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ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Where is Conflict Research? Western Bias in the Literature on Armed Violence

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Which countries are likely to be subjects of research in the study of armed conflict? Evidence from other fields suggests that research often focuses disproportionately on the West, but it is unclear to what extent this is true in conflict studies. We suggest that a baseline explanation of research focus is each country's conflict experience, and we present two additional hypotheses: Western bias and research feasibility. Empirically, we count countries in the abstracts of five prominent conflict or security journals, 1990–2015. We also manually count single-country case studies. Western countries, measured by U.N. voting or geographic location, appear more than non-Western countries, even after considering conflict, wealth, and other factors. There is less support for the research feasibility argument, measured by each country's official languages and democracy. We find French- and Spanish-language countries less likely to appear in the literature. We conclude with a discussion of under-studied countries and offer related suggestions.

Qué países son más propensos a ser objeto de investigación en el estudio de los conflictos armados? Los indicios derivados de otros campos sugieren que la investigación suele centrarse, de manera desproporcionada, en occidente, pero no está claro hasta qué punto esto es cierto también en los estudios sobre los conflictos. Sugerimos que una explicación basal del enfoque de la investigación es la experiencia en materia de conflictos de un determinado país, y presentamos dos hipótesis adicionales: el sesgo occidental y la viabilidad de la investigación. De manera empírica, contamos los países incluidos en los resúmenes de cinco destacadas revistas sobre conflictos o seguridad, 1990-2015. También contamos manualmente los estudios de caso de países individuales. Los países occidentales, determinados por votación de la ONU o por ubicación geográfica, aparecen más que los no occidentales, incluso después de que se tengan en consideración los conflictos, la riqueza y otros factores. El argumento de la

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viabilidad de la investigación, medido en función de las lenguas oficiales de los países y de la democracia, cuenta con menos apoyo. Observamos que los países de lengua francesa y española tienen menos probabilidades de aparecer en la literatura. Concluimos con un debate sobre los países poco estudiados y proponemos sugerencias al respecto.

Quels pays sont les plus susceptibles de faire l'objet de recherches dans le domaine des conflits armés? Au vu des travaux menés dans d'autres domaines, il semblerait que la recherche soit axée de manière disproportionnée sur l'Occident, mais il est difficile de déterminer dans quelle mesure c'est également le cas pour les études sur les conflits. Nous avançons, comme première explication, que cette orientation de la recherche est liée à l'expérience des différents pays en matière de conflits, et proposons deux hypothèses complémentaires : un biais occidental et la question de la faisabilité des recherches. Dans la pratique, nous avons dénombré les pays mentionnés dans les abstracts de cinq revues majeures consacrées aux conflits ou aux questions de sécurité, entre 1990 et 2015, et avons compté manuellement les études de cas portant sur un pays spécifique. Les pays considérés comme occidentaux ou alliés (sur la base de leur emplacement géographique ou de leur positionnement lors des votes aux Nations Unies), apparaissent davantage que les pays non occidentaux, indépendamment de leur profil en matière de conflits, de richesse ou autres facteurs. L'argument de la faisabilité des recherches, mesurée en termes de langues officielles et de niveau démocratique dans les différents pays, semble moins attesté. Nous constatons toutefois que les pays francophones et hispanophones sont moins présents dans la littérature. Nous concluons en indiquant plusieurs pays faisant l'objet d'un nombre insuffisant de recherches et proposons des solutions pour combler cette lacune.

Keywords: conflict, meta-analysis, Western bias
Palabras clave: conflicto, metaanálisis, sesgo occidental
Mots clés: conflit, méta-analyse, biais occidental

Introduction

Which countries are most likely to be subjects of research in the conflict literature? The study of armed conflict involves scholars from International Relations (IR) and Comparative Politics within Political Science, and scholars from other disciplines, including Economics and Geography. It covers a broad range of topics, such as intra-state and inter-state war, as well as latent and lower levels of violence. These phenomena occur throughout the world. Conflict scholars study many countries—either as single or small-*n* case studies or in larger samples. Whether picking cases for in-depth study or selecting illustrative examples, scholars must make choices. This paper provides what we believe is the first extended analysis of which countries are chosen for *conflict research*.

This research contributes to a recent and growing literature that identifies interesting and sometimes disturbing patterns in the countries that scholars study (Briggs and Weathers 2016; Briggs 2017; Douglass and Rondeaux 2017; Hendrix and Vreede 2019; Pepinsky 2019; Song 2019; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). There are reasons to suspect that scholars give "Western" countries more attention than they do to non-Western countries—independently of the level of conflict involvement. Research suggests that Western bias exists in the study of other topics (Erdmann 2004), and in Political Science and IR generally (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2016; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). Some critical theory scholars argue that Western favoritism affects conflict research (Buzan and Little 2000; Barkawi and Laffey 2006). This concern is generally consistent with the demands of the "decolonize the

curriculum" movement, which argues in part that higher education has privileged Western experiences over others (Malik 2017; Begum and Saini 2019). However, empirically, it is unclear to what extent country coverage in the conflict literature is based on anything other than conflict experience.

Additionally, this research raises questions about our ability to draw inferences from the broader literature. Scholars frequently summarize the state of knowledge on conflict topics (e.g., in literature reviews), and this assumes that the literature paints a representative picture of conflict globally. An alternate possibility is that the literature draws on a small and unusual set of countries. This could skew inferences. This appears to have occurred with other subjects, such as research on climate change's effects (Hendrix 2017; Adams et al. 2018). In conflict research, scholars have asserted that over-focus on Western cases has affected conclusions on topics such as military innovation (Sharman 2018) and Chinese security strategy (Kopper and Peragovics 2019). Beyond these specific subjects, it is unclear if similar biases are present broadly in conflict studies.

Conflict studies is an important topic to examine regarding questions of location bias because it seems relatively straightforward to see which countries the literature *should* study—those with the most, and most severe, conflict. With other topics or sub-fields, it is not as evident which countries should ideally be the focus of investigation. As a result, conflict research can serve as a laboratory to more precisely shed light on an issue that likely affects other research topics as well.

The literature already suggests various kinds of bias affect conflict research. For example, Kalyvas (2004) argues that civil conflict studies are biased toward *urban* as opposed to rural dimensions of civil conflict. Conflict event data seems to be affected by reporting bias, which in turn might affect inferences (Weidmann 2016). Terrorism data sets appear to be under-reporting terrorist attacks, and this seems to be systematically related to regime type (Drakos and Grafos 2006). Beyond these issues, should we also be concerned about systematic differences in which countries' conflict scholars research more than others?

Until now, we have lacked substantial evidence to evaluate this question. Some studies have begun to examine the geographic areas covered in, for example, Comparative Politics or IR generally. However, most of this work only examines which *regions* are studied more (not particular countries), and this geographic element is only one part of a broader study (e.g., Munck and Snyder 2007a; Douglass and Rondeaux 2017; Pepinsky 2019; Brenner and Han 2021). For example, Douglass and Rondeaux (2017) examine articles on "countering and preventing violent extremism," and find that some regions, such as South Asia, are under-represented. However, geography is only one of three topics studied in the working paper. Brenner and Han (2021) examine armed conflicts and find that those in Europe or the Middle East appear disproportionately in the literature, while conflicts in South and Southeast Asia seem to be under-analyzed. They suggest that the Myanmar civil war is especially overlooked. Munck and Snyder provide a detailed analysis of scholarship in Comparative Politics, and one paragraph addresses geographic heterogeneity. Song (2019) focuses on geography with an insightful snapshot of the countries studied in Comparative Politics. The article analyzes data from two journals but does not conduct multivariate analyses. Multivariate analysis of conflict studies research is important because it can examine the impact of geography while taking into consideration other factors such as actual conflict history. Wilson and Knutsen (2020) use descriptive and regression analysis to understand research on Political Science, and find that it usually focuses on Western Europe and North America. However, since armed conflict often occurs in the developing world, it could be that the conflict literature focuses more on these countries than developed countries.

The next section discusses conflict and bias and suggests that the most natural explanation of country coverage in the conflict literature is conflict experience. We propose two additional explanations: Western bias and research feasibility.

