

# From territorial claims to identity claims: The Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) Project

Conflict Management and Peace Science

2017, Vol. 34(2) 126–140

© The Author(s) 2016

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0738894216652160

journals.sagepub.com/home/cmp



**Paul R Hensel**

University of North Texas, USA

**Sara McLaughlin Mitchell**

University of Iowa, USA

## Abstract

The Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) research project began nearly 20 years ago by collecting data on territorial claims in South America. Since then, the ICOW territorial claims dataset has expanded to cover the entire world, while ICOW has collected new data on river claims and maritime claims and is beginning a new project on identity claims. This article discusses the development and expansion of ICOW data, illustrating how the additional datasets offer important new information and open up new avenues for scholarship.

## Keywords

Ethnicity, ICOW, identity, maritime, rivers, territory

The Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) research project began in 1997 with the collection of data on territorial claims in South America from 1816 to 1992. Since that time, the project has expanded in spatial and temporal scope, now covering territorial claims around the world from 1816 to 2001 as well as river claims and maritime claims from 1900 to 2001. This article reviews the progress of the project to date as it has expanded to additional issue types beyond the original territorial claims and introduces a new expansion of the data project to collect identity claims.

## Territorial claims

The ICOW project began with the long-term goal of collecting data on multiple contentious issues in a way that would allow scholars to study the similarities and differences in how

---

### Corresponding author:

Paul R Hensel, Department of Political Science, University of North Texas, 1155 Union Circle, 305340, Denton, TX 76203-5017, USA.

Email: phensel@unt.edu

these issues have been managed (Hensel, 2001; Hensel et al., 2008). Scholars had previously speculated on differences between diplomatic issues (Mansbach and Vasquez, 1981; Rosenau, 1966), but there were no datasets that included many decades or centuries of interaction over issues. Recognizing that the task of collecting data on numerous issues at the same time would be impractical, the project began by focusing on territorial issues, which had been receiving the most scholarly attention in research on issues. Research on the causes of war in the early 1990s had identified geographic contiguity, or shared land or sea borders, as a key cause, leading to speculation that territorial claims may be the main reason for this finding (Bremer, 1992; Vasquez, 1993), and making the study of territorial claims a natural first issue for such a project.

The key to collecting data on contentious issues is to design a research strategy that is not tied to certain behaviors that might be considered dependent variables in issue-based studies, such as armed conflict. One of the reasons for the density of scholarly attention to territorial issues was the observation that territory was the most frequent issue in interstate wars (Holsti, 1991; Huth, 1996; Luard, 1986), along with the finding that militarized disputes over territory were more escalatory than disputes over other issues (Hensel, 1996; Vasquez and Henehan, 2001). Yet these analyses did not allow study of how many territorial issues did *not* lead to militarized conflict. In fact, a standard strategy is to start with a list of wars, militarized disputes, or crises, and then code the issues at stake.<sup>1</sup> While this helps us understand the configuration of issues in the set of dyadic interactions that escalate to serious threats or uses of force, we are missing information about diplomatic issues involving the same issues (e.g. a disputed land border) that never become militarized.

The ICOW project's solution was to code diplomatic disagreements over land or island territories, defining territorial claims as situations involving explicit contention between official government representatives regarding sovereignty over a specific piece of territory. This rules out situations where observers "know" that a leader's "true" motivation was probably to acquire territory but s/he never explicitly indicated this, as well as situations where the claim was stated by citizens who are not authorized to make foreign policy<sup>2</sup> or where a vague claim is made to "a route to the sea" or "Lebensraum" that could be obtained in numerous possible territories. The key element is being sure that the territorial claim is an official goal of the government's foreign policy, with the exclusion of borderline cases that may be official but lack sufficient documentation being seen as preferable to including cases that may not represent official government policy. The country challenging the issue status quo (e.g. by demanding sovereignty over territory that is currently being administered by another state) is identified as the challenger state, while the country defending the issue status quo is defined as the target state.

Using this definition, the ICOW Project identifies 841 territorial claims between 1816–2001, as shown in Table 1. For the purposes of comparison with later ICOW datasets on river and maritime claims, which are only collected for the period from 1900 to 2001, Table 1 separates these claims by the period when they began. During the nineteenth century, the largest group of claims began in the Western Hemisphere, as the former Spanish colonies in Latin America decolonized and sought to expand or clarify their borders; as these borders have been settled, the number of new claims in the region has decreased from 78 in the nineteenth century to just 50 since 1900. Europe experienced 54 claims in the nineteenth century and 182 since 1900, as dozens of new states were created after the First World War and after the Cold War. Asia and Oceania saw 52 claims in the nineteenth century and 165 since 1900, as most of the region has decolonized since the Second World War. Africa and the Middle

**Table I.** Territorial claims, 1816–2001

Region	Year when claim began		Total
	1816–1899	1900–2001	
Western Hemisphere	78	50	128
Europe	54	182	237
Africa	34	127	161
Middle East	5	94	94
Asia and Oceania	52	165	217
<i>Total</i>	223	618	841

East saw the outbreak of relatively few claims in the nineteenth century, most of which involved colonial competition between the European great powers, but both regions have seen many more claims as the former colonies have become independent after the Second World War. This gives us a much more complete picture of the amount of diplomatic contention over territory than was possible in earlier research that only studied the issues involved in armed conflicts.

