bargaining scenarios.

Illustrative Examples: Independence of East Timor 1999, and Political Unrest in Ivory Coast, 2010-2011

When a UN-led referendum produced a clear vote for the independence of East Timor from Indonesia in 1999, tensions in the Indonesian-occupied territory ran high. Pro-Indonesian militias and parts of the Indonesian military started a violent intimidation campaign in reaction to the

[29] This result is robust if only non-escalated conflicts are analyzed, that is if only decisive victories are compared to settled conflicts (HSIGOs $p < .01$). Other regressors include Polity, Polity (sq.), GDP p.c. (logged), ethnic fractionalization, a territorial conflict dummy, and CINC scores.

pro-independence vote (Donnan 1999; United Nations 1999). Growing concern in the region and in the rest of the world after recent experiences of massive violence in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia led to quick reactions from Australia and the United States. According to observers, "the most effective weapon in squeezing Indonesia was the threat of financial sanctions" (Wheeler and Dunne 2001, 819). In 1999, Indonesia was a member in 18 HSIGOs, well over the median and mean of 12 over time and 15 in that year. Interestingly, these sanctions were executed by HSIGOs. Representatives from the IMF and the World Bank went on record in regional media stating clear conditions for short-term loans and longer-term aid (BBC News 1999; ReliefWeb 1999; Thornton 1999). Without a clear movement of the Indonesian government to end the violence in East Timor, the Indonesian economy would suffer dramatically from the withdrawal of aid funds, loans, and looming currency problems. Contemporary observers noted that this pressure was "instrumental in persuading Indonesia to accept an international peacekeeping force" (Fidler and Robinson 1999, cited in Wheeler and Dunne 2001, 819). This interpretation is backed up by other news reports from that year which note the impact of the threats of suspending HSIGOs' involvement and the resulting economic disaster on Indonesian leaders, foremost President Habibie (Hajari 1999).

In the recent case of Ivory Coast (17 memberships), HSIGOs – foremost the World Bank, IMF, and the African Development Bank – quickly expressed their concern about the rising post-election conflict in the country. The verbal warnings from these institutions threatened severe consequences for the incumbent government and the country as a whole: the country would lose significant resources if Laurent Gbagbo tried to remain in office while forcefully repressing the declared election winner and his followers. These warnings were followed by actions and the suspense of funds from different regional banks and global HSIGOs (BBC News 2010b;

VibeGhana.com 2011). At the same time, the HSIGOs sent signals that they would be ready to provide assistance to the country after the incumbent steps down. The World Bank and other IGOs also made it clear that escalating the conflict and fighting against Gbagbo's forces would have come with the cost of less and slower support from potent HSIGOs to rebuild the country from the damages of a potential civil war. This message arguably affected the calculations of the opposition and those ready to use force to attain their goal, removing Gbagbo from power.

The above scenarios highlight some of the mechanisms of our argument. The early signals from HSIGOs clarified the constraints under which the Habibie and Gbagbo governments were operating: escalation would (and partially did) cause the denial of outside resources. In addition to the stick, the HSIGOs did announce and eventually provide support when Gbagbo stepped down and the conflict was settled (Wroughton 2011). This shows how HSIGOs' influence over the distribution of costs and benefits can factor into the calculations of governments and rebels to escalate a lingering violent political conflict. Moreover, the case shows that HSIGO threats are not idle, cheap talk. When the HSIGOs were ignored, they followed through on their threats to curtail aid and impose sanctions. This shows that HSIGOs are willing to influence the course of domestic politics within member countries and follow through with their threats, making anticipated consequences quite real.

Conclusion and Implications

Given the devastating consequences of civil wars and the limited success of traditional and active conflict management techniques such as mediation, intervention, or peacekeeping, this project focuses on civil war prevention via passive conflict management approaches. We argue that HSIGO memberships can help curtail the escalation of low-level domestic armed conflicts

before they reach the civil war stage. They can do so by altering the bargaining game between governments and rebels in ways that can help address the causes of civil war associated with bargaining failure. Our argument centers on deterring escalation via the anticipation of consequences rather than on traditional and active conflict management activities. Our analyses provide empirical support not only for our general expectation that HSIGOs are linked to lower likelihoods of escalation; we also find support for components of our causal argument. The findings are driven by cost-benefit HSIGOs, and HSIGO memberships are associated with an increased likelihood of low-level conflicts ending in settlements. Our insights lead to the following broader implications.

An important stream of the institutionalist literature has focused on rational design of international institutions (e.g., Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001; Thompson 2010): states design institutions so that they reduce uncertainty and allow them to reap the benefits of cooperation. Broadly speaking, our findings corroborate the argument that institutional design has an impact on the effectiveness of international regimes. Yet, by demonstrating that IGO structure can affect domestic political developments, our findings show that high levels of international institutionalization have benefits both beyond the international level of analysis and the core issue of the respective IGO. Although few HSIGOs were established to prevent the escalation of domestic conflicts per se, embeddedness in these IGOs is more likely to result in more effective domestic conflict management. That is, with regard to domestic politics, spillover and positive externality effects from HSIGO membership for domestic conflict management are an important, non-trivial addition to the well-established extant arguments on international effects of institutional design.