The data section presents original data on country coverage in five conflict journals between 1990 and 2015. Analyses use counts of countries mentioned in abstracts, and counts of single-country case studies. Multivariate regression results suggest countries in the West appear more in the conflict literature than non-Western countries, even after taking into consideration conflict history, wealth, and other factors. We find little support for the notion that scholarly attention is related to research feasibility, which we measure with country official languages and democracy. The conclusion discusses implications for research more broadly and offers some suggestions for how conflict scholars can mitigate bias-related issues.

Conflict, Bias, and Explaining Scholarly Attention

"Conflict" research refers to scholarship within the overlapping fields of security studies and peace and conflict studies.[1] While the emphases of these fields are distinct, they both study many of the same topics, such as the causes, consequences, and resolution of international and civil war. Conflict is often described with the more specific phrase of "armed conflict," suggesting that it not only refers to disagreement but violence. Conflict research generally includes work on organized violence, usually involving a government as at least one party. While conflict is generally thought of as *political* violence, some conflict scholars study large-scale criminal violence, like that which has occurred in Mexico, since there are substantial overlaps with more traditional civil conflict (Barnes 2017; Ley 2018). Beyond war, conflict research covers topics such as terrorism, repression, and genocide, although these phenomena often occur within the context of armed conflict or war (Findley and Young 2012). Some research also studies latent or potential conflict by analyzing topics such as nuclear proliferation.

Which countries are the most likely to appear in the conflict literature? Perhaps the most intuitive, if optimistic or naive, explanation of conflict coverage is that countries with more conflict experience should appear more in the conflict literature. Conflict experience takes a number of forms. Most directly, states participate in inter-state and intra-state conflict. Some have experienced conflict every year for decades, while others have been conflict-free since at least the end of the Second World War. These divergent experiences suggest substantial heterogeneity throughout the world. Countries experiencing any of these types of violence are likely to be discussed in conflict research. This is consistent with Douglass and Rondeaux's (2017) finding that countries' experiences with intra-state conflict are somewhat associated with mentions in the "violent extremism" literature. Beyond direct conflict involvement, conflict experience can include less-direct manifestations. For example, research discusses nuclear proliferation, contributions to peacekeeping missions, and discussions in the United Nations Security Council about conflict. This secondary involvement in conflict, or involvement in what could be described as latent or potential conflict, might be the subject of less research than actual war participation, but it is still important to consider.

Conflict experience would be a natural explanation of country distributions within the literature—research simply follows conflicts, or represents their distribution around the world. This would probably be a proportionate or fair representation of conflict in the literature. Other explanations for conflict coverage could be explanations based on bias. Bias can be defined as a disproportionate weight, or an unfair inclination, toward or against something.[2] Given that conflict

[1] Security studies is more state-focused, usually exploring threats to governments (Collins 2016). Peace and conflict studies, as the name suggests, focuses more on conflict resolution and prevention (Gleditsch et al. 2014; Bright and Gledhill 2018; Gledhill and Bright 2019).

[2] See, for example, King et al. (1994, 27–28), who describe a biased procedure as one that will "tilt the outcome in one direction or another." Similarly, other scholars use the phrase "disproportionate weight" when discussing bias (Collier 1995; Berinsky 2002).

research seems to be biased in particular ways, such as the apparent tendency to study civil war from an urban instead of rural perspective (Kalyvas 2004), the distribution of country coverage in the literature could be affected as well. The following sections outline two related arguments—beyond conflict alone—for why one type of country might be researched more than another.

The Western Bias Explanation

Scholars in many disciplines have asserted that research over-focuses on Western countries. In Psychology, for example, the vast majority of participants in published experiments are from the West (Henrich et al. 2010; Nielsen et al. 2017).[3] In another example, commentary in *The Lancet* argues that "widespread systematic bias" exists in medical journals, leading to less coverage of diseases that affect poorer countries (Horton 2003). Similarly, it could be that non-Western countries are ignored or under-analyzed in the conflict literature, in spite of the substantial conflict experience many of these countries have.

Western bias is argued to affect IR, the field of many conflict scholars. Tickner (2011) argues that IR has long been West-centric and US-centric in particular. Thomas (2004) argues that when major IR journals study the "Third World," they analyze it as a security threat. The argument that scholars ignore the non-Western world is related to concerns that the dominant voices in IR theorizing tend to be scholars in Western countries (Tickner 2003; Zhang 2003; Bilgin 2008; Acharya and Buzan 2010; Gleditsch et al. 2014; Deciancio 2016; Kopper and Peragovics 2019). Interestingly, one recent study of five prominent IR journals found that there do not seem to be *regional* differences in coverage, although it did find that the United States receives more scholarly attention than other countries (Hendrix and Vreede 2019).[4]

The subfield of Comparative Politics, which also produces conflict research, seems to have Western bias issues as well, according to Munck and Snyder's (2007a) review of hundreds of articles in three journals. They analyze descriptive data and suggest there exists a "striking contrast" between the coverage of Western Europe and coverage of South and Southeast Asia. An investigation of case studies also finds that Western countries, and to some extent those in Latin America, were overrepresented in Comparative Politics and IR case studies (Pepinsky 2019). An analysis of two-country case studies in two Comparative Politics journals reports that scholars in these journals seem to "strongly favor" North American and Western European countries for research (Song 2019). More broadly, Wilson and Knutsen (2020) find similar issues with research in eight prominent Political Science journals.

In conflict studies, such biases are likely to exist, but it is not clear to what extent they do. Regarding *authors* in the conflict literature, one study finds that authors of peace and conflict research usually work in North American or European institutions (Bright and Gledhill 2018). At least anecdotally, it seems that many articles focus on Western countries. Examples include research on a protest in Sweden (Andersson 2003), terrorism in the United States (Brooks 2011), how several Western countries behave in the United Nations (Hanania 2019), Canadian security policies toward indigenous communities (Crosby and Monaghan 2012), or US public opinion about war (Muradova and Gildea 2019). Obviously, the topics covered in these articles (e.g., protests, terrorism) occur in non-Western countries as well, but do not seem to receive as much attention when occurring in such countries. A

[3] An acronym used to describe Western experimental subjects is WEIRD: Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic.

[4] The visibility of the United States is consistent with research showing that the vast majority of authors assigned on IR syllabi are US-resident and US-trained scholars (Knight 2019). Knight interprets the US dominance finding as evidence of Western bias, including that phrase in the title of the article.

number of scholars contend that security studies is Eurocentric (Buzan and Little 2000; Barkawi and Laffey 2006). Researchers in critical terrorism studies argue that more attention needs to be paid to the Global South (Jackson et al. 2009). Barkawi (2006) argues that when countries outside the West are studied, they are considered peripheral, and conflicts in them only seem to matter regarding their relation to powerful countries. Overall, this suggests the following hypothesis:

> **Western bias hypothesis:** *Western countries receive more coverage in the conflict literature than non-Western countries.*

The Research Feasibility Explanation

Beyond the above argument, it is possible that countries are more likely to be the subject of research if it is simply easier for scholars to access them. Conflicts in certain countries might be more accessible to researchers for a number of reasons. Commonly spoken languages, for example, and open governments represent more accessible research locations. Regarding regime type, conducting research in authoritarian countries poses unique challenges for access to archives and interview subjects, as well as the personal safety of the researcher (Morgenbesser and Weiss 2018; Greitens and Truex 2019). This is consistent with Wilson and Knutsen's (2020) study, which finds that democratic countries and English-speaking countries appear more often in Political Science research. Regarding conflict studies, in particular, fieldwork on intrastate conflict in Colombia, Northern Ireland, or Israel is probably more accessible for most researchers than conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tajikistan, or Syria. Regarding inter-state conflict, scholars have seemed more likely to research the frozen conflict between Greece and Cyprus, for example, compared with more recent wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan or Eritrea and Ethiopia. Beyond travel to countries, many scholars get information from news media sources, which in turn are biased in similar ways (Golan 2008; Jones 2008). As a result, it seems likely that conflict research—which often relies on such media sources—would suffer from similar biases.

