States have a multitude of tools for territorial dispute resolution at their disposal ranging from direct bilateral negotiations to third-party states to international organizations (IOs). While the literature explores when states are more likely to accept a third party in their negotiations and when they are more likely to seek a resolution to their disputes bilaterally, we have little understanding of why states are more likely to seek IOs for such tasks. We examine the disputants that prefer certain conflict managers, with a focus on the distinguishing characteristics of IO-led conflict management. We derive a set of hypotheses based on our expectations that, due to the institutional and multilateral characteristics of IOs, certain states will turn to them to resolve their disputes while others will avoid them. Using the Issue Correlates of War data, we find support for our hypotheses. We conclude that the institutional and multilateral characteristics of negotiations indeed affect states’ conflict resolution choices.

When seeking to resolve their territorial disputes over Jammu and Kashmir, India and Pakistan accepted Soviet third-party mediation after their 1965 war but opted for bilateral negotiations after their 1972 war (Indian Foreign Ministry 1972). In 1973, after Iraq invaded a Kuwaiti border station, the two countries preferred the involvement of Saudi Arabia in resolving their dispute rather than Arab League or United Nations (UN) mediation (Wynbrandt 2004). After their 1974 war over the Agacher Strip, Burkina Faso and Mali sought mediation of their dispute through the Organization of African Unity (Nhema and Zeleza 2008). What explains some countries’ preferences to address their territorial disputes through an international organization (as Burkina Faso and Mali
through the Arab League) rather than bilaterally (as India and Pakistan did in 1972) or through other third-party conflict managers (as India and Pakistan did with the USSR in 1965 and Iraq and Kuwait did with Saudi Arabia in 1973)?

States have a multitude of tools for dispute resolution at their disposal. Some states prefer resolving their disputes through direct bilateral negotiations with their adversary. Others turn to third-party states to mediate such negotiations, and yet others seek the assistance of international organizations (IOs).¹ Recent trends show states are increasingly turning to IOs as a forum for conflict management. For instance, while between 1961 and 1970 there were nine instances of IOs acting as third-party mediators in disputes between states, between 1991 and 2000 they were involved in twenty-two instances of dispute resolution. We are at a point where the role of IOs in conflict resolution deserves closer attention.

While the literature has offered numerous arguments explaining when states are more likely to negotiate through a third-party mediator and when they are more likely to seek a resolution to their disputes bilaterally, we still need to better explain why states are more likely to seek IOs for such tasks. The present study complements existing works by seeking to understand which disputants are more likely to turn to IOs for resolving their disputes. By identifying the types of disputants that prefer certain types of conflict management mechanisms, we can then better design such mechanisms to fulfill the needs of the states that use them.

The following section reviews the existing literature addressing IO involvement in conflict resolution. We then proceed to discuss what we consider to be the most important differences between IOs and other types of actors as third-party mediators: their multilateral and institutional character. The institutional character of IOs refers to their role in reducing uncertainty through conveying information, and their multilateral character refers to the multiple actors involved in IOs. We derive a set of hypotheses based on our expectations that, due to the institutional and multilateral characteristics of IOs, certain states will turn to them to resolve their disputes while others will avoid them. We argue that states that do not highly value private information, such as those with membership in highly institutionalized IOs and those without additional ongoing disputes, are more likely to employ IO conflict managers. In addition, certain states may develop institutionally oriented preferences. We argue that states with a history of IO-led conflict management are more likely to choose this forum once again, as the process creates changes in a state’s
cultural identity and the structure of their bureaucracy. We then proceed to test these hypotheses using cases drawn from the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) data, which include all disputed territorial claims in the Americas and Western Europe between 1919 and 2001. We control for other variables that have been shown in existing literature to affect states’ decisions to resolve their disputes through third parties and find that both institutional and multilateral effects of IOs appear to play a role in disputants’ decisions. We conclude with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

Theory

The role of IOs in fostering cooperation among states has long been debated in the international relations literature. On the one hand, realists have argued that while international institutions may facilitate cooperation in economic, environmental, or other non-security issue areas, in the security realm they hardly play any role (e.g., Grieco 1988; Mearsheimer 1994). Institutionalists, on the other hand, dispute this claim highlighting the factors that allow international institutions to facilitate cooperation among states in the security realm, of which one of the most important was the ability of such institutions to extract information from states (e.g., Keohane 1993; Keohane and Martin 1995). For a long time this debate played out primarily at the theoretical level, relying on only a handful of empirical cases to support one perspective or the other. The work of Russet, Oneal, and Davis (1998) offered important initial empirical evidence that states’ joint membership in IOs reduces the likelihood for conflict. However, while the three authors acknowledged that there were different functions IOs can play to reduce the likelihood of conflict among states (including mediation), their research design did not allow for much distinction between the relevance of each such function. Theoretically, however, this piece highlights how IOs affect state behavior through enforcement mechanisms, facilitating the pursuits of mutual interests, and spreading norms.

Most of the initial empirical work focusing specifically on the role of IOs in conflict resolution primarily tackled the question of the effectiveness of such organizations, especially by assessing states’ compliance with the agreements reached through mediation and the durability of such agreements (e.g., Allee and Huth 2006; Gent and Shannon 2011; Mitchell and Hensel 2007; Simmons 2002). This strand of literature emphasized how IOs have developed more binding mechanisms of dispute resolution than
the relatively ad hoc agreements reached bilaterally or through third-party states. Implicitly, IOs may be more likely to induce disputants to comply with agreements. Yet, as Simmons (2002) showed, both states and IOs can offer binding decisions. Therefore, we should seek additional factors that may lead IOs to be more or less appealing for disputants.