This study also contributes to the more recent discussion on the transnational dimensions of

civil conflict (e.g., Gleditsch 2007). In this context, scholars have investigated the role of external actors such as states, ethnic, religious, or political diasporas (Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008; Salehyan 2008), international mediation attempts (Greig and Regan 2008), or the international system (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Focusing on states' embeddedness in the HSIGO network, our study extends the concept of transnational aspects of domestic conflict. The proliferation of institutionalized cooperation between states (Shanks, Jacobson, and Kaplan 1996) means that effects of centralized IGO structures will likely become even more influential in the development of domestic conflict.

Finally, our results show that the determinants of lower-level political violence differ from those of full-scale civil war, especially with regards to the role of a state's institutional embeddedness. While the extant literature on low-level domestic political violence and civil wars is rich, little effort has been made to link the two. Treating the two phenomena as part of one trajectory is not only of academic interest but is also important for international policy. External actors likely have little influence on spontaneous and rapid occurrences of political protest that turns violent. But there is an opportunity for international institutions to affect the further development of such episodes of political violence. More academic and practical attention should be devoted to the multiple channels international organizations have at their disposal to prevent civil wars.

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Table 1: Logit and Heckman Analyses of Domestic Conflict Escalation

		Logit models			Heckman Probit models		
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
y2: Escalation (Outcome)	HSIGOs	-0.162*	-0.147*	-0.150*	-0.0937*	-0.0698*	-0.0802*
		(0.0665)	(0.0659)	(0.0673)	(0.0412)	(0.0326)	(0.0337)
	MSIGOs	0.0673	0.0679	0.0656	0.0487	0.0327	0.0340
		(0.0705)	(0.0692)	(0.0705)	(0.0411)	(0.0299)	(0.0309)
	LSIGOs	0.0170	0.0139	0.0314	0.00499	0.0135	0.0200
		(0.0296)	(0.0283)	(0.0331)	(0.0186)	(0.0129)	(0.0153)
	Polity	-0.00964	-0.0145	-0.0166	-0.00902	-0.00642	-0.00831
		(0.0296)	(0.0311)	(0.0302)	(0.0201)	(0.0107)	(0.0123)
	Polity (sq.)	-0.0123**	-0.0132**	-0.0129**	-0.00678	-0.000298	-0.00146
		(0.00425)	(0.00437)	(0.00448)	(0.00492)	(0.00426)	(0.00429)
	GDP p.c. (logged)	-0.206	-0.287	-0.358	-0.0668	-0.0165	-0.0618
		(0.160)	(0.183)	(0.183)	(0.156)	(0.133)	(0.132)
	Population (logged)		0.0289	-0.0963		-0.141**	-0.152**
			(0.108)	(0.112)		(0.0491)	(0.0536)
	Ethnic Fractionalization		-1.102	-1.084		-0.666	-0.649
			(0.713)	(0.767)		(0.372)	(0.378)
	Mountains (logged)			0.247			0.0862
				(0.148)			(0.0802)
	Constant	2.845	3.634	4.553	1.605	3.856	3.929
y1: Low-Level Conflict (Selection)	HSIGOs				0.0268	0.0267	0.0272
					(0.0169)	(0.0168)	(0.0169)
	MSIGOs				-0.00479	-0.00511	-0.00469
					(0.0174)	(0.0174)	(0.0173)
	LSIGOs				-0.0128	-0.0122	-0.0133
					(0.00912)	(0.00899)	(0.00893)
	Polity				0.0105	0.00927	0.00988
					(0.00693)	(0.00726)	(0.00701)
	Polity (sq.)				-0.00543**	-0.00537**	-0.00543**
					(0.00131)	(0.00131)	(0.00131)
	GDP p.c. (logged)				-0.179**	-0.176**	-0.177**
					(0.0586)	(0.0541)	(0.0539)
	Population (logged)				0.136**	0.135**	0.138**
					(0.0393)	(0.0353)	(0.0353)
	Ethnic Fractionalization				0.217	0.248	0.234
					(0.235)	(0.207)	(0.201)
	Mountains (logged)				0.0438	0.0534	0.0406
					(0.0319)	(0.0284)	(0.0287)
	Fuel Exports				0.269*	0.267*	0.283*
					(0.130)	(0.121)	(0.110)
	Muslim population				0.00196	0.00142	0.00158
					(0.00101)	(0.00143)	(0.00125)
	Constant				-1.753	-1.799	-1.777
Correlation	ρ				-0.178	-0.873	-0.78
					0.63	0.218	0.288
	$p(\rho \neq 0)$				0.782	0.143	0.156
	Log-likelihood	-143.733	-139.325	-133.685	-993.808	-990.279	-989.34
	Observations	232	227	220	5820	5820	5820

Robust standard errors (country clusters) in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05 in two-tailed tests.