The research feasibility explanation is related to, and perhaps a sub-explanation of, the Western bias explanation. The majority of the research published in "top" journals comes from scholars in North American and Western European institutions (May 1997; Munck and Snyder 2007b; Hazelkorn 2016). At many of these institutions, and others around the world, English is the language of research (Choi 2010; Jenkins 2014). Therefore, one must think about what is convenient for this subset of researchers to develop expectations about the subjects of research. This bias toward feasibility probably does not only affect cases selected for in-depth study but also when researchers need anecdotes or examples. Studies of media consumption suggest that "accessibility bias" explains why people draw on the information that is most easily retrieved from memory to make political decisions (Iyengar 1990). Researchers probably take similar shortcuts themselves, and this should have implications for the countries studied in the conflict literature.

Note that we are not suggesting laziness on the part of researchers who study countries with democratic governments, for example, instead of autocratic governments. There are serious safety concerns that scholars must keep in mind when planning research. This is especially the case when considering fieldwork, which can be dangerous (Clark 2006; Loyle and Simoni 2017; Getmansky 2019; Krause and Szekely 2020). Even if one does not travel to do fieldwork, there are issues of accessibility that affect whether archives are available online, whether the country has a free press, and whether members of a diaspora might feel comfortable communicating with a researcher in a different country. In general, some countries are simply more difficult than others to research.

Research feasibility hypothesis: *Countries more feasible to research receive more coverage in the conflict literature than countries that are more challenging to access.*

Data and Analysis

Our country-year dataset includes information on the countries covered in articles in five prominent conflict journals, 1990–2015. The data begin in 1990 to look at post-Cold War phenomena. The data are based on all research articles[5] from the following journals: *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *International Security*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Security Dialogue*. These five publications are some of the most visible conflict journals, and their contents represent the state of the field of conflict research.

Our journal selection process started with the journals in the IR and Political Science lists in the 2017 Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports. From these lists, we identified all the journals that seemed to focus exclusively or primarily on conflict. We chose conflict-only journals to not have to subjectively evaluate thousands of articles one-by-one to decide whether they were "conflict" or not. Of the conflict journals in this list, we looked to see which were accessible through JSTOR, which was instrumental for our search technique (see below). Of these conflict journals on JSTOR, we identified the top five by impact factor.[6] We focused on these journals to be able to analyze some of the most visible research on the subject. Note that not all journals are covered in all years. For example, *CMPS* did not publish any articles in 1997, and *International Security* stopped being available in JSTOR after 2013. This reduces counts for all countries for these particular years, although year-fixed effects should address the issue.

The journals have interesting similarities and differences. Geographically, they are all headquartered in North America or Western Europe,[7] and all are English-language—as is usually the case for the highest impact factor journals (May 1997; Di Bitetti and Ferreras 2017). *International Security* is unique among these journals for its explicit focus on US national security.[8] As a result, more than other journals, it is especially likely to cover the United States and its enemies and allies. However, overall, these journals represent a broad mix of approaches to conflict studies: quantitative and qualitative, security-focused and peace-oriented, mainstream/traditional, and critical. As a result, they are a fairly diverse set of journals, containing much of the prominent research on armed conflict. These five journals during these years contained 4,171 articles.

The primary dependent variable is *Abstract mentions*, a count of the number of abstracts that mention a country name in any of the five journals each year. It is not a count of the total mentions within abstracts; if a country appears five times in one abstract, that is counted as one abstract mention, to avoid count inflation. To compile this count, we first downloaded all articles from the journals during these years via the JSTOR Data for Research service.[9] The data contain the counts of the words in each article, including unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams. To search for

[5] Other content such as front matter is excluded.

[6] There are a few other journals that would have been included if they were in JSTOR, such as *Cooperation and Conflict* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. The exclusion of these journals seems unlikely to affect results, as they are similar enough to included journals. As a pilot test, we examined case studies from *Terrorism and Political Violence* and found trends similar to those reported for other journals.

[7] *JPR* and *Security Dialogue* are based at the Peace Research Institute Oslo, while the other three journals are based in US institutions.

[8] The short description of the journal on its website includes the phrase "*International Security* has defined the debate on US national security policy..." (https://www.mitpressjournals.org/loi/isec). On the other four journals' websites, there are no mentions of specific countries.

[9] The service is available at https://www.jstor.org/dfr/about/dataset-services, and our data were downloaded on January 20, 2019.

country names, we used the ISO 3166 country names, focusing on U.N.-recognized countries with populations larger than 500,000 because of likely missing data for independent variables on smaller countries.[10] With this list of countries, we used a regular expression in Python to search for total country counts in each article's abstract. For countries that are commonly referred to by multiple names (e.g., Myanmar and Burma, Ivory Coast and Côte D'Ivoire), we searched for multiple terms. We were also careful to not combine counts of countries with similar names, such as mistakenly including mentions of Northern Ireland when searching for Ireland, or Nigeria when searching for Niger.[11] These total counts for each article were then collapsed into a total for each country year. The country-year maximum is 20, for the United States in 2005. The country-year mean is nearly zero, 0.4, since many countries do not appear in abstracts for many years. Regarding country totals for the entire period, the mean is 10 mentions.

The second dependent variable is *Case studies*, a count of the number of times a country is the subject of a case study in the above five journals each year. A country is considered to be the subject of a case study if the article includes an extensive analysis of this country on its own. The entire country does not need to be studied; the case study could be of a particular subnational region such as Northern Ireland (which was a common occurrence), which would be coded as the United Kingdom. We focus on single-country case studies, but of course, some articles look at two, three, or more cases. These situations should be captured in our primary independent variable.[12] *Case studies* is coded manually by an author or research assistant reading at least the title and abstract of every issue in the journals. Some examples include an article on US treaties (Chayes 2008), a study of conflict de-escalation analyzing the Israel-Palestinian case (Rasler 2000), and an article on peacebuilding in Bosnia (Kappeler and Potter 2006). The country-year maximum is 19, for the United States in 2004. The mean is close to zero, 0.17, as many countries are rarely or never the subject of case studies. Regarding country totals for the entire period, the mean is around six.

Abstract mentions and *Case studies* are distinct ways to measure country coverage, but they are correlated at 0.69, indicating substantial overlap. *Case studies* captures in-depth, direct coverage of particular countries, so we find it helpful in that regard. However, single-country case studies are only part of the literature. Additionally, since many countries are rarely or never the subject of case studies, there is less variation with this variable. *Abstract mentions* offers the advantage of taking into consideration multiple-country case studies, including regional studies, and it shows substantial variation across countries and time. This is consistent with other studies of scholarly attention on countries (Hendrix and Vreede 2019; Song 2019), and more broadly research that uses counts of particular words to identify trends (Diermeier et al. 2012; Steger and Wilson 2012; Jones 2016).

Neither of these measures captures inclusion in global quantitative analyses, i.e., studies that seek to analyze all countries. We do not see this as a substantial problem. If global studies include all countries, then this would be comparable to adding a "1" to the dependent variable values for each country. The current distributions of *Abstract mentions* and *Case studies* would be identical after such an inclusion—if each country was included in every global study. However, related to this, if we were able to count country inclusion in global quantitative studies, this might make potential Western bias and/or feasibility bias even more apparent. Many global

[10] The country list is here: http://blog.plsoucy.com/2012/04/iso-3166-country-code-list-csv-sql/.

[11] A search for the term "Ireland" will also return mentions of Northern Ireland, which is of course in the United Kingdom, not the Republic of Ireland. This would return a falsely high count for the Republic of Ireland. To correct this, we first searched for the word Ireland and then subtracted from that total the count the number of mentions of Northern Ireland. We did a similar subtraction of mentions of Nigeria from the total Niger count.

[12] Articles that analyze three, four, or more countries cannot devote as much attention to their subjects, so we exclude this kind of country coverage to have a consistent indicator of case studies.