Identifying the number of claims is only part of the contribution of the issues approach to world politics. Most proponents of an issues framework also argue that issues vary in salience or importance.<sup>3</sup> This typically includes two types of variation: differences in salience between broad issue types (e.g. with territorial claims generally being more salient than other issues) and within each type of issue (with certain claimed territories being more salient than others). This is another limitation of previous research, which could only distinguish between broad issue types, as in the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset's distinction between territorial, regime, policy, and other issues or Holsti's identification of several dozen different types of issues that have been involved in interstate wars since 1648, such as territory, government composition, enforcing treaty terms, and protecting ethnic or religious confederates.

The ICOW project addresses variation in salience for territorial claims by developing a salience index to measure the value of the claimed territory, with six attributes that might be present in the territory for each of the two claimant states (Hensel and Mitchell 2005). This includes three tangible attributes (a permanent population, economic resources, and a strategic location) and three intangible factors (claiming the territory as part of the national homeland rather than as a dependency, an identity connection to the territory or its residents owing to ethnic or religious ties, and a history of sovereignty over the territory). Each attribute that is relevant for each claimant state contributes one point to the index, producing a range from 0 to 12. While one might argue that more precise measures would be useful, such as measuring the dollar value of natural resources in each disputed territory, estimating the amount of each resource in each territory as well as the dollar value of this resource over the duration of the claim would be essentially impossible over the two-century span of the ICOW dataset. Despite the lack of precision, the resulting salience measure has high face validity.

The issues approach also emphasizes the importance of studying the numerous ways that contentious issues can be managed, which includes the threat or use of military force as well as such peaceful techniques such as bilateral negotiations between the claimants, non-binding

**Table 2.** Militarization of territorial claims, 1816–2001

	Year when claim began		Total
	1816–1899	1900–2001	
<i>(A) Any MID over claim</i>			
I+ MID(s)?			
Yes	88 (39.5%)	258 (41.8%)	346 (41.1%)
No	135	360	495
<i>Total</i>	223	618	841
<i>(B) Fatal MID over claim</i>			
I+ Fatal MID(s)?			
Yes	51 (22.9%)	175 (28.3%)	226 (26.9%)
No	172	443	615
<i>Total</i>	223	618	841

third-party assistance such as good offices or mediation, and binding third-party assistance such as arbitration and adjudication. The ICOW project collects data on all militarized and peaceful settlement attempts in order to determine both the frequency and success of such attempts.

Table 2 reports on militarization of the 841 dyadic ICOW territorial claims, including two types of militarization: any MID and MID(s) that produced at least one battlefield fatality. Both forms of conflict are based on the Correlates of War project's Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset (Palmer et al., 2015); the ICOW project examines every MID that occurs during an ongoing territorial claim, consulting historical sources and news archives to determine whether or not it was related to that specific issue claim. The information in this table allows us to return to the original point about identifying contentious issues separately from specific types of behavior, indicating that only 41.1% of territorial claims produce even a single threat or use of military force, and only 26.9% produce a single fatality from militarized conflict. Both figures are slightly higher for territorial claims that began after 1900, with 41.8% of such claims experiencing armed conflict and 28.3% experiencing fatal conflict over the territory.<sup>4</sup>

This empirical pattern demonstrates one of the key contributions of the issue approach to world politics. While territorial issues have been associated with more wars in history than any other type of issue (Holsti, 1991), more than half of all disputed territories have been managed and settled peacefully, without a single threat or use of armed force. By selecting on conflicts and studying issues, we could not understand the processes that lead to successful peaceful settlement for diplomatic issues that avoid escalation.

The territorial claims dataset has been useful for a number of purposes. Claim salience greatly increases the risk of militarized conflict over the claim, while also increasing the likelihood of peaceful attempts to settle the claim through bilateral negotiations or third party activities (Hensel, 2001; Hensel et al., 2008). Militarized conflict is more likely when the challenger is more powerful than the target state holding the territory (Bell, 2016). A history of recent armed conflict and a history of failed negotiations over the claim also increases the likelihood of both future conflict and future efforts to settle peacefully, particularly involving third parties that seek to manage or end the threat to regional stability (Hensel, 2001; Hensel et al., 2008). Other scholars have found similar results using alternative datasets

**Table 3.** Typology of contentious issues by claim salience

	Low Intangible salience	High Intangible salience
High Tangible salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River (Turkish dam projects on Euphrates River)</li> <li>• Maritime (Cod Wars)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territory (Golan Heights, Alsace–Lorraine)</li> </ul>
Low Tangible salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firms or industries (Airbus subsidies, shrimp imports)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity (Germans in South Tyrol, Russians in Ukraine)</li> </ul>

(Huth, 1996; Huth and Allee, 2002). Settling territorial claims also reduces the risk of future conflict between the claimants, increases the chances of successful democratization (Gibler, 2012; Owsiak, 2012; Owsiak and Rider, 2013), and enhances the chances for long-term (negative) peace (Owsiak et al., 2016).