Table 2: Logit Re-Analyses of Escalation with Controls for Mediation and Militarized Intervention

	Full sample	Restricted sample	
	(7)	(8)	(9)
HSIGOs	-0.09**	-0.12**	-0.09*
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Polity	-0.00	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Polity (sq.)	-0.01**	-0.01*	-0.02**
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP p.c. (logged)	-0.17	-0.02	-0.03
	(0.16)	(0.23)	(0.26)
Mil. Interventions			0.03
			(0.02)
Mediations			-0.10*
			(0.05)
Constant	2.35*	2.60	2.34
	(1.16)	(1.69)	(1.89)
Log-likelihood	-144.49	-67.2	-64.83
Observations	232	108	108

Robust standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05 in one-tailed tests.

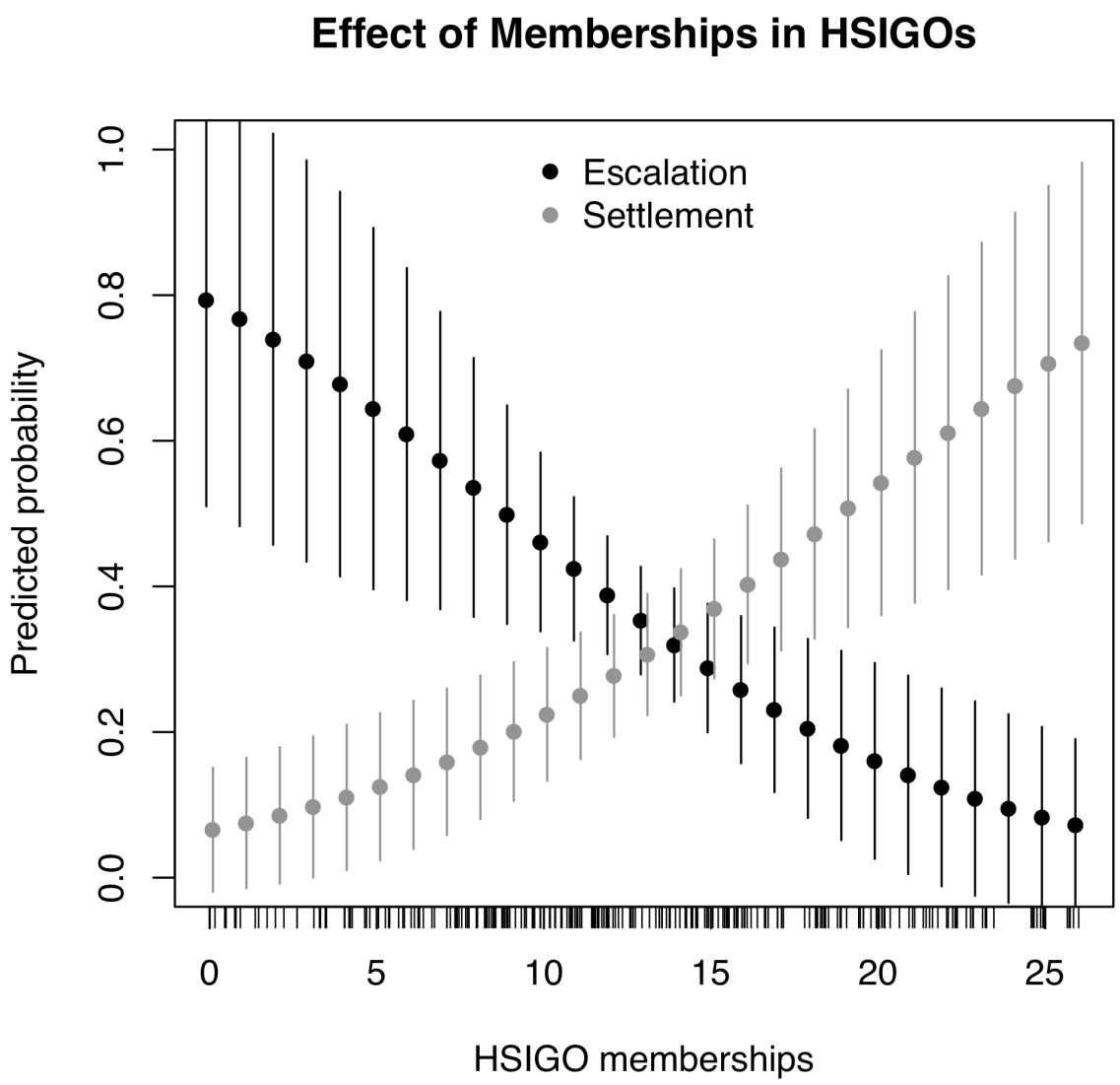

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of escalation and settlements
The plots show the predicted probabilities of low-level conflicts escalating (black) and being settled (gray). The vertical lines mark the 95% confidence intervals, and the tick marks on the x-axis represent the observed cases.