Another strand of literature moved the discussion beyond questions simply of the effectiveness of conflict resolution by asking which factors impact the initial choice of conflict resolution method (Bercovitch and Schneider 2000; Gent and Shannon 2011; Greig 2005). The work of Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom (2004) is particularly relevant for the present study as it identifies a series of IO characteristics (such as institutional structure, membership cohesion, and a security mandate) that make them more appealing for disputants. Although all of these works asked questions that are more directly related to the one driving this study, they generally focused on identifying the features of the third party, rather than of the disputants themselves as in the case of the present study.

Only limited scholarship has explored how state characteristics affect their selection of forums for managing their disputes. Shannon (2009) sought to understand how joint IO membership (a characteristic of the disputants, rather than of IOs themselves) affects the likelihood that such states will seek peaceful resolution. Similarly, Bercovitch and Jackson (2001) showed that dyads of states that are more unequal in terms of their power and that are involved in more complex disputes are more likely to resolve their disputes through mediation rather than bilateral negotiations. Powell and Wiegand (2010) also explored the choice of bilateral or third-party conflict management, finding that domestic legal traditions predict management method choices. Yet these works do not distinguish between states and IOs as third-party conflict managers and therefore can offer only partial answers to our question.

While the present study builds on such previous work, it also seeks to complement this literature by shifting attention from the effect of IO resolution and the types of IOs that make dispute resolution likely to the types of disputants that are more or less likely to turn to IOs. By doing so, it identifies the characteristics of state dyads that are more likely to accept IOs for resolving their disputes.

We suggest that the best way to understand why some disputants choose IOs as conflict managers and others do not is by starting from the factors that distinguish such organizations from other third parties. Most important, we emphasize that IOs are, by definition, multilateral
institutions. Therefore, we argue that the main differences between them and other third-party mediators should derive from their “institutional” and “multilateral” character. But what do these terms mean in the context of conflict management?

*International Organizations as Institutions*

There are many differences among the various strands of the extensive literature on institutions. Yet virtually all perspectives agree that one of their main characteristics is that they create order and predictability (March and Olsen 1998). The multiple explanations for how institutions shape actors’ preferences in order to give such predictability generally can be viewed as falling into one of two major approaches, dubbed by Hall and Taylor (1996) the “calculus approach” and the “cultural approach.” According to the calculus approach, institutions allow for a greater degree of certainty about actors’ behavior by providing information and mechanisms to enforce agreements, while the cultural approach emphasizes how institutions establish “symbols, scripts and routines” (939) that alter actors’ preferences by giving specific meaning to potential actions. We build our arguments about the institutional nature of IOs around these two approaches, to explain how institutional mechanisms make IOs more or less attractive conflict managers to disputants.

According to the “calculus approach,” the first distinguishing characteristic of IOs as institutions is their role in reducing uncertainty through conveying information (Russett, Oneal, and Davis 1998). All institutions offer a “set of channels for processing information, solving problems, and transmitting communications” (Russett 1967, 98). Boehmer et al. (2004) argue IOs can promote peace in acting as “information brokers” by acquiring and then releasing to the two disputants private information about their capabilities and resolve. This is a necessary condition of reaching agreements (Fearon 1995). While state mediators can also act as information brokers (Boehmer et al. 2004), IO secretariats have an institutionalized process in place for collecting information and therefore are expected to be more effective. The informational advantages that IOs have may induce some disputants to seek such multilateral institutions rather than states as third parties.

Of course, as Boehmer et al. (2004) suggest, some IOs are more capable of fulfilling their tasks as information brokers than others. The very complex and highly institutionalized system of the EU, for example, offers this
organization a tremendous advantage in extracting information, even if the organization often avoids becoming involved in third-party mediation (Gentz 2007). Boehner et al. (2004) distinguish between IOs based on their degree of “institutionalization,” defined as the degree to which organizations have the bureaucratic structures through which they can acquire the necessary private information from disputants.

To explain disputants’ conflict management choices, membership in IOs and the level of institutionalization of said IOs provides two causal mechanisms that should increase the willingness of states to use IOs for managing their disputes. The first mechanism is through the information membership provides about the states that join institutionalized IOs. The second is in terms of the opportunities offered by membership.

Indeed, the literature has pointed out that, as IOs have been faced with increasingly complex functions, they have been tasked to collect an ever-greater amount of information from member states and prospective members. IOs collect a wide array of such economic, environmental, social, and even military information. In the most institutionalized IOs (such as the European institutions), states are even willing to have such organizations run and then disclose the results of public opinion surveys, thus revealing important information about societal support for government actions involving conflicts and their resolution (Grigorescu 2003).

States that join IOs with high levels of institutionalization willingly relinquish otherwise private information. Private information about a state’s military capability, strategy, tactics, popular support, and likely joiners is a useful bargaining tool. While states have an incentive to avoid the costs of war, they also have strategic incentives to withhold or misrepresent such information to obtain a favorable resolution to the issue (Fearon 1995). That some states have given control of such private information signals a willingness to concede their ability to misrepresent or exaggerate their capabilities and resolve. These states are willing to give up their monopoly on information (Florini 1998; Mitchell 1998). Thus, states that are willing to surrender their private information are likely to join highly institutionalized IOs and are more likely to use IOs to manage their disputes.