### River and maritime claims

It is important to recognize that from the very beginning the ICOW project was meant to collect data on multiple types of contentious issues in a way that would allow empirical comparison of issue management. This was the reason the project was called the *Issue Correlates of War* rather than something more one-dimensional like *Territorial Correlates of War*. This is one important distinction between the ICOW dataset and related datasets such as Huth and Allee's territorial dispute dataset, which includes only territorial issues and a more limited temporal domain than ICOW (extending back to 1919). Contested water issues were a natural extension of disputes over land, particularly in light of research on regime type and disputed issues.<sup>5</sup>

Hensel et al. (2008) present a simple typology of contentious issues, based on whether the issue in question typically has high or low values for tangible salience, based on tangible values of security, survival, and wealth, and for intangible salience, based on intangible values of culture/identity, equality/justice, independence, and status/prestige/influence. This produces the typology in Table 3.

The first issue type to be studied by the ICOW Project, territorial claims, is seen as having relatively high values on both tangible and intangible salience. For example, Alsace–Lorraine had high tangible value for both France and Prussia/Germany because of its large population centers, coal and iron ore deposits, and strategic military location. The territory also had high intangible value for both claimants because both states considered it part of their homeland rather than a colony, the inhabitants were largely ethnically German while considering themselves French, and both Germany and France had histories of sovereignty over the area. While this helps to make territorial claims interesting cases to study and may account for the earlier observation that territory is the most conflictual issue historically, a systematic issues approach requires the study of less salient issues as well as the most salient ones.

ICOW data collection thus expanded to include river claims and maritime claims under a National Science Foundation grant in 2001. This expansion added two issue types that have

relatively high levels of tangible salience, owing to the importance of fresh water and resources such as fish or undersea oil, but relatively low levels of intangible salience, as the water and fish in question do not have strong symbolic or psychological value to most citizens beyond their tangible benefits. Since that time, water issues have become more prominent in global politics, as stories about the Spratly or Senkaku Islands regularly fill the pages of Western newspapers.

River and maritime claims follow the same basic definition as territorial claims, requiring explicit contention between official government representatives. The only difference lies in the nature of the contested issue, which for river claims requires disagreement over the usage of a shared river (typically pollution, large-scale irrigation projects, or dam construction), and for maritime claims requires disagreement over ownership or access to a maritime zone (typically for fishing rights, access to undersea resources such as oil, or navigation rights). These are very different in nature from states demanding sovereignty over territory. Most river claims involve the usage of shared rivers with no claim that the entire river should be under the challenger state's sovereignty, although a few involve the usage of rivers that flow through claimed territories (e.g. the Jordan River) or rivers that form territorial borders (e.g. the Shatt al-Arab). Similarly, most maritime claims involve the usage of maritime zones that may be adjacent to the national territory or may be further away and often involve resource extraction. However, some contested claims over the boundaries for 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones stem from disagreements over territorial sovereignty over islands or the national coastline from which the maritime zone extends into the sea (e.g. the Falkland Islands). Expanding ICOW data collection to include these issue types allows scholars to investigate disagreements over shared resources even where territorial sovereignty is not directly at stake.<sup>6</sup>

The salience scale for river and maritime claims is comparable to the territorial claim salience, with a 0–12 index that considers six attributes of the claimed river or maritime zone for each claimant. For river claims, this includes five tangible attributes reflecting the value of the river for the states that possess or control it: whether the river is used for navigation (of people or commerce), fishing/resource extraction, hydroelectric power generation, irrigation, or to support a permanent population living in nearby villages or cities. It also includes one of the intangible elements used in the territorial claims dataset, indicating whether the river flows through the state's homeland territory (seen as more salient) rather than through a colonial or dependent possession that the state rules.

For maritime claims, the salience index similarly relies on tangible attributes reflecting the value of the claimed maritime zone for the state(s) that possess or control it: whether the waters include fisheries, migratory fish stocks, undersea oil or gas deposits, a strategic location, or involvement in an ongoing territorial claim. Like both territorial and river salience, this also includes one intangible element, indicating whether the waters lie offshore from the state's homeland territory (seen as more salient) rather than from a colonial or dependent possession that the state rules. It is worth noting that for both river and maritime claims, these salience measures almost exclusively capture tangible dimensions of issue salience, consistent with the description of issues in Table 3.

