Authoritarian Subtypes and Conflict Initiation

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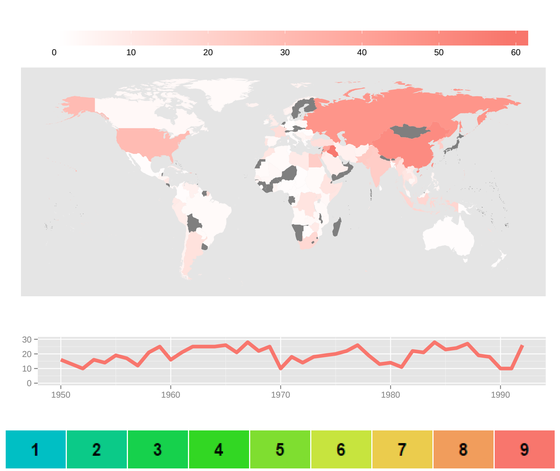
Summary

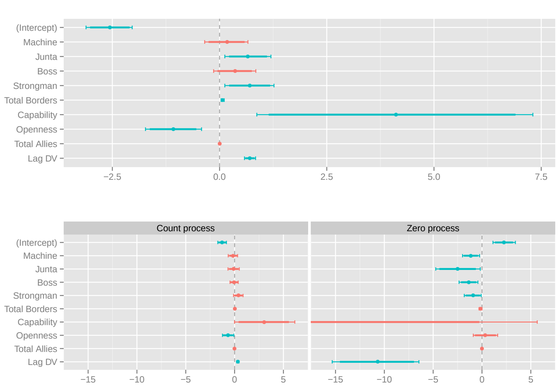
Lai and Slater (2006), LS, argue that military regimes are more likely than party regimes to initiate militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), regardless of personalization. They test this claim using a negative binomial model and Slater's (2003) regime typology, classifying authoritarian regimes by "infrastructural institutions" (party vs. military) and "despotic institutions" (oligarchic vs. autocratic). Their assertion does not stand up to systematic uncertainty or to an alternative zero-inflated negative binomial model, which outpredicts the LS model by a factor of five in-sample. Instead, differences in regime classification have little impact upon major MID initiation, a fact supported by out-of-sample testing.

Data

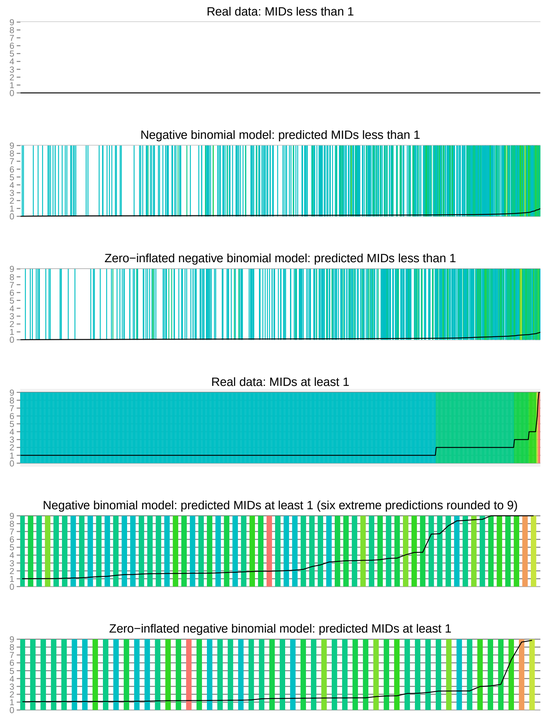
The LS dataset contains 829 major MIDs (638 country-years) from 1950 to 1992. 97.4% of the 4940 observations $\in \{0, 1\}$.



Coefficient Plots

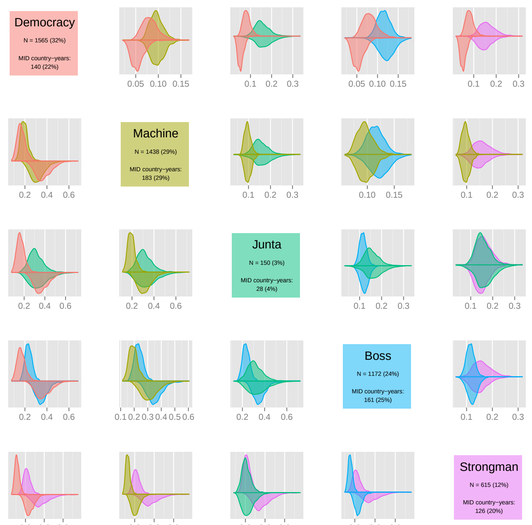


Pseudo-Separation Plots