Also, membership in institutions offers additional opportunities to resolve disputes. Highly institutionalized IOs possess mechanisms for mediating conflicts and even enforcing some decisions, such as the arbitration and adjudications mechanism of the European Court of Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Less institutionalized IOs do not have such mechanisms.
While not all institutions have such quasi-coercive legal institutions for mediation, all institutions offer mechanisms to reduce transaction costs (Coase 1937) and thus encourage more exchange (Stone Sweet and Brunell 1998). While pairs of states that have shared memberships in IOs are less likely to become embroiled in disputes in the first place (Oneal and Russett 1999), member-states know they can use IOs to gain information to resolve their disputes.

Based on these arguments we suggest that:

\[ H_1: \text{Disputants with membership in highly institutionalized IOs are more likely to use an IO for resolving their disputes.} \]

\[ H_{1A}: \text{Disputants with membership in highly institutionalized IOs prefer to use an IO rather than a state for resolving their disputes.} \]

The cultural approach to institutions emphasizes that institutions establish “symbols, scripts and routines” altering actors’ preferences by giving specific meaning to potential actions (Hall and Taylor 1996, 939). There are two main causal mechanisms through which institutionally oriented preferences can develop. The first is through the establishment of a cultural identity, and the second is through changes in the structure of the state’s bureaucracy.

State preferences can be shaped through working with institutions in that this interaction and experience can shape the cultural identity of the state. In the international relations literature, the constructivist approach has embraced this type of cultural perspective, emphasizing how international institutions not only limit states’ actions through their rules and norms (their “regulative effect”) but also offer possibilities of action by shaping common identities (their “constitutive effect”) (Kratochwil 1989). ² The norms and identities shaped by interactions within IOs also establish expectations that are more predictable.

One of the most common ways in which the cultural approach expects institutions to make actors’ actions more predictable is through their “stickiness” (Jervis 2002). Specifically, the literature has noted that continued participation in international institutions might shape collective identities (e.g., Bearce and Bondanella 2007; Checkel 2005) and make it more “appropriate” to act through such institutions again and again. Indeed, a state may find it more difficult to reject a proposal for peaceful resolution through an IO after it used that organization in the past (compared to the rejection of bilateral or ad hoc multilateral resolution mechanisms), as
there is a certain degree of normative pressure attached to the potential use of IO mechanisms.

Such stickiness can also be explained as a result of the changes in the structure of the state’s bureaucracy that occurs when working with institutions. Continued participation in international institutions brings about changes in the structures of national bureaucracies and among political groupings (Jervis 2002). Specifically, when states decide to resolve a dispute through an IO, top decision makers (in the foreign ministries as well as in other governmental bodies) hire or advance individuals with expertise in the work, rules, and norms of that organization. Even after the dispute is resolved, most such experts stay on in their newly acquired positions. For instance, when Romania decided to resolve its first ever International Court of Justice (ICJ) case (involving a territorial dispute it had with Ukraine), the Romanian Foreign Ministry put together a strong contingent of ICJ and UN experts. Virtually all such experts later stayed on in the Foreign Ministry even after the case ended. Moreover, the relative success of the case led the top experts to garner a great deal of prestige and to advance within the Foreign Ministry. The head of the Romanian team for the ICJ trial, Bogdan Aurescu, was nominated for the position of Foreign Minister (at age 36) just one year after the case concluded (Romania Libera 2009). Similarly, in the case of the dispute over the Agacher Strip, mentioned in the introduction of this article, after Burkina Faso and Mali reached a peaceful agreement in the 1970s through the mediation of the Organization of African Unity, they later returned to multilateral institutions (the Non-Aggression and Defense Aid Agreement and, eventually, the ICJ) after tensions between them reemerged in the 1980s (Nhema and Zeleza 2008). Overall, we expect in such cases that countries that have garnered the necessary expertise for negotiating a dispute through IOs will be more inclined to deal with other disputes through IOs. Conversely, disputants that have previously sought peaceful resolution bilaterally or through third-party states (as in the other two cases discussed in the introduction, between India and Pakistan and between Iraq and Kuwait) are less prepared for negotiations through multilateral institutions.

In sum, we do not expect states’ choices for seeking peaceful resolution through IOs to follow the exact same logic of those through state-led, noninstitutional mechanisms. The stickiness of such organizations is much stronger than that associated with ad hoc conflict management mechanisms and will establish a pressure for them to return to IOs once they used such organizations in the past.
This argument is similar to Wiegand and Powell’s (2011) that also emphasizes the relevance of past experiences with a certain type of forum for dispute resolution on the present choice of such forums. Yet they argue that such choices will be contingent on the rate of success that the country has had with that specific type of dispute resolution mechanism. This strictly “cost-benefit” argument differs from ours as we suggest that habit and norms also contribute to states’ likelihood of returning to IOs regardless of whether they were successful or not in their past dispute settlements in those organizations. Specifically, we posit that:

\[ H_2: \text{The more that states have sought peaceful resolution through IOs in the past, the more likely they are to seek peaceful resolution through an IO to resolve their present dispute.} \]

\[ H_{2A}: \text{The more that states have sought peaceful resolution through IOs in the past, the more likely they are to seek peaceful resolution through an IO rather than a state to resolve their present dispute.} \]

*International Organizations as Multilateral Forums*

The second distinguishing characteristic of IOs that is important for understanding disputants’ conflict management choices is their multilateral nature. Keohane (1990, 750) defines multilateralism as coordination of national policies “in groups of three or more states” and considers the number of members in an IO (specifically the open or restricted membership rules) as a reflection of the multilateral character of that organization. The more actors that are involved in the resolution of a dispute, the more multilateral the process is. In other words, negotiations involving two states as mediators in addition to the two disputants are more multilateral than those that involve only one third-party state. When IOs that have many members become involved in conflict management, the process becomes even “more multilateral.” An IO represents, after all, a collective third party with multiple principals. While it is unlikely that all IO member-states are directly involved in negotiations, such IO officials often have strong ties to the representatives of member states (sometimes their conationalists), certainly stronger than those between national officials acting on behalf of a state third party and other states.