Table 4 compares the frequency of territorial, river, and maritime claims that began between 1900 and 2001. Territorial claims were the most common of the three issue types during this era, with the 618 new claims over territory more than double the 267 maritime claims and more than quadruple the 143 river claims during this time frame.<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps not surprising, given the number of new states that have become independent since 1900. It

**Table 4.** Territorial, river, and maritime claims, 1900–2001

Region	Territorial claims	River claims	Maritime claims
Western Hemisphere	50	28	67
Europe	182	30	75
Africa	127	16	50
Middle East	94	47	28
Asia and Oceania	165	22	47
<i>Total</i>	<i>618</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>267</i>

**Table 5.** Militarization of territorial, river, and maritime claims, 1900–2001

	Type of contentious issue:		
	Territorial claims	River claims	Maritime claims
<i>(A) Any MIDs over claim</i>			
I+ MIDs?			
Yes	258 (41.8%)	16 (11.2%)	73 (27.3%)
No	360	127	194
<i>Total</i>	<i>618</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>267</i>
<i>(B) Fatal MIDs over claim</i>			
I+ MIDs?			
Yes	175 (28.3%)	5 (3.5%)	11 (4.1%)
No	443	138	256
<i>Total</i>	<i>618</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>267</i>

is worth noting that the region that saw most of its states become independent during the nineteenth century, the Western Hemisphere, is the only region to see more maritime than territorial claims begin during this time, as well as one of only two regions (along with the Middle East) to experience more than half as many river claims as territorial claims.

Comparing the relative militarization of the new issue types with territorial claims (Table 5) also offers some instructive lessons. Focusing on the common period covered by all three types of issues (1900–2001), 41.8% of territorial claims during this period feature at least one militarized interstate dispute, while 28.9% produce at least one fatal militarized dispute. River claims have been the least likely of the three issues to lead to armed conflict, with only 11.2% of all claims producing even a single militarized dispute, and only 3.5% producing at least one fatal dispute. Maritime claims fall in the middle, with 27.3% of all claims producing at least one militarized dispute, but many of these disputes are bloodless seizures of fishing boats; only 4.1% of such claims produce fatalities. Pacific patterns of contention over cross-border rivers are consistent with other data collection projects, such as the Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database, which notes the density of cooperative treaties to settle transnational water issues and the paucity of water wars in these scenarios (Wolf, 1998).

Research using the river and maritime claims datasets has generated important findings about these two types of issues. Hensel et al. (2006) find that greater water scarcity in the river basin increases the likelihood of both militarized conflict and peaceful negotiations, but

that river institutions reduce armed conflict and increase the effectiveness of peaceful management. Brochmann and Hensel (2009, 2011) find that greater water scarcity in the basin generally increases the risk of a new river claim, but also increases the likelihood and effectiveness of peaceful settlement attempts (as both sides need access to the shared resource), and the existence of treaties over the river increases the likelihood of peaceful management (Mitchell and Zawahri, 2015). With respect to maritime claims, Nemeth et al. (2014) find that institutionalization and legalization matter; membership in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) reduces the likelihood of new maritime claims and increases third party involvement when such claims begin, while legally declared exclusive economic zones (EEZs) increase the success of peaceful settlement attempts.

In addition to these issue-specific findings, collection of data on three separate contentious issues has also demonstrated the utility of the issue-based approach to world politics more generally. Higher levels of issue salience increase the likelihood of both militarized conflict and peaceful settlement attempts across all three issues, while a history of militarized conflict and failed attempts for peaceful negotiations helps to predict future conflict and negotiations over the issues at stake (Hensel et al., 2008). On the other hand, we find differences across these issues as well. Territorial claims involve more militarized conflict and wars than river or maritime claims, and disputing parties have been reluctant to settle border disputes through international courts. Maritime claims, on the other hand, are increasingly being addressed through the creation of a multilateral institution, UNCLOS, which is widely accepted by most countries in the world, and whose member states are willing to utilize third party settlement including courts like the International Court of Justice or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. River claims are more typically settled through regional treaties that include provisions for river basin organizations, information sharing, sanctioning, and monitoring. The density of institutional mechanisms for resolving water-based issues reflects the greater ease with which countries can design treaties and institutions to settle issues that involve primarily tangible and divisible stakes.<sup>8</sup>

ICOW analyses have also taught us much about the use and success of various conflict management strategies. Third parties are more likely to become involved to help resolve contentious issues when the issue is more salient (Hansen et al., 2008; Kadera and Mitchell, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2008), when the international system is filled with more democratic members (Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2008), when the issue has been militarized previously, and when the claimant states all belong to a greater number of peace-promoting international organizations (Hansen et al., 2008; Kadera and Mitchell, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2008; Shannon, 2005, 2009). Of course, disputing states *prefer* to settle things on their own (through bilateral negotiations)—particularly when they are jointly democratic and relatively equal in capabilities (Hensel, 2001; Mitchell, 2002). Yet international organizations are viewed as “acceptable” mediators under certain conditions—especially if the claimant states are relative equals, share membership in many international organizations, and if the issue is highly salient (Hansen et al., 2008).