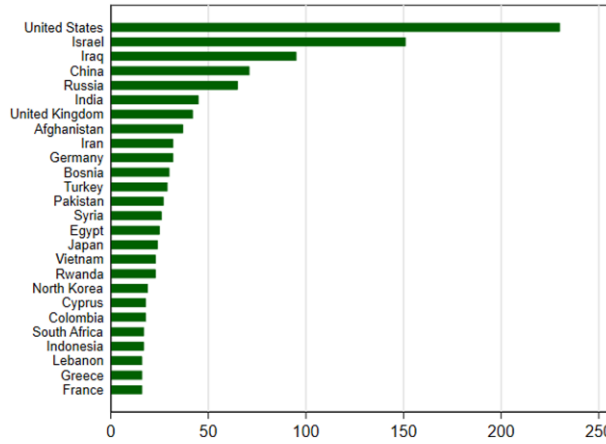

Figure 1. Most-mentioned countries in abstracts of five conflict journals, 1990–2015.

quantitative studies exclude countries for which data are missing, and this is most commonly poor countries and less democratic countries (Lall 2016). As a result, if we were to add a "1" to each dependent variable value for each time a country appeared in a global quantitative study, this would likely *increase* potential evidence of Western bias or research feasibility. Thus, our measures can be seen as somewhat conservative.

Descriptive Data: Abstract Mentions

Figure 1 shows the distribution of *Abstract mentions* as the total (collapsed) mentions of countries during 1990–2015. The countries in at least 15 abstracts are shown for readability. The figure indicates that the United States appears in far more abstracts than other countries, 230. The prominence of the United States is consistent with some other research (Hendrix and Vreede 2019; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). Israel is a prominent second, in 151 abstracts. A study of Political Science research shows that Israel is one of the most-studied countries, ranked 13 in coverage (Wilson and Knutsen 2020), but in conflict research, it seems to be even more of a standout. Israel's coverage in the conflict literature is at least in part explained by decades of simmering intra-state conflict and the history of inter-state disputes and wars. Other countries near the top include Iraq, China, Russia, and India. These countries are global or regional powers, and in Iraq's case, it has been the location of multiple highly internationalized conflicts.

Several patterns are noteworthy in Figure 1. First, the substantial gap between the United States and most other countries is remarkable. Second, the distribution of countries does not seem to be based only on conflict involvement or power (population, wealth, etc.). There are far more countries from Europe (broadly defined) than Africa, for example. Even Western European countries are strongly represented. This top 26 includes five countries from Western Europe (the United Kingdom, Germany, Cyprus, Greece, and France), but only two from Sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda and South Africa), in spite of the substantial conflict in that region. Even within the most researched countries, there are substantial disparities. Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, appear in the literature almost twice as much (30 times) as South Africa (23) or Rwanda (17).

A final note about Figure 1 is that only a small portion of the world's nearly 200 countries appear, so the tail (not pictured for space reasons) is quite long and thin. Most countries only appear in a few abstracts—across 24 years, in five

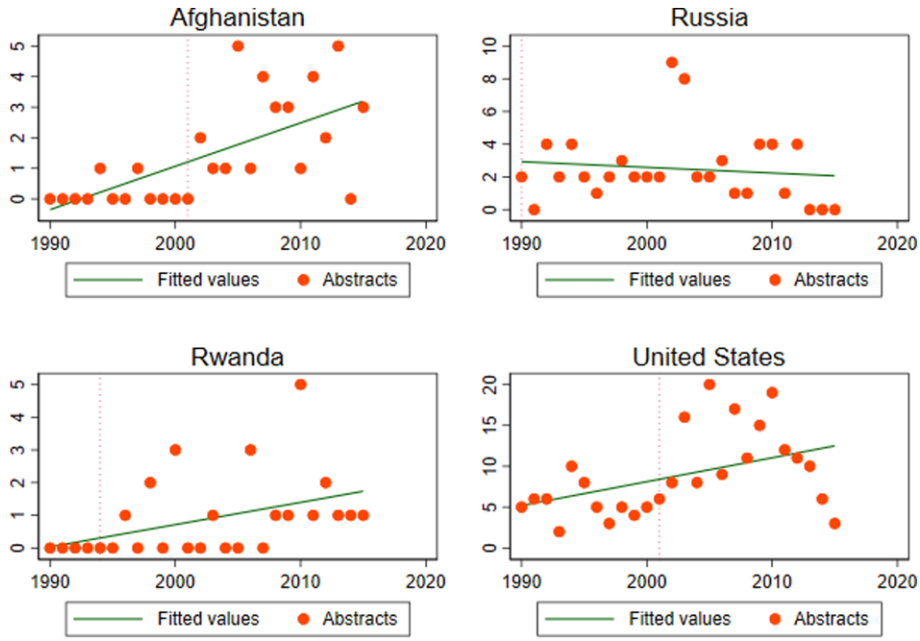

Figure 2. *Abstract mentions* values for selected countries, 1990–2015.
Note: Different vertical axes are used to show each country's changes over time. Vertical dotted lines indicate key years for respective countries: 2001 (September 11 attacks), 1990 (end of Cold War), or 1994 (Rwandan genocide).

journals—and this includes countries with substantial conflict experience, such as El Salvador (in three abstracts), Ethiopia (four), Eritrea (four), Georgia (three), Nepal (six), Uganda (eight), and Yemen (two). El Salvador, for example, was in civil war from 1979 to 1992 and in the years since has had some of the highest per capita homicide rates in the world due to organized crime violence.[13] Eritrea and Ethiopia, meanwhile, fought an inter-state war from 1998 to 2000, and Ethiopia has experienced many years of civil conflict. Overall, Figure 1 shows there is substantial variation in the coverage of countries in the conflict literature, and that some countries appear in the literature much more than others.

Regarding the *least-mentioned* countries, there are many countries *never* mentioned in the abstracts of these journals, and some countries that are surprisingly only mentioned several times. Countries only appearing in three or fewer abstracts, include Argentina (one), Bangladesh (one), Chad (one), Ghana (one), Ivory Coast (two), Singapore (zero), and Uzbekistan (zero). Not all of these countries have substantial conflict histories, but some do, and they all have experienced phenomena frequently covered in the conflict literature, such as protests, riots, terrorism, civil-military tension, or repression.

Figure 2 shows how *Abstract mentions* varies over time for several countries. The purpose is to show that the variable changes over time, and in ways, we might expect. Afghanistan does not appear much in conflict journal abstracts before 2001 (shown by the dotted vertical line), with zero mentions most years. After the US-led war against Afghanistan in 2001, however, the country appeared three-to-five times per year for most years between 2005 and 2015. Russia, meanwhile, has a less clear pattern over time. Its count slightly decreased over the years, perhaps as its influence decreased after the Cold War's end. A spike in the early 2000s seems somewhat

[13] Regarding research looking at organized criminal violence, it seems that a disproportionate amount of English-language work focuses on Mexico instead of Central American countries, Brazil, or elsewhere.

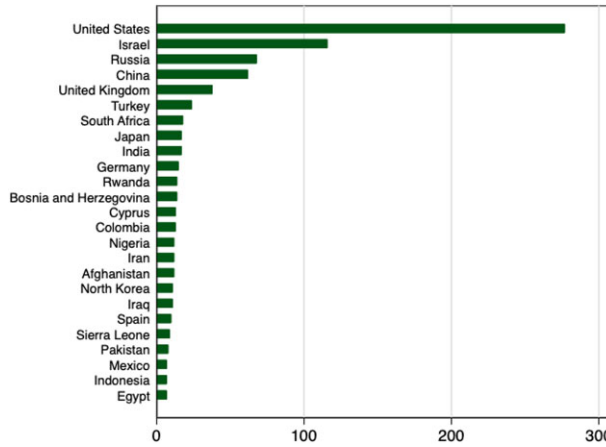

Figure 3. Number of case studies on each country in five conflict journals, 1990–2015.

random, but many articles at that time happened to discuss issues such as Russia's relationships with the European Union, Estonia, or the United States. The general pattern, however, is a slight decline. It is notable that Russia did not appear in any conflict journal abstracts in 2013–2015. Regarding Rwanda, a trend is apparent. It did not show up in any abstracts in the first half of the 1990s, but after the 1994 genocide, it became a regular subject of the conflict literature. The United States sees an overall increase over the years, especially after 2001, with the September 11 attacks and the start of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Overall, Figure 2 demonstrates *Abstract mentions* vary substantially over time and in ways that are generally consistent with expectations.