The fact that IOs include many members makes this a more “public” conflict management forum in comparison to direct talks and those involving a single state. When IOs act as conflict managers between two
disputants, the information regarding the negotiations may reach a much larger set of actors than when such negotiations take place in a “less multilateral” setting. Even if this is not always true, we expect that in most cases the two disputants will work under the assumption that their private information may reach broader audiences than in cases where states act as conflict managers.

The multilateral nature of IO membership means that, when disputants choose this forum for managing their dispute, more states can have access to information about the conflict management process. We posit that it is this informational aspect of negotiations that differentiates the more multilateral negotiation setting from the less multilateral ones. Indeed, while the final agreement that is reached through any type of dispute resolution mechanism is likely to be public, the process that led to it is not. Information about the conflict management process may be especially useful for states with ongoing claims involving one of the disputants. State C, which has an ongoing territorial dispute with state A, will want to know how A reached an agreement with state B. What is A willing to accept? Did A “bluff” in its negotiations with B? Did B call its bluff? If so, how did A react? Who are the key domestic veto-holders in A’s decision-making process? Did A give any signs of external or internal “weakness” in such negotiations? When third parties (whether they are states or IOs) are involved in the dispute resolution involving A and B, it is more likely that C will receive some answers to these questions than if the negotiations were bilateral and, implicitly, more closed. State A is therefore likely to avoid having third parties involved in its negotiations with B because it wants to keep state C from acquiring such sensitive information. Based on the above arguments, we suggest that it is even more likely to avoid using IOs as third-party conflict managers.

Furthermore, we argue that states involved in only one dispute are not concerned that their private information may reach other states through more multilateral resolution processes. Yet states that are involved in multiple simultaneous disputes care deeply about possible information leaks. We expect them to fear that, once they share their private information in negotiations with one rival, such information may spread to their other rivals (Crescenzi 2007; Walter 2003). For disputants that are concerned with keeping private information from their other adversaries, the multilateral character of IOs can be cause for avoiding this forum. What this implies is that disputants with many other ongoing claims will be deterred from using IOs because they need to control their private information
more tightly and avoid having knowledge of their negotiating tactics get into the hands of their other adversaries.

The existence of states with multiple ongoing claims should not be viewed as a rare occurrence. In fact, most states that have an ongoing territorial dispute are simultaneously involved in other disputes with other states. The number of territorial disputes in which a country is involved at a certain point in time is therefore an important characteristic of that state, one that affects its approach to peaceful resolution of any individual dispute. Indeed, recent literature has shown that the number (Melin and Grigorescu 2014) and relative salience (Akcinaroglu, Radziszewski, and Diehl 2014) of states’ ongoing disputes impacts their behavior in a particular dispute. Based on these arguments we hypothesize that:

H₃: The more disputes states are simultaneously involved in, the less likely they are to seek peaceful resolution to one such dispute through an IO.

H₃A: The more disputes states are simultaneously involved in, the more likely they are to seek peaceful resolution to one such dispute through a state third party than through an IO.

H₃B: The more disputes states are simultaneously involved in, the less likely they are to seek peaceful resolution to one such dispute through a third party than through bilateral negotiations.

The multilateral character of IOs should be understood as distinct from its institutional one. In fact, as Ruggie (1993, 10) points out, “multilateral is an adjective that modifies the noun institution.” States have set up bilateral and not just multilateral institutions to negotiate their differences. For example, the United States and Canada have “institutionalized” their bilateral negotiations on multiple issues from the presence of US ships in the Canadian-claimed waters of the Polar Sea (Briggs 1990) to the Pacific Salmon Treaty for cooperation in conservation and harvest sharing between the two countries (Buck 2008). Even some of the most important issues of the Cold War, such as arms limitations between the United States and the USSR (the SALT and START treaties), were negotiated in a bilateral institutionalized setting where the same norms and even rules were often maintained throughout the various phases of the negotiations.

Conversely, multilateral negotiations do not need to be institutionalized (Keohane 1990). There have been more than twice as many attempts
to resolve territorial disputes between two states multilaterally through ad hoc arrangements where at least one state mediated the negotiations, than through multilateral institutionalized forums (i.e., IOs) since 1945. The term “multilateral” therefore needs to be treated separately from the term “institutional.” More important, the effects of multilateralism for states’ calculations when deciding on the best method for peaceful resolution need to be discerned from the aforementioned institutional effects.

In sum, this theoretical discussion leads us to several expectations about the behavior of disputants in selecting a conflict management forum. Based on disputant membership in institutionalized IOs, we can expect these states are ones that value private information less and are therefore willing to use IOs for managing their disputes. Membership in such organizations also offers additional opportunities for IO-led conflict management. We also expect that past use of IOs increases the likelihood that a disputant uses IOs again since the process creates changes in a state’s cultural identity and the structure of their bureaucracy. Finally, we expect that the multilateral character of IOs attracts disputants that do not need to tightly protect information about their negotiations from other adversaries. Disputants with greater numbers of additional disputes will prefer a less public forum for conflict management. The next section provides empirical tests of these expectations.