Finally, analyses of ICOW data reveal many interesting patterns about the *success* of various conflict management strategies as well. Claimant states, for example, are more likely to comply with agreements reached to end contentious issues if they are struck with the assistance of international institutions and if the techniques employed are binding on the parties (specifically, arbitration and adjudication; Mitchell and Hensel, 2007; see also Allee and Huth, 2006). This suggests that international organizations serve an important conflict management purpose. Indeed, international organizations are frequently effective at helping



states resolve contentious issues, particularly if the organizations are highly institutionalized, if their memberships are more democratic, and if their members share foreign policy preferences (Hansen et al., 2008). International courts—as specific international organizations—are key players in this broader trend; states strike peaceful agreements more readily when they can sue each other in the World Court (Mitchell and Powell, 2011). Finally, the global democratic community at large fosters the use and success of peaceful conflict management strategies as well—largely through the spread of democratic institutions and international organizations, which creates a greater supply of unbiased, credible mediators (Crescenzi et al., 2011; Kadera and Mitchell, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2008).

Third parties, however, only tell part of the settlement story. Claimant states regularly try to resolve issues on their own, and how they do so affects their success. As an illustration, militarized techniques are much less successful than peaceful conflict management techniques in helping claimants resolve the underlying issues at stake (Hensel, 2003). Even worse, these militarized techniques can erode peace, even among democratic states. Highly salient and previously militarized issues—especially contentious border disputes between rival states—can threaten the peaceful interactions typically observed between democratic states (James et al., 2006; Lektzian et al., 2010; Mitchell and Prins, 1999).

Cumulatively, these findings demonstrate the thoroughness of the ICOW approach, the rich nuance that its data can unearth, and the value it adds to our understanding of interstate interactions. As the ICOW project nears the completion of its current data collection process (for territorial, river, and maritime claims), it is the ideal moment to gather data on another important contentious issue, identity claims.

## **Identity claims**

As discussed above, territorial claims typically have relatively high values of both tangible and intangible salience, while river and maritime claims typically have high tangible salience but relatively low intangible salience. This still leaves two cells from the conceptual framework in Table 3 that we have not studied systematically. In order to address this gap, the ICOW project is now moving on to fill another cell by collecting data on identity claims.

As with the other ICOW issues, an identity claim requires explicit contention between official government representatives. The substantive nature of these issues is the treatment or status of an ethnic group that is shared by the challenger and target states in the claim. In such a claim, the challenger might be supporting or demanding better treatment or equality for its ethnic kin in the target state, or may go further to demand regional autonomy, independence, or even unification with the challenger state itself. Examples include Austria's interest in protecting ethnic Germans in the former Austrian province of South Tyrol after the area was transferred to Italy, Hungary's interest in protecting ethnic Hungarians in neighboring Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia since the post-First World War Treaty of Trianon, and Russia's interest in protecting ethnic Russians in former Soviet republics since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Generally speaking, most identity claims are distinct from territorial claims, in that they only seek to improve the status of the shared ethnic group, whether this involves better treatment, equal rights, autonomy, or independence; only one category of these claims—irredentist demands for unification of the shared ethnic group with the challenger state—involves a demand for territorial sovereignty by the challenger state.

Identifying the population of potentially relevant ethnic groups for study is more difficult than identifying international borders, rivers, or maritime zones. Rather than produce our own definition and our own original list of ethnic groups, we have chosen to follow the definition and data provided by the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset (Vogt et al., 2015) and the related Transborder Ethnic Kin (TEK) dataset (Cederman et al., 2010, 2013). This approach, drawing from Max Weber, defines ethnicity as “a subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and shared culture” (Vogt et al., 2015: 4). These datasets are widely used in scholarly research on ethnic conflict and civil war and their identification of ethnic groups that both identify themselves as distinct from their countrymen (EPR) and share ties across international borders (TEK) offers an ideal starting point for identifying potential identity claims.

The TEK dataset identifies 157 ethnic groups shared by at least two states between 1946 and 2013.<sup>9</sup> Aggregating these states into dyads produces a total of 1218 dyadic shared groups, such as Turkey and Iraq sharing ethnic Kurds or Russia and Estonia sharing ethnic Russians. Each such dyadic shared group is being investigated to determine whether or not the two governments in the dyad had an explicit disagreement over the treatment or status of the group in one or both states. Consistent with the other ICOW datasets, each qualifying claim that is identified will be studied in greater detail to determine the salience of the claimed group to each state and to collect data on how the claim was managed and (where relevant) resolved.