Descriptive Data: Case Studies

Regarding *Case studies*, Figure 3 shows the distribution of case studies per country, and the total for all years, as was shown with *Abstract mentions* in Figure 1. Similarly, for space reasons, only the top 25 most-analyzed countries are shown. The overall distribution of case studies per country is similar to that of *Abstract mentions*. The United States is the subject of far more case studies (277) than any other country. The gap between the United States and other countries is more extreme with case studies than with country mentions. Israel is second with 116 case studies, and Russia and China come in at third and fourth with 68 and 62, respectively. Most other countries are substantially below this, the subjects of few or no case studies.

As with *Abstract mentions*, the countries shown in Figure 3 for case studies are those that are globally or regionally influential in conflict or had substantial conflicts occur on their own soil. Another similarity is that Western European countries seem to be disproportionately subjects of case studies. The countries most often in single-country case studies include the United Kingdom, Germany, Bosnia, Cyprus, and Spain. Bosnia appears in about as many case studies (14) as Rwanda (14) or Nigeria (12), and far more than Pakistan (eight) or Egypt (seven).

In spite of general similarities with *Abstract mentions,* the counts of single-country case studies show some differences as well. Israel is in far fewer case studies than the United States, although they were mentioned in abstracts almost the same number of times. This illustrates a difference between *Abstract mentions* and *Case studies*. Israel appeared a great deal in abstracts when being discussed as part of its region or in multiple-country case studies. This type of research is not captured in the single-country case study measure. The United States, on the other hand, mostly appeared

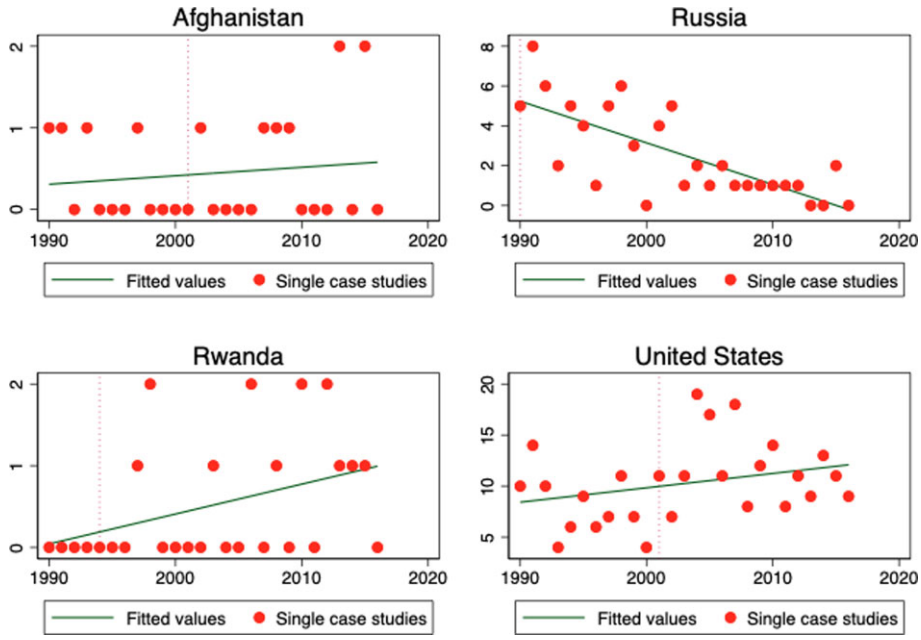

Figure 4. *Case studies* values for selected countries, 1990–2015. *Note:* Different vertical axes are used to show each country's changes over time. Vertical dotted lines indicate key years for respective countries: 2001 (September 11 attacks), 1990 (end of Cold War), or 1994 (Rwandan genocide).

in abstracts as the subject of single-country case studies. As a result, there is a difference between the two countries when it comes to single-country case studies.

Figure 4 indicates the values of *Case studies* for the same countries shown previously, demonstrating interesting variation over time. Trends are overall similar to the trends illustrated with *Country mentions*. Russia case studies decreased over time, Rwanda case studies began after 1994, and US case studies increased after 2001. There are also some differences, consistent with what was discussed regarding Israel above. Russia shows an interesting difference compared to Figure 2. The decline in scholarly attention is especially steep when measured as case studies. This is apparently because scholars kept researching Russia in terms of regional or multiple country studies (post-Soviet states, bilateral relations, etc.). However, conflict research on Russia on its own has clearly plummeted since the 1990s. A difference also appears regarding Afghanistan. Afghanistan does not have a substantial increase in single-case studies, unlike its abstract mentions (Figure 2). The research did expand on Afghanistan post-2001 but in multiple-country case studies more than in single-case studies.[14] Overall, *Abstract mentions* and *Case studies* are similar in many ways, but also get at distinct dimensions of scholarly attention to particular countries.

Multivariate Regression

This section describes regressions to analyze which factors are associated with country coverage while taking into consideration alternate explanations. Regarding independent variables, we use three measures for the Western bias explanation. Our primary measure we call *West (U.N. voting)*, which is based on U.N. General

[14] Examples of multiple-country studies that would appear in *Abstract mentions* but not *Case studies* include articles on US operations in Afghanistan, Afghanistan–Pakistan border issues, and the US Global War on Terror generally.

Assembly voting. Bailey et al. (2017) use General Assembly voting data to determine the position (ideal point) of each country, each year, regarding the "U.S.-led world order." The authors use "Western liberal order" as a synonym for this phrase (e.g., 431, 439). As a result, this is a valuable, fine-grained, and time-varying measure of Western affiliation. The variables range from −2.13 to 3.15. The countries scoring the highest for this are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel. Of the countries with above-average scores, most are in Western Europe.

A secondary measure is *West (Huntington)*, a dichotomous variable coded "1" for the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and countries in Western Europe. This list comes from Huntington's notion of Western countries (Huntington 1993). We acknowledge that Huntington's idea of the West is certainly debatable, and his broader arguments are widely criticized (Fox 2002; Henderson 2005; Bottici and Challand 2010), but it is also a commonly used reference point for discussions about the topic. These two variables represent distinct dimensions of Westernness, since many countries that are not in Huntington's West score fairly high on *West (U.N. voting)*. Examples include Israel, Japan, and South Korea. There are also countries in Huntington's West that score relatively low on *Western U.N. voting*, such as Cyrpus and Greece in some years. The third indicator of the West involves including regional control variables, and the excluded categories are North America and Western Europe.[15] If the West is covered more than other regions, then we should expect negative coefficients on other regional variables.

To test the research feasibility hypotheses, models include measures for official languages as well as regime type. A primary feasibility measure is *English language*, a dichotomous variable coded "1" for countries where English is an official language, or *de facto* official and primary language. Language information comes from the CIA World Factbook. Countries, where English is an official language, should probably be more accessible to scholars working in the countries that produce the most research (Hazelkorn 2016), especially given the dominance of English in academia (Choi 2010; Jenkins 2014). Some studies find that countries using the English language receive more research attention (Das et al. 2013; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). In addition to English, there are many countries where the official languages are languages spoken by many researchers (whether as a first or additional language), such as Arabic, French, or Spanish.[16] Countries using these widely spoken languages should be easier to research for most scholars than countries that would require scholars to learn a new language or rely on translated sources. To take this into consideration, models include the dichotomous variables *Arabic language*, *French language*, and *Spanish language*.

Another measure of research feasibility is country regime type, using Policy imputed with Freedom House data from the Quality of Government (QOG) project (Teorell et al. 2019). Less democratic countries generally have more barriers to research, from preventing access to archives to arresting researchers (Clark 2006; Krause and Szekely 2020).[17]

In addition to the variables representing hypothesized relationships, we include variables to take into consideration other possible explanations. As discussed above, it seems intuitive that countries with the most conflict experience should appear more in the conflict literature. Consistent with this, we include multiple measures of

[15] This is similar to Huntington's West, although it excludes Australia and New Zealand. This is done to look at commonly used regions, and North America and Western Europe mostly overlap with the West.

[16] Chinese (Mandarin) has many speakers, but it is only an official language in China and Singapore. Thus a variable for this language would only represent these two countries, almost a single-country fixed effect. The other languages mentioned, however, are official languages of dozens of countries.