**Empirical Tests and Results**

Our analysis examines the decision to address a territorial claim by involving an international organization. We employ Hensel’s definition of a territorial claim as a dispute in which “official representatives of at least one state make explicit statements claiming sovereignty over a piece of territory that is claimed or administered by another state” (Hensel 2001, 90). We analyze cases drawn from the ICOW data, which include all disputed territorial claims in the Americas and Western Europe from 1816 to 2001 (Hensel et al. 2008). To identify claims, we employ the ICOW claim data, wherein a separate claim is coded for each distinct piece of territory, river, or maritime zone for each state (Hensel 2001). The ICOW data are particularly useful in constructing the dependent variable as they uniquely record management efforts in a range of approaches and actors. The temporal domain of our study is 1919–2001, and the unit of analysis is settlement attempt-dyadic claim-year. This captures annual information on each dyadic claim and attempts to settle each claim, thereby enabling the examination of settlement behavior over time.
Models

The present study asks when states are more likely to turn to IOs to resolve their territorial disputes. In a first cut to answering the question of when states turn to IOs to resolve their disputes, we simply employ a model (Model 1 in Figure 1) that assesses the impact of the various hypothesized factors reflecting the institutional and multilateral character of such organizations on disputants’ choices to seek IO conflict management, *rather than any other conflict resolution method*. The population of cases for this model therefore is all dyads that seek peaceful resolution to their disputes. This model allows us to test H₁, H₂, and H₃, which offer expectations about the general use of IOs.

To further refine our understanding of states’ decisions and distinguish between the separate impact of multilateralism and institutionalism, we break down disputants’ decisions in two subsequent steps (Models 2 and 3 in Figure 1). We suggest that the first decision disputants are faced with is whether to resolve their disputes bilaterally or seek management of a third party, whether it be a state or an IO. This decision reflects how states take into account the costs and benefits of multilateralism but not those of institutionalism. As in the first model discussed previously, we consider

Figure 1. State Decisions in Choosing Type of Dispute Resolution: One-Step and Two-Step Models
the population of cases of all dyads that seek peaceful resolution to their disputes in the second model. This model will allow us to test only $H_{3B}$.

Disputants that have opted for a multilateral setting will be faced with a second decision: whether to include states or IOs as third parties to their dispute resolution. This model will allow us to assess the impact of institutional factors on states’ decision ($H_{1A}$ and $H_{2A}$) and, also, of the potential additional impact of multilateralism, when moving from negotiations that involve only a small number of third parties and those that involve a collective third party with multiple principals ($H_{3A}$). In Model 3 we therefore only consider the population of dyads seeking peaceful resolution through a third party.

**Outcome Variables**

We estimate two settlement methods as dependent variables.

*International Organization Involvement* is a dichotomous measure of two states’ decision to involve an international organization in a peaceful settlement attempt (Hensel et al. 2008). In Model 1 it distinguishes between cases where IOs were used and all other cases of peaceful dispute resolution where IOs did not act as third parties in dispute resolution. In Model 3 it distinguishes only between cases where IOs were used as third-party mediators and those where states were used as third-party mediators.

*Third-Party Involvement* is a dichotomous measure of the states’ decision to attempt settling the issue using a third party, as opposed to bilateral negotiations (Hensel et al. 2008).

**Explanatory Variables**

We include the following explanatory variables in our models.

*Claims* is the summed total of the number of simultaneous other claims in which the disputants are involved, ranging from zero to twenty. Only 7 percent of settlement attempts involve dyads that have no other claims, with over half of the dyads having five or more ongoing claims (and a maximum of twenty). This is used to test the role multilateralism plays in disputant choices.

*Institutionalization1* employs the Boehmer et al. (2004) measure of IO institutionalization, which is coded on a scale ranging from minimal organizations to structured and interventionist organizations. We use the measure to differentiate between disputants that have joint membership in highly institutionalized IOs, which can help them extract the necessary
information from each other and those that do not. The measure we use codes the number of maximally institutionalized IOs in the dyad.

*Institutionalization*2 is a measure of a different type of institutional effect, one that reflects the “stickiness” of IOs. It represents the extent to which disputants have developed institutionally oriented preferences, measured with the ratio of the number of the disputants’ past claims that involved an IO to those that did not.

**Control Variables**

# IOs is the sum of the number of shared IO memberships each state in the dyad has (Boehmer et al. 2004). A greater number of shared IO memberships offers more opportunities and forums for conflict resolution.

*Salience* is the ICOW salience index, which reports the highest salience for the dyadic claim (Hensel et al. 2008). Existing literature argues states are less likely to solve salient claims peacefully because they want to maintain control over outcomes and are therefore more likely to deal with them using force (Hensel 2001; Mitchell and Hensel 2007).

*Joint Democracy* is a dummy variable capturing the similarity of claimants’ Polity IV democracy scores for the dyadic year (Marshall and Jaggers 2004). Dyads that both score 6 or higher on the Polity IV scale are coded 1; all others are coded 0. Existing research shows democratic dyads are more likely to settle their conflicts peacefully (Dixon 1993).

*Capabilities* employs the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores to assess the claimants’ relative power (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972). This measure is calculated by dividing the stronger state’s CINC score by the weaker state’s score, meaning that a larger score reflects a greater distance in capabilities and a smaller score reflects similarity in capabilities. Existing findings show that disputants are more likely to employ peaceful resolutions in situations of power polarity due to uncertainty (Reiter 2003).

*Alliance* is a dummy variable that accounts for the presence of a formal alliance between the claimants in a given year, measured according to the Alliance Applications and Provisions data (Leeds et al. 2002). These data define alliances as formal agreements “among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of potential or realized military conflict” (Leeds 2005, 121). Alliances have been shown to indicate bilateral satisfaction with the status quo (Lemke and Reed 1996), reflect common interests (Bueno de Mesquita 1981), and signal beliefs about the likelihood and nature of future conflict (Morrow 1999).
The preceding variables are summarized in Table 1.