The measurement of identity claim salience is similar to the first three datasets, producing a range from 0 to 6 for each claimant state and from 0 to 12 overall. Salience for the first three datasets was measured by attributes of the territory, river, or maritime zone that would benefit the state(s) that possessed or controlled it, such as the presence of natural resources or a strategic location. Salience for identity claims is similarly measured by attributes of the ethnic group in question, focusing on the similarity and relationship between the group and the claimant state; the closer the similarity and relationship are, the more salient the claim is to the state in question. This includes measures of whether the shared ethnic group has the same ethnicity, religion, and language as the plurality of the state’s citizens; whether the group has recently been ruled as part of the state within the past two centuries; whether the group is primarily located in a regional base near the border (for the challenger state) or distributed statewide (for the target state); and whether the group is located in the claimant state’s homeland or a dependency.

One obvious benefit of collecting the identity claims dataset is the extension of research on contentious issues. Of the three issue types that have been collected so far, both river and maritime claims have relatively high tangible salience but relatively low intangible salience, while territorial claims are relatively high on both dimensions. One study that has compared the tangible and intangible dimensions of territorial claims has found that greater levels of both dimensions of salience increase the likelihood of armed conflict, while greater levels of intangible salience increase the success of peaceful settlements and greater levels of tangible salience have the opposite effect (Hensel and Mitchell, 2005). Wars are also more likely when territorial claims are high in intangible salience. It remains to be seen, though, whether this is also true of entire issue areas that typically have higher intangible salience, such as identity claims.

There are also many unique questions that can only be addressed once this new identity claims dataset has been collected. For example, some have suggested that the international system has increasingly accepted a territorial integrity norm (Hensel et al., 2009; Zacher,

2001), which should reduce the onset of new territorial claims and promote the settlement of ongoing claims. If this is correct, then we might expect identity claims to become increasingly frequent as states find the international system opposing irredentist efforts to annex territories where their kinsmen live, and instead focus their efforts on improving the lives of their kinsmen abroad. Similarly, if this norm matters, states that lose territory through territorial claims may be more likely to try to improve the lives of their ethnic kin through identity claims rather than through new territorial claims for the recovery of the lost territory as the norm has strengthened.

On a related note, a recent study (Hensel and Macaulay, 2015) has examined the conditions under which states sharing an ethnic group are likely to begin an irredentist territorial claim that includes an identity element for the challenger state. This paper's analyses are based on the territorial claims dataset rather than the new ICOW identity claims dataset, so they only include cases where an explicit demand was made for territorial sovereignty over the area where the shared group lives. Such claims are most likely when the shared ethnic group makes up a majority of the population and at least part of the ruling political coalition in the challenger state, when the group is involved in an ethnic war or has recently lost political status in the target state, and when fewer states support the global territorial integrity norm. Once the identity claims dataset is collected, future research should follow up on this study by investigating the conditions under which states are more likely to pursue non-irredentist identity claims rather than such overt territorial demands, as well as the ways that these different types of claims are managed.

Another example is the relationship between international disagreements and domestic sovereignty. Territorial questions between states have often been managed through international courts, but identity claims would seem to be fundamentally different. The status of an ethnic group within a given state would seem to fall under the heading of sovereignty, as a domestic political question that should be left for the sovereign state to decide without any foreign interference. If this is so, then states should be much less likely to submit their identity claims questions to the jurisdiction of any external third party, which would effectively remove one of the options that has been found to be most effective at settling territorial, river, and maritime claims (Mitchell and Hensel, 2007).

## **Conclusions**

In keeping with the territorial theme of this special issue, systematic research on contentious issues began with a primary focus on territorial issues. The earliest work used data on the issues involved in armed conflict to reveal that territorial issues have been especially conflictual. The ICOW project's first dataset, covering territorial claims between states over the past two centuries, has greatly improved our understanding of this central issue beyond the original research that focused only on the issues involved in armed conflicts. This includes a more complete understanding of the management of territory, ranging from the temporal and geographic distribution of territorial claims around the world to the surprising fact that over half of these claims are managed and settled without resort to the threat or use of military force.

The expansion of ICOW to collect data on river and maritime claims made additional contributions to the scholarly understanding of contentious issues. There are notable similarities in the ways that all three issue types are managed, with both armed conflict and

peaceful management being more likely when the issue at stake is more salient, when there is a recent history of armed conflict over the issue, and when recent peaceful attempts to manage the issue have failed. Much has been learned from studies of the combined datasets about the conditions under which peaceful conflict management is most likely to be effective. We have also learned more about the unique details of each type of issue, ranging from the positive effects of both water scarcity and river institutions on peaceful river claim management to the reduction in maritime claims associated with UNCLOS membership and the increasing success of peaceful management efforts associated with legally declared EEZs.

The next stage of ICOW data collection, focusing on identity claims, holds the potential to improve our understanding of issues even further. This will be the first collection of systematic data on an issue that is primarily intangible in salience rather than primarily tangible or mixed, offering the possibility of new analyses of how the intangibility of an issue's salience affects its management. As with river and maritime claims, there are also unique elements of identity claims that can be analyzed, ranging from the centrality of domestic sovereignty in the target state to the possibility that identity claims will become more prominent as the global territorial integrity norm continues to strengthen.