[17] We had considered an additional measure, distance in kilometers from Washington, DC (or London), to indicate easier travel for researchers in the globally top-ranked institutions. However, this overlaps too much with the Western bias measures, and we prefer more parsimonious models. If such distance measures are included, they are usually not statistically significant and do not change other results.

conflict involvement. Models include *Inter-state conflict history*, a variable that counts the number of years in which the country has been involved in inter-state conflicts since 1945.[18] Models include a similar variable, *Intra-state conflict history*.[19] Both come from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Pettersson and Eck 2018), via the QOG project (Teorell et al. 2019). An alternate measure of conflict involvement is *Battle deaths*, a cumulative sum of the number of battle deaths (in thousands) in conflicts the country has been involved in since 1989, the year data are first recorded (Pettersson and Eck 2018).[20] We do not use this as our primary measure because it does not have information on conflicts before 1989, which is likely to be influential for conflict coverage. The variable is somewhat correlated with the conflict history measures, so we do not include them in the same model.

Another conflict-related measure is *Nuclear weapons*, a count of the number of nuclear weapons the country had at the time. The source is the Federation of American Scientists *Nuclear Notebook*. Due to extreme values, a natural logarithm is used. Independently of conflict involvement as measured above, states with nuclear arms seem to be discussed substantially in the conflict literature regarding proliferation issues, the possibility of nuclear war, and because of the power that stems from possessing such weapons.[21] A dichotomous indicator of countries with nuclear weapons returns similar results.

Models also include two other control variables to take into consideration basic country demographic differences: *Population* (Bank 2016) and *Income per capita* (Bolt et al. 2018), both as logarithms and via QOG. More populous countries are probably studied more in the literature (Pepinsky 2019; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). Regarding per capita wealth, it is less clear how this should be related to research coverage. Some studies find that richer countries are more often researched (Das et al. 2013; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). Since this is conflict literature, however, and poorer countries fall into conflict traps (Collier 2003; Kibris 2015), perhaps there should be a negative relationship.

The estimator is a negative binomial regression because of the dispersion of the count dependent variables.[22] Models include country effects because of the time-series nature of the data, to capture otherwise unmeasured differences in countries. The country effects are random effects because fixed effects cause observations with no variation over time to drop (Baltagi 2005). There are 36 countries with zero abstract mentions and 75 countries with zero case studies for all years, and these are dropped from the sample if fixed effects are included. In spite of the substantial change in the sample, results are mostly similar if country fixed effects are used. Year fixed effects are included to take into consideration temporal variation.[23] Robustness tests and their results are discussed more below.

[18] We use 1945 to maximize the amount of information on each country. Many countries did not yet exist in 1945, but for the ones that did (e.g., El Salvador, Peru, Russia, Turkey, and the United States), their conflicts are why they are still discussed in the literature, so this should be taken into consideration. Additionally, scholarly research is often about conflicts decades earlier, not only those of the past several years. If a later year start is used, such as 1970 to have most countries included for all years, results are similar.

[19] Another form of conflict involvement is when states are the subject of terrorism campaigns. Some countries experience substantial amounts of terrorism, and this is often coded as civil conflict given that the majority of terrorism occurs within civil conflict (Findley and Young 2012). Thus the majority of terrorism should be captured by our intra-state conflict variable.

[20] The authors report "low," "high," and "best" estimates, and we use the latter.

[21] A comparable measure is a variable indicating the permanent five members of the U.N. Security Council. These are highly correlated, so we do not include both in the same model. However, if such a measure is included instead of *Nuclear weapons*, results are similar.

[22] For *Abstract mentions*, the mean is 0.4 and the variance is 1.26. For *Case studies*, the mean is 0.23 and the variance is 1.15. This suggests substantial over-dispersion, for which a negative binomial is suitable. We do not use a zero-inflated model because we do not expect that the explanation for zeroes is unique compared to the explanations for 1s instead of 2s. Additionally, there is no straightforward way to include random effects with a zero-inflated model. If a zero-inflated negative binomial model is estimated, most results are robust, but the goodness-of-fit is worse.

Table 1. Negative binomial regressions of *Abstract mentions*, 1990–2015

	(1) Primary model	(2) Huntington's West	(3) Regions (see Figure 5)	(4) Battle deaths
West (U.N. voting)	0.357***		0.304**	0.407***
	(0.100)		(0.105)	(0.100)
West (Huntington)		0.687**		
		(0.311)		
English language	−0.086	−0.182	0.174	−0.064
	(0.236)	(0.241)	(0.274)	(0.248)
Arabic language	1.053***	0.852**	0.571	0.927**
	(0.306)	(0.302)	(0.420)	(0.318)
French language	−0.564**	−0.631**	−0.561*	−0.688**
	(0.276)	(0.285)	(0.299)	(0.294)
Spanish language	−0.686**	−0.827**	−0.813	−0.579*
	(0.300)	(0.296)	(0.505)	(0.320)
Democracy	0.041	0.070**	0.032	0.027
	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Intra-state conflict history	0.033***	0.035***	0.033***	
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	
Inter-state conflict history	0.021	0.021	0.015	
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	
Battle deaths history				0.011***
				(0.002)
Nuclear weapons (log)	0.063**	0.082**	0.063**	0.076**
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)
Population (log)	0.407***	0.386***	0.387***	0.504***
	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.069)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.163*	−0.176*	−0.321**	−0.156*
	(0.084)	(0.092)	(0.098)	(0.087)
Country random effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−5.069***	−4.815***	−2.817*	−6.225***
	(1.427)	(1.442)	(1.575)	(1.389)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.001$.

Results for Abstract Mentions

Table 1 shows the results with the dependent variable *Abstract mentions*. Model 1 is the primary model. Regarding the variable *West (U.N. voting)*, the coefficient on it is positively signed and statistically significant. This suggests that increased alignment with the West in U.N. voting is associated with increased mentions in the conflict literature. Regarding the research feasibility argument, the coefficients on both *English language* and *Democracy* are statistically insignificant, suggesting neither attribute is associated with more coverage in the conflict literature. This is surprising, but this could be seen as good news. Country coverage might not be driven by the convenience of the local language for English-speaking researchers or the openness of the country in terms of its regime type, ceteris paribus.

Regarding other language measures, *Arabic language* is statistically significant and positively signed, while the measures of French and Spanish are significant and negatively signed. This suggests that countries with Arabic as an official language are associated with more mentions in conflict literature abstracts, while French-

[23] We do not include a lagged version of the dependent variable because it seems likely to introduce bias, particularly since we use country effects (Bellemare et al. 2017). However, if a lagged dependent variable is included, results are robust.

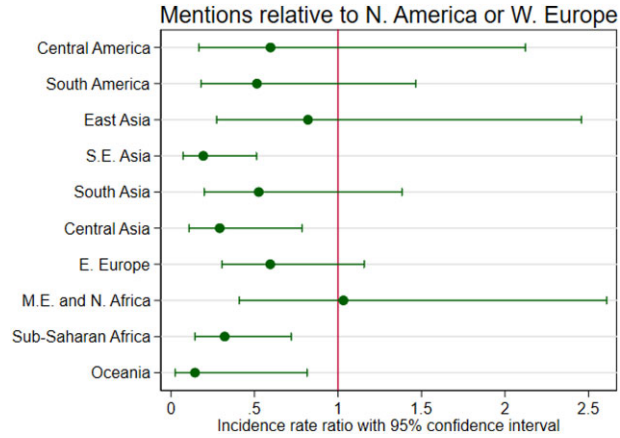

Figure 5. Results for regional variables included in Model 4.

and Spanish-speaking countries are associated with fewer. The divergent finding for Arabic, as opposed to other languages, could suggest researchers' interest in the Middle East and North Africa more than linguistic feasibility. The negative findings for Spanish and French could suggest a lower interest in Latin America or Sub-Saharan Africa, in spite of a great deal of conflict in the latter region in particular. The negative finding about French in particular is consistent with the Briggs (2017) study of African politics research, which found that scholars study former French colonies less than other African countries.