**Results**

Table 2 presents the results from the three models covering cases between 1919 and 2001, and Table 3 presents the predicted probabilities based on these results. Model 1 tests the impact both of multilateral and institutional effects on decisions to adopt IO mediation rather than any other type of peaceful resolution method. Our theory leads us to expect that disputants with membership in highly institutionalized IOs, those that have sought peaceful resolution through IOs in the past, and those without other ongoing disputes are more likely to use IOs for conflict management. In this model both measures of institutionalization (Institutionalization1 and Institutionalization2) have a significant and positive effect on the involvement of an IO. Claimants with memberships in highly institutionalized IOs and those dyads who have previously sought IO mediation (whether successful or not) are significantly more likely to engage an IO in their efforts to resolve the claim. A shift from not having membership in highly

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<td>joint Democracy</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capabilities</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>.596</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Logit Models of Third-Party and IO Involvement in Dyadic Claims That Employ Peaceful Resolution Mechanisms, 1920–2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IO involvement rather than any other form of dispute resolution</td>
<td>Third-party involvement rather than bilateral negotiations</td>
<td>IO involvement rather than state involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**“Institutionalism”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutionalization1</th>
<th>1.0110*</th>
<th>1.8820***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.4168)</td>
<td>(0.5403)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutionalization2</th>
<th>4.0564***</th>
<th>2.6933***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.6535)</td>
<td>(0.6249)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**“Multilateralism”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claims</th>
<th>-0.0947*</th>
<th>-0.0491*</th>
<th>-0.0515</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0374)</td>
<td>(0.0229)</td>
<td>(0.0447)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Controls**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># IOs</th>
<th>-0.0231</th>
<th>-0.0116</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0130)</td>
<td>(0.0173)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salience</th>
<th>-0.0863</th>
<th>0.0359</th>
<th>-0.1319</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0792)</td>
<td>(0.0450)</td>
<td>(0.0907)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joint Democracy</th>
<th>-1.9896*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.9838)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>0.0003</th>
<th>0.0001</th>
<th>0.0010***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>0.7285</th>
<th>-0.4107*</th>
<th>0.2863</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.4163)</td>
<td>(0.1884)</td>
<td>(0.4043)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>-2.1140***</th>
<th>-0.1450</th>
<th>-1.5417*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.6275)</td>
<td>(0.3602)</td>
<td>(0.7035)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N         659 816 265
PRE/PPC   .25/.92 .01/.62 .26/.83
Pseudo-r² .283 .021 .31
Log Likelihood -156.97 -533.75 -104.2

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 based on z-scores. Robust standard errors clustered on dyadic claim in parentheses.

institutionalized IOs to the presence of membership in highly institutionalized IOs increases the probability of IO involvement by 475 percent and decreases the probability that no IO is involved in conflict management by
Table 3. Predicted Probabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IO Involvement v. No IO Involvement</th>
<th>Third-Party Involvement v. Bilateral Negotiations</th>
<th>IO Involvement v. State Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Institutionalism”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalization 1</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.024, Maximum: 0.138, Change: 475%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.084, Maximum: 0.692, Change: 723%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.024, Maximum: 0.138, Change: 475%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalization 2</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.039, Maximum: 0.669, Change: 1615%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.140, Maximum: 0.683, Change: 388%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.039, Maximum: 0.669, Change: 1615%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Multilateralism”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.072, Maximum: 0.014, Change: −80%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.526, Maximum: 0.300, Change: −43%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.072, Maximum: 0.014, Change: −80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Democracy</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.449, Maximum: 0.136, Change: −70%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.550, Maximum: 0.864, Change: 57%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.449, Maximum: 0.136, Change: −70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.450, Maximum: 0.353, Change: 10%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.550, Maximum: 0.647, Change: 18%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.450, Maximum: 0.353, Change: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capabilities</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.165, Maximum: 0.888, Change: 438%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.835, Maximum: 0.112, Change: −87%</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.165, Maximum: 0.888, Change: 438%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only statistically significant results from Table 2 are shown here. All other variables are held at their means, except Joint Democracy and Alliance, which are held at 0.

12 percent. That disputants have a history of IO use increases the probability that an IO will be involved by 1615 percent over those disputants that have not previously worked with an IO. We also find that the variable
Claims, a surrogate measure of the multilateralism effect on dispute resolution choice, is negative and significant, suggesting that states with many disputes are less likely to involve IOs in their efforts to resolve international territorial claims. Substantively, those with the maximum number of other claims (20) are 80 percent less likely to involve an IO compared to those disputants with no other ongoing claims.

Model 2 uses the same population of cases but seeks to explain only the choice between seeking to resolve a dispute bilaterally or through a third party. Our expectation for this model is based on our arguments about the multilateral nature of IOs. We hypothesized that disputants with more ongoing disputes are likely to prefer bilateral negotiations to those involving a third party. Here we also find that the number of ongoing claims of the two disputants significantly impacts (in a negative way) their decision to seek a third-party mediator of any type. Claimants with many other ongoing claims are 43 percent less likely to involve a third party rather than negotiating bilaterally, and they are 48 percent more likely to negotiate bilaterally.