In conclusion, the systematic study of territorial claims has ignited an entire research program focused on contentious issues. Two decades of systematic data collection and analysis have revealed much about the nature of territorial, river, and maritime claims, and it is to be hoped that similar insights can be gained into identity claims in coming years. While many research programs have begun to stagnate by the end of their second decade, we believe that research on contentious issues is stronger than ever, and we look forward to seeing where scholars take this research in the future.

### **Author note**

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference "New Directions in the Study of Territory and Political Violence: Advancing Theory, Methods, and Data Collection," Knoxville, TN, 6 June 2015.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors wish to thank the other conference participants and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

### **Funding**

ICOW data collection efforts have been funded by the National Science Foundation (SES-0960320; SES-0214417; SES-0079421), the US Agency for International Development (AID-OAA-A-12-00070), and the Department of Defense's Minerva Research Initiative (Office of Naval Research award N00014-16-1-2072).

### **Notes**

1. GIBLER (2016), for example, codes detailed information about territorial issues at stake in militarized interstate disputes (MIDs).
2. For example, a Canadian legislator made a claim to the Turks and Caicos in 2004 (USA Today, 2004).

3. For an overview of the issue approach in ICOW research and more broadly, see Hensel (2001), Hensel and Mitchell (2005), Hensel et al. (2008), and Mitchell and Hensel (2010).
4. ICOW has also coded over 3000 peaceful settlement attempts for territorial, maritime, and river claims in multiple regions. Bilateral negotiations are utilized most frequently (in about 70% of the cases), with mediation being the most frequent form of third-party conflict management. While international courts or arbitration panels are employed in less than 10% of all peaceful settlement attempts, they are the most successful form of peaceful conflict management (Mitchell and Hensel, 2007).
5. The finding by Mitchell and Prins (1999) that many jointly democratic MIDTs involved maritime resources prompted the addition of maritime claims to ICOW data. While democracies do not typically challenge their neighboring democracies' land borders, the frequency of contention over maritime spaces is most likely for jointly democratic dyads, even more so than for mixed or autocratic dyads (Daniels and Mitchell, 2016).
6. Both the river claim and maritime claim datasets include variables indicating whether the river or maritime zone is associated with an ongoing territorial claim, allowing users to separate these cases or control for the impact of the territorial claim.
7. The figures for territorial and river claims in this and subsequent tables are complete. Maritime claim data collection is only complete for claims in the Americas and Europe; maritime data for the remaining regions of the world is estimated in these tables based on the current state of data collection.
8. However, institutions are less likely to form in resource scarce regions (Hensel et al., 2006).
9. Because the EPR and TEK datasets are currently limited to 1946–2013, our identity claims dataset will also face the same limitation. EPR and TEK will presumably continue to update their datasets into future years, but unless they also extend their data back in time, we will be unable to examine identity claims before the Cold War era.

## References

- Allee TL and Huth PK (2006) Legitimizing dispute settlement: International legal rulings as domestic political cover. *American Political Science Review* 100(2): 219–234.
- Bell SR (2017) Power, territory, and interstate conflict. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, this issue.
- Bremer SA (1992) Dangerous dyads: Conditions affecting the likelihood of interstate war, 1816–1965. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36(2): 309–341.
- Brochmann M and Hensel PR (2009) Peaceful management of international river claims. *International Negotiation* 14(2): 391–416.
- Brochmann M and Hensel PR (2011) The effectiveness of negotiations over international river claims. *International Studies Quarterly* 55(3): 859–882.
- Cederman L-E, Wimmer A and Min B (2010) Why do ethnic groups rebel? New data and analysis. *World Politics* 62(1): 87–119.
- Cederman L-E, Gleditsch KS, Salehyan I and Wucherpfennig J (2013) Transborder ethnic kin and civil war. *International Organization* 67(2): 389–410.
- Crescenzi MJC, Kadera KM, Mitchell SM and Thyne CL (2011) A supply side theory of mediation. *International Studies Quarterly* 55(4): 1069–1094.
- Daniels K and Mitchell SM. (2016) Bones of democratic contention: Maritime disputes. Working paper. Available from: <http://www.saramitchell.org/research.html>
- Gibler DM (2012) *The Territorial Peace: Borders, State Development and International Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibler DM (2017) What they fight for: Specific issues in militarized interstate disputes, 1816–2001. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, this issue.