To test the robustness of the primary model, we include some robustness checks in Models 2–4. Model 2 uses an alternate measure of Western countries, *West (Huntington)*. The coefficient on this variable is statistically significant and positively signed, suggesting additional support for the hypothesis. The results of the research feasibility argument are similar to those of Model 1. One exception is that the coefficient on *Democracy* is positively signed and statistically significant. This suggests some support for the feasibility argument. However, the finding is not robust.

Model 3 uses the other Western measure, regional variables, with North America and Western Europe as the omitted categories. These variables are not shown in the table for space reasons, but their results appear in Figure 5. Incidence rate ratios are used, and values less than one indicate a negative effect. Several of the regions have statistically significant effects: Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania. This suggests that countries in these regions are mentioned less than countries in North America or Western Europe. This is consistent with H1. Other regional variables are statistically insignificant, but it is noteworthy that *none* of the regions is estimated to receive *more* coverage in the conflict literature than North America or Western Europe.

In Model 3's results in Table 1, most findings are consistent with those of Model 1. The only changes are regarding language measures. *Arabic language* and the *Spanish language* are statistically insignificant in Model 3, and *French language* is only significant at the 90 percent level. This suggests that findings in Model 1 for these variables might have been driven by regional variation more than linguistic convenience. Overall, the research feasibility argument remains without much support.

Model 4 includes an alternate measure of conflict involvement, *Battle deaths history*. The coefficient on this variable is statistically significant and positively signed as expected. Other results are robust.

Regarding other conflict measures and other control variables throughout Table 1, two of the conflict-related variables have positively signed and statistically significant coefficients. A country's history of civil conflict and number of nuclear

weapons are associated with a higher number of mentions in the conflict literature. Interestingly, country history of inter-state conflict is not associated with abstract mentions. This could be an indicator of the field's emphasis on civil conflict since the turn of the century. This is a noteworthy (non-)finding, but overall there is substantial support for the idea that research attention is based at least in part on countries' conflict involvement.

The two other control variables, *Population (log)* and *Per capita income (log)*, are statistically significant in all models of Table 1. More populous countries are more likely to receive coverage in the conflict literature, compared to less populous countries. This is consistent with expectations. *Per capita income* is negatively signed, suggesting less wealthy countries receive more attention in the conflict literature. The coefficient is only significant at the 90 percent level in two models, but it is highly significant in two others. The finding is interesting because it contrasts with findings in the broader literature suggesting wealthier countries are studied more (Das et al. 2013; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). The negative relationship might seem to clash with the support for the Western bias hypothesis, but whether within the West or in non-Western countries, poorer countries are more likely to be researched. At least part of the reason could be that these countries are more likely to experience civil conflict.

Results for Case Studies

Table 2 shows results for the second dependent variable, *Case studies*. The results are mostly similar to those of *Abstract mentions* models. There is robust support for the Western bias hypothesis. Results for *West (U.N. voting)* are consistent across the models. The second measure of Western bias, *West (Huntington)*, is statistically significant and positively signed in the model in which it is included.

Model 7 includes regional variables for an alternate test of the Western bias argument, and results are shown in Figure 6. They are similar to those in Figure 5: Half of the regions have statistically significant and negative relationships with case study counts: South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania. Countries in any of these regions are less likely to appear in conflict case studies than countries in North America or Western Europe. The only difference compared to the findings from the *Abstract mentions* model is that in that model, the South Asia variable was not significant. Again, however, there is no region that has a positive relationship with case studies, relative to North America and Western Europe. Overall, this suggests support for the first hypothesis.

Results for the research feasibility hypothesis in case study models are mostly similar compared to those of abstract mentions. There is almost no support for the research feasibility argument. *English language* is never significant, and Democracy only is in the model with *West (Huntington)*. The measures for French and Spanish are negatively signed, with the former often statistically significant and the latter always statistically significant.

The one difference across the two tables is that *Arabic language* was statistically significant and positively signed for *Abstract mentions*, but it was never significant for *Case studies*. It is unclear why this difference would occur between the dependent variable types, but it could be related to research on Israel (see Figures 1 and 3). It could be that Arab-speaking countries appear in abstracts of articles that are primarily about Israel, but these articles do not count as case studies of the Arab-speaking countries since the measure is of single-country case studies. In other words, Arab countries are mentioned in abstracts of articles mostly about Israel, so they appear in that measure but not in the single-country case study measure. Overall, however, it is remarkable that this is the only difference across the tables in spite of such different dependent variables.

Table 2. Negative binomial regressions of *Case studies*, 1990–2015

	(5) Primary model	(6) Huntington's West	(7) Regions (see Figure 6)	(8) Battle deaths
West (U.N. voting)	0.467***		0.364**	0.598***
	(0.139)		(0.144)	(0.132)
West (Huntington)		1.138**		
		(0.415)		
English language	0.221	0.077	0.598	0.269
	(0.311)	(0.331)	(0.379)	(0.326)
Arabic language	0.414	0.159	−0.133	0.358
	(0.435)	(0.442)	(0.561)	(0.442)
French language	−0.604	−0.741*	−0.729*	−0.794**
	(0.369)	(0.394)	(0.397)	(0.390)
Spanish language	−1.268**	−1.497***	−1.387**	−1.142**
	(0.409)	(0.418)	(0.600)	(0.416)
Democracy	0.058	0.087**	0.035	0.043
	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Intra-state conflict history	0.043***	0.048***	0.044***	
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.011)	
Inter-state conflict history	0.016	0.019	0.008	
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.034)	
Battle deaths history				0.015***
				(0.004)
Nuclear weapons (log)	0.085**	0.103***	0.088**	0.093**
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Population (log)	0.453***	0.436***	0.410***	0.538***
	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.093)	(0.086)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.253**	−0.308**	−0.501***	−0.302**
	(0.119)	(0.132)	(0.144)	(0.121)
Constant	−5.861**	−5.304**	−2.127	−6.312***
	(1.785)	(1.823)	(2.007)	(1.709)
N	3814	3814	3814	3814

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, and ***$p < 0.001$.

Regarding control variables in the *Case studies* models, results are again consistent with the *Abstract mentions* models. The coefficient for *Intra-state conflict* is statistically significant and negatively signed, while the coefficient for *Inter-state conflict* remains statistically insignificant. Battle deaths history is statistically significant and negatively signed. *Nuclear weapons (log)* remains positively signed and statistically significant across all models. *Population (log)* is robustly positively signed and significant, while *GDP per capita (log)* remains negatively signed and significant.

Robustness

The results of the models are robust to many additional changes in model specification, some of which we show in the online appendix. If the dependent variable is a total count of country mentions in the entire article (excluding bibliography and author affiliation or address), and not only abstracts, results are similar. We do not use this as a primary dependent variable because we are more interested in the countries studied in-depth, which are more likely to be mentioned in the abstract. We also use an alternate measure of case studies, which includes two-country case studies instead of only single-country case studies. Online appendix models also include changes to independent variables and more parsimonious models excluding

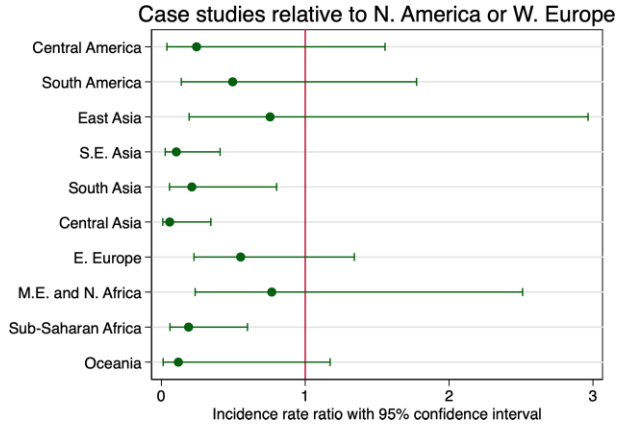

Figure 6. Results for regional variables included in Model 7.

controls or other variables. We also report models excluding articles from *International Security*, since its explicitly US focus could be responsible for the significance of the Western variables. Additionally, online appendix models include a measure of ongoing conflict to see if that might draw more research or deter it through feasibility. Through all these robustness checks, the general relationships for *West (U.N. voting)* and *West (Huntington)* remain consistent. The results for regional variables are mostly similar. The regions most often associated with less research attention than North America or Western Europe are Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South-East Asia. The results for research feasibility measures are mixed in these robustness checks. *English language* is usually statistically insignificant, while *Democracy* is significant and positively signed in about half of the models. *Spanish language* is usually negatively signed and statistically significant. Conflict variable results stayed mostly similar across these distinct modeling approaches.