Model 3 only considers cases where disputants sought a third party to help them resolve their dispute. We expect that disputants will prefer to involve an IO rather than a state as conflict manager when the disputants have membership in highly institutionalized IOs, they have sought peaceful resolution through IOs in the past, and they do not have other ongoing disputes. We find that both Institutionalization1 and Institutionalization2 have significant and positive effects on the choice of IOs rather than states as mediators. Membership in highly institutionalized IOs and past IO involvement both significantly increase disputants’ use of an IO rather than a state as conflict manager. Claimants with membership in highly institutionalized IOs are 723 percent more likely to use an IO conflict manager compared to a state and 66 percent less likely to use a state manager. Claimants with a history of working with an IO are 388 percent more likely to engage an IO in their conflict management effort and 63 percent less likely to work with a state. The variable Claims in this model is negative but not significant. While we can say that disputants with more ongoing other disputes are less likely to prefer IO conflict managers to states ones, we cannot be completely confident that this relationship is not due to chance.

The results for control variables follow expectations. While the number of shared IO memberships and claim salience do not have a clear effect on IO use, claimants are more likely to engage in direct bilateral negotiations.
rather than bringing in a third party when both claimants are democratic. This falls in line with research findings that third parties are used in cases that are harder to resolve (Gartner and Bercovitch 2006). Others have shown democratic dyads are more likely to settle their conflicts peacefully (Dixon 1993). We also find that states with similar capabilities are more likely to involve both third parties and IOs in conflict management. Perhaps most important, the results of these tests show that, even when controlling for factors that have been found to predict states’ choices for conflict resolution, the measures of institutionalism and multilateralism independent variables are significant. In fact, these variables appear to take away some of the explanatory power of variables other scholars find to explain conflict management choices.

Figure 2 depicts the predicted probabilities of IO and third-party involvement across varying levels of our main explanatory variables. The top left figure shows an increase in the probability that an IO is involved in managing a claim from near zero to .25 when states have memberships in highly institutionalized IOs. The same pattern is true in the top right figure, which compares the involvement of IOs to states as conflict managers. The increase in the probability of IO involvement is stronger in this case, as the probability of IO involvement increases from almost .10 to almost .70. This pattern is repeated in our other test of institutionalization, and disputants with a history of working with IOs have an increase in the probability of working with an IO from approximately .1 to .8 generally and .2 to .7 in comparison to state management. The bottom graphs depict the impact of multilateralism on IO and third-party involvement. When disputants have no other claims, the probability of IO involvement is .15, but this decreases to almost .1 if they have twenty ongoing claims. Similarly, the probability of involving a third party decreases from almost .5 to .25 as the number of ongoing claims increases from zero to twenty. Overall, these graphs highlight the decreasing relationship between increased disputant claims and third-party involvement, and the more dramatic, negative relationship between claims and IO involvement.

Discussion and Conclusion

What explains states’ decisions to turn to IOs for dispute settlement? Our findings support both arguments deriving from the hypothesized institutional and multilateral character of IOs. Indeed, states with joint membership in strongly institutionalized IOs, which have the ability to extract
information from their members, are more likely to turn to such organizations to resolve their disputes ($H_1$, $H_{1A}$). We found support for this argument both in Model 1, which assumes a straightforward and direct decision of seeking IO support or not, and in Model 3, which reflects the second part of a two-step decision, when states have already opted for third-party mediation and are making up their mind whether they prefer IOs or states as mediators. These results imply that states indeed value the information that highly institutionalized IOs can offer to their negotiations.
Models 1 and 3 also found support for the arguments deriving from another form of institutionalism, the one reflecting how habits, norms, and the changes brought about by the constituencies of international institutions lead states to return to IOs to resolve their disputes, whether they were successful in previous instances of IO mediation or not (H₂, H₂A). Another way of interpreting these findings is that states that have never approached IOs in the past for resolving their disputes may hesitate doing so for the first time, even when there are good reasons for them to do so. Yet once states decide to resolve one such dispute, the “logjam” of other contentious disputes may be broken and we may see a flurry of dispute resolutions, often by using the same IO as a third party. This effect may, indeed, explain the very high significance of the variable Institutionalization2.

The models offer a more complex answer to the question of whether the states’ number of claims affects their decisions to involve IOs or other states as conflict managers (H₃, H₃A, and H₃B). At first sight, the findings of Model 1 suggest that, indeed, states that have multiple disputes will avoid using IOs as mediators for fear that the information they reveal will reach their other rivals. Yet Model 2 indicates that the same effect is present even when they decide whether to involve states (most often only one of them) as third-party mediators in their peaceful resolution. Model 3 shows that, once they have already decided to include one outside actor in their mediation (by moving away from bilateral negotiations), the number of claims they have does not really impact their choice for a third-party state or IO to help them resolve their dispute. Once they have decided to use a third-party mediator, they acknowledge that they will lose their monopoly over the private information relevant for the dispute, and it appears that whether one or more other states acquire such information is not essential for them. They will now work under the assumption that their rivals may have access to this information.

Another interpretation of the results involving the tests of H₁ and H₃ is that IOs affect both in a positive and a negative way the informational calculations of disputants. While the results supporting H₁ indicate that states will be drawn to IOs because of the information such organizations can extract from their rivals, the results involving H₃ suggest that they may fear the spread of such information when a third party becomes involved in the negotiations. While our study has sought to explain why certain states are more likely to turn to IOs for resolving their disputes, there are a series of related questions that are also important and that merit further research. First, it is important to determine whether the various resolutions to
disputes that are reached bilaterally, through state third parties, or through 
IO third parties differ in terms of their effectiveness and durability. While 
some of the literature addresses, at least in part, this question (e.g., Fearon 
1998; Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth 2008; Mitchell and Hensel 2007), it 
would be very useful for future research to disentangle even further such 
differences in outcome of conflict resolution processes, beyond the initial 
selection process discussed here.