- Hansen H, Mitchell SM and Nemeth SC (2008) IO mediation of interstate conflicts: Moving beyond the global vs. regional dichotomy. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52(2): 295–325.
- Hensel PR (1996) Charting a course to conflict: Territorial issues and militarized interstate disputes, 1816–1992. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15(1): 43–73.
- Hensel PR (2001) Contentious issues and world politics: The management of territorial claims in the Americas, 1816–1992. *International Studies Quarterly* 45(1): 81–109.
- Hensel PR (2003) Militarized management of territorial claims in the Americas, 1816–2001. Presented at the *Joint Meeting of the International Studies Association and CEEISA*, Budapest, 27 June.
- Hensel PR and Macaulay C (2015) Ethnic/identity issues and interstate territorial conflict. Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association*, New Orleans, LA, February 2015.
- Hensel PR and Mitchell SM (2005) Issue indivisibility and territorial claims. *GeoJournal* 64 (4): 275–285.
- Hensel PR, Mitchell SM and Sowers TE II (2006) Conflict management of riparian disputes: A regional comparison of dispute resolution. *Political Geography* 25(4): 383–411.
- Hensel PR, Mitchell SM, Sowers TE II and Thyne CL (2008) Bones of contention: Comparing territorial, maritime, and river issues. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52(1): 117–143.
- Hensel PR, Allison M and Khanani A (2009) Territorial integrity treaties and armed conflict over territory. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26(2): 120–143.
- Holsti KJ (1991) *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huth P (1996) *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Huth PK and Allee T (2002) *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- James P, Park J and Choi SW (2006) Democracy and conflict management: Territorial claims in the Western Hemisphere revisited. *International Studies Quarterly* 50(4): 803–818.
- Kadera KM and Mitchell SM. (2005) Heeding Ray's advice: An exegesis on control variables in systemic democratic peace research. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 22, 4: 311–326.
- Lektzian D, Prins BC and Souva M (2010) Territory, river, and maritime claims in the Western Hemisphere: Regime type, rivalry, and MIDs, 1901 to 2000. *International Studies Quarterly* 54(4): 1073–1098.
- Luard E (1986) *War in International Society*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Mansbach R and Vasquez JA (1981) *In Search of Theory: A New Paradigm for Global Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mitchell SM (2002) A Kantian system? Democracy and third party conflict resolution. *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 749–759.
- Mitchell SM and Hensel PR (2007) International institutions and compliance with agreements over contentious issues. *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 721–737.
- Mitchell SM and Hensel PR (2010) Issues and conflict. In: Jakobsen TG (ed.), *War: An Introduction to Theories and Research on Collective Violence*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science, pp. 275–295.
- Mitchell SM and Prins BC (1999) Beyond territorial contiguity: Issues at stake in democratic militarized interstate disputes. *International Studies Quarterly* 43(1): 169–183.
- Mitchell SM and Zawahri NA (2015) The effectiveness of treaty design in addressing water disputes. *Journal of Peace Research* 52(2): 187–200.
- Mitchell SM, Kadera KM and Crescenzi MJC (2008) Practicing democratic community norms: Third party conflict management and successful settlements. In: Bercovitch J and Gartner SS (eds), *International Conflict Mediation: New Approaches and Findings*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 243–264.
- Mitchell SM and Powell EJ (2011) *Domestic Law Goes Global: Legal Traditions and International Courts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moore WH (2002) Ethnic minorities and foreign policy. *SAIS Review* XXII(2): 77–90.

- Nemeth SC, Mitchell SM, Nyman EA and Hensel PR (2014) Ruling the sea: Managing maritime conflicts through UNCLOS and exclusive economic zones. *International Interactions* 40(5): 711–736.
- Owsiak AP (2012) Signing up for peace: International boundary agreements, democracy, and militarized interstate conflict. *International Studies Quarterly* 56(1): 51–66.
- Owsiak AP and Rider TJ (2013) Clearing the hurdle: Border settlement and rivalry termination (with Toby J. Rider). *Journal of Politics* 75(3): 757–772.
- Owsiak A, Diehl PF and Goertz G (2017) Border settlement and the movement toward negative peace. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, this issue.
- Palmer G, D’Orazio V, Kenwick M and Lane M (2015) The MID4 Data Set: Procedures, coding rules, and description. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32(April): 222–242.
- Rosenau JN (1966) Pre-theories and theories of foreign policy. In: Farrell RB (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*. New York: Free Press, pp. 27–93.
- Shannon M (2005) The democratic community and the expansion of international organizations. PhD dissertation, University of Iowa.
- Shannon M (2009) Preventing war and providing the peace? International organizations and the management of territorial disputes. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26(2): 144–163.
- USA Today (26 March 2004) Canada could ditch winter blues by annexing Caribbean paradise. Available from: [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/news/2004-03-26-canada-caribbean\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/news/2004-03-26-canada-caribbean_x.htm)
- Vasquez JA (1993) *The War Puzzle*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Vasquez JA and Henehan MT (2001) Territorial issues and the probability of war, 1816–1992. *Journal of Peace Research* 38(1): 123–138.
- Vogt M, Bormann NC, Rüeegger S, Cederman LE, Hunziker P and Girardin L (2015) Integrating data on ethnicity, geography, and conflict: The ethnic power relations dataset family. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, in press.
- Wolf AT (1998) Conflict and cooperation over international waterways. *Water Policy* 1(2): 251–265.
- Zacher M (2001) The territorial integrity norm: International boundaries and the use of force. *International Organization* 55(2): 215–250.