Discussion: The Most- and Least-Studied Countries

The regression findings provide a profile of the types of countries that are researched most in the conflict literature, taking into consideration conflict involvement and other attributes such as population and wealth. Using the results from Tables 1 and 2, these are countries with some conflict experience that vote with the West in the United Nations, are physically in the West as defined by Huntington, and have large populations. Countries with nuclear weapons also appear a great deal in the literature. Regionally, the most-discussed states are mostly in North America or Western Europe. These countries are relatively wealthy, but the inclusion of the per capita GDP measure suggests that, independently of wealth, other factors such as pro-Western voting behavior and location are especially important for explaining variation in coverage. Regarding the attention on nuclear-weapons states, this coverage could make sense given the potential for regional or global devastation in a nuclear war. However, since many millions of people are affected by actual armed conflicts, the apparent focus on nuclear-weapons states raises questions about priorities in conflict research.

The findings also offer hints about which countries are most likely to be overlooked in the conflict literature. These would be countries that have conflict experience but do not vote with the West in the United Nations, are not physically in the West as defined by Huntington, do not have nuclear arms (or have fewer nuclear arms), have smaller populations, and are perhaps not the poorest in the world. Regionally, these are countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia,

Sub-Saharan Africa, or Oceania. Linguistically, the under-studied countries might include those that have Spanish or French as an official language.

Some examples—which meet at least most of the above criteria, and also have below-average counts for *Abstract mentions* or *Case studies*—include Algeria, Chad, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, and Tajikistan. Algeria experienced a massive civil war in the 1990s and early 2000s, killing more than 100,000 people. Yet the country only appears in six abstracts and is the subject of one case study in the five journals we examine during 26 years. (The mean for abstract mentions over the whole time period is 10, and the mean number of single-country case studies is six.) Eritrea and Ethiopia, belligerents in a substantial inter-state war and Ethiopia experiencing years of civil conflict as discussed earlier, appear only four times each in abstracts. Regarding single-country case studies, Ethiopia is the subject of only two and Eritrea none. As far as some other countries and case studies, Chad and Myanmar appear in single-country case studies only once each, and Georgia and Tajikistan never—in spite of substantial civil conflict in each of these countries during the years of the sample.[24]

By comparison, the phrase "Northern Ireland" appears in 23 abstracts, and the conflict there is the subject of 20 single-country case studies. Northern Ireland is not in the sample for our quantitative tests, since it is not a state in the same sense as others (e.g., with a seat at the United Nations), but there is a stark difference in coverage there as opposed to countries that are non-Western. Northern Ireland is the subject of more research than any of the countries listed in the first sentence of the previous paragraph.[25] Other Western countries—not nuclear powers or especially populous—that received above-average research coverage include Canada (nine abstract appearances and six case studies), Cyprus (18 abstracts, 13 case studies), Greece (16 abstracts, six case studies), and Spain (six abstracts, 10 case studies, half of which were on the conflict with ETA). In general, countries of the West seem to be studied much more in the conflict literature than non-Western states, regardless of conflict involvement.

Conclusion

Which countries are subject to the most attention in the conflict literature? This study provided the first attempt to address this question, using data from five journals over 26 years. With two measures of scholarly attention, we found evidence that countries from the West receive more coverage in the conflict literature than non-Western countries. We also suggested that "research feasibility" should be related to the extent to which countries appear in conflict articles. However, our measures for this argument, principally English as an official language and democracy, are not usually important for explaining country coverage. These results were consistent whether looking at mentions of country names in abstracts, or by counting how many single-country case studies each country appeared in.

If conflict research suffers from Western bias, what are the implications? One serious issue is that our general body of knowledge is potentially skewed—focused on a small and unusual set of states, yet we use the literature to generalize about all states.[26] A growing line of research illustrates the problems associated with applying US or European models to other countries (Zhang 2003; Sharman 2018; Cheng and Brettle 2019). More generally, are we over-learning the lessons of Northern

[24] Most of the countries in this paragraph experienced tens of thousands of battle deaths during the years studied (Pettersson and Eck 2018). These numbers exclude many civilians killed in one-sided violence.

[25] The focus on Northern Ireland was also noted by Silke in his analysis of 1990s terrorism research. "In proportional terms, Northern Ireland is the most intensely studied region on the planet," wrote Silke (2004).

[26] Some studies analyze particular countries or conflicts without an explicit interest in generalization, but a great deal and probably the majority of conflict research does assert some notion of comparability or lessons applicable to other cases.

Ireland (for example), and ignoring the lessons of Ethiopia or Algeria? This seems likely. What are the lessons of the 1992–1997 civil war in Tajikistan? Do its dynamics raise questions about extant theories or help create new explanations of conflict or its resolution?[27] In general, it is difficult to know how much, or how precisely, this over-focus on certain countries and under-focus on others affects the body of research. However, if scholars are concerned about bias affecting individual studies, they should probably also be concerned about bias affecting the broader corpus of work.

To try to address these issues, scholars can consider analyzing cases that are studied less in the literature. The focus on such cases could be "sold" in the framing of the research, advertising that the case is important to understand because it has not received as much attention as others. Country bias probably does not only affect single-country case studies. It is likely to affect two-country comparisons, studies of several countries, and medium-*n* studies (Ragin 2000). Additionally, researchers who conduct global analyses often discuss examples and sometimes complement them with brief illustrative case studies. These opportunities could be harnessed to draw on information from countries that are not as frequently analyzed. Beyond individuals working on their own research, more importantly, there are gatekeepers at all levels who could play a role in encouraging a less-biased body of conflict research. Journal editors and reviewers, grant decision committees, and grant peer reviewers could think more about to what extent a case is already under-covered or over-covered when evaluating research. Dissertation supervisors and graduate admissions committees could also take these issues into consideration. Of course, there are practical limitations to encouraging more geographically diverse research, such as the funding required for visiting more distant locations and the safety of field work in certain locations. But when choices are possible, hopefully, scholars and administrators can think about decisions that might help reduce the bias that is apparent in the conflict literature.

This research suggests a number of steps for future research. First, to what extent do these biases affect other areas of study? Some important work suggests the issue could be widespread (Munck and Snyder 2007a; Briggs 2017; Pepinsky 2019; Song 2019; Wilson and Knutsen 2020). One study looks at IR generally (Hendrix and Vreede 2019), but more in-depth analyses of geographic disparities in this discipline, or specific topics like political economy, would be important contributions. Second, our measures of scholarly attention did not capture countries used in quantitative global analyses. We explained why this was probably not a problem and might even make our findings conservative. However, it could be valuable for scholars to analyze samples used in global studies—particularly, which states appear less from large-*n* samples—and see what patterns emerge, and how this affects findings in conflict research. This has been done for other topics, with interesting results (Lall 2016). Third, scholars could try to gauge the effects of bias in a number of ways. One would be to determine some of the key findings of a commonly studied case and see to what extent they apply to less-studied cases. There might be substantial *sui generis* issues, suggesting the singular focus on a prominent case is problematic. Or one could do the reverse, and see how a less-studied case could help us to understand the more-researched case(s). In general, as suggested above, scholars can build on these findings by seeking out under-studied countries, such as those not in the West or not especially populous, and show how these cases offer important contributions to the literature. Overall, there are interesting and troubling patterns of country coverage in the conflict literature, and scholars can use

[27] Of course, there is some research on these questions (e.g., Tunçer-Kilavuz 2011; Driscoll 2012; Epkenhans 2016), and on all the countries identified as under-studied. It is a question of degree, of the amount of research on respective countries.

this knowledge to help build a more representative and more informative body of research.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Review* data archive.

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