Second, the present study focused on a set of important state character-
istics (primarily the number of ongoing disputes in which they are 
involved) that are relevant for their decision to choose an IO as third-party 
mediator. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that there are additional state 
qualities that will affect this important decision.

We need to be careful in teasing out any policy prescriptions from these 
findings. As a starting point, we argue that states should have at their disposal 
as many options as possible for resolving their disputes so that they can use 
the most appropriate ones. IOs are clearly an important type of third-party 
mediator and therefore should prepare to be selected by some states some 
of the time for seeking resolutions to their conflicts. The so called “crowded 
field” of individuals, states, and IOs (both governmental and nongovern-
mental) that can act as mediators (Jones 2007, 47) should not be viewed 
as a negative development discouraging some IOs from becoming involved 
in mediation. Indeed, there is evidence that some of the most prominent 
IOs, such as the UN and EU, sometimes avoid becoming involved in such 
mediation (e.g., Gentz 2007), in part because they mistakenly believe that 
states are better off turning to other existing third parties. Yet we posit that 
the more choices states have when selecting a mediator, the more likely it is 
that they will engage in peaceful resolution of their disputes.

The present study has also suggested that we need to understand better 
the potential factors that lead states to avoid IOs as third-party mediators 
and, if possible, to find ways of alleviating the fears that have often kept 
states away from them. On the one hand, this study has shown that one 
such factor affecting the use of IOs and states as third-party mediators 
in conflict resolution is that disputants that are entangled simultaneously 
in multiple other disputes fear that information about negotiations with 
one rival will adversely affect their settlement of other disputes. In other 
words, the potential information-generating advantage of IOs discussed 
in the literature (e.g., Mitchell and Hensel 2007) may turn into a disad-
vantage for two disputants seeking a resolution to conflict if other rivals 
may gain access to it. Indeed, although the increased transparency of IOs
over the past few decades has been lauded by most observers (e.g., Florini 1998; Grigorescu 2003), recent works have suggested, as do our results, that more public access to IO information can be a double-edged sword (Barkin 2015). By compartmentalizing the various types of information that can be released to the public and even to member-states that are not directly involved in negotiations, IOs can send signals that the private information of disputants is secure with them. Specifically, despite their multilateral character, when becoming involved in such delicate negotiations, IOs should consider limiting as much as possible the number of actors within the organization who have actual knowledge of the conflict resolution process. Just as important, they need to make it clear early on to both disputants that they value such discretion, in order to induce states to consider them as viable third-party mediators in the first place.

The policy prescriptions deriving from this study are not limited to IOs. Our findings suggest that states with multiple ongoing disputes need to be flexible in their decisions for selecting a mediator. Even if they were successful in resolving one dispute through a certain type of third-party mediator, they should not seek to return to such a mediator for a second dispute simply due to habit or to simplifying domestic institutional factors. In fact, after they resolve some disputes (perhaps through bilateral channels or through a state third-party mediator) they may want to reevaluate the usefulness of multilateral forums because, at that point, they will have fewer additional disputes to consider and, therefore, the private information that may be more easily spread through an IO is not quite as crucial as in the disputes that they have already resolved.

The finding that states value IOs’ abilities to extract information for the purpose of dispute settlement also implies that states with ongoing disputes should also be encouraged to join organizations that can step in as mediators. This should, of course, be balanced with other considerations that have been used when keeping states out of certain IOs until they fulfilled certain conditions that IO members considered important (such as the democratic conditions imposed on Council of Europe or EU prospective members).

Overall, we suggest that the more actors there are that can act as effective third parties for conflict resolution, the more likely it is that states will find an appropriate mechanism for their particular situation. As long as we recognize that there is no “one size fits all” approach to international conflict resolution, we may be able to develop increasingly refined mechanisms, including some in IOs, for helping states resolve their disputes.
Notes

1. In this study we use the term IOs to refer only to international governmental organizations. We do not discuss the often important role played by international nongovernmental organizations as third-party mediators. For example, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva focuses both on states already involved in armed conflict and on those that are not involved at that time in such conflict.

2. The identity-shaping characteristics of IOs can lead directly to improved relations between two disputants that are members of the same organization (through mechanisms similar to the ones discussed in the literature on the “contact hypothesis”). Our arguments here focus though on the indirect process through which IOs shape identities that increase the likelihood that disputants will return to IOs over and over when seeking resolutions to their disputes.

3. Keohane (1990, 731) refers to this type of multilateralism as “quantitative” multilateralism, emphasizing the difference in the number of actors involved in the negotiations.

4. Morocco, Russia, and Spain have been previously used as examples of such states with multiple ongoing disputes (Melin and Grigorescu 2014). India, mentioned in the introduction of this article, is yet another example of a state with multiple ongoing disputes.

5. The Issue Correlates of War data, which we use to test our hypotheses, includes 230 peaceful settlement attempts that are ad hoc forums and 91 cases involving IOs.

6. Some works have implied that there is a connection between the degree of multilateralism and the degree of institutionalization of IOs. Hansen et al. (2008) have noted that regional organizations tend to be less institutionalized than global ones. While this may indeed be true, the correlation between the two dimensions of IOs is far from perfect and we will therefore consider them separately.

7. We also tested our models in the post-WWII period only with similar results. A state’s decision to address a dispute peacefully is not a product of the temporal domain.

8. Interestingly, bilateral settlement attempts produce an agreement or treaty in 57 percent of these attempts, and third-party efforts produce an agreement or treaty in 51 percent of these efforts. The slight difference in success rates is likely due to the fact that third parties are more likely to be involved in cases that are difficult to resolve (Gartner and Bercovitch 2006).

9. These results hold when running the models without controls as well (results available upon request).

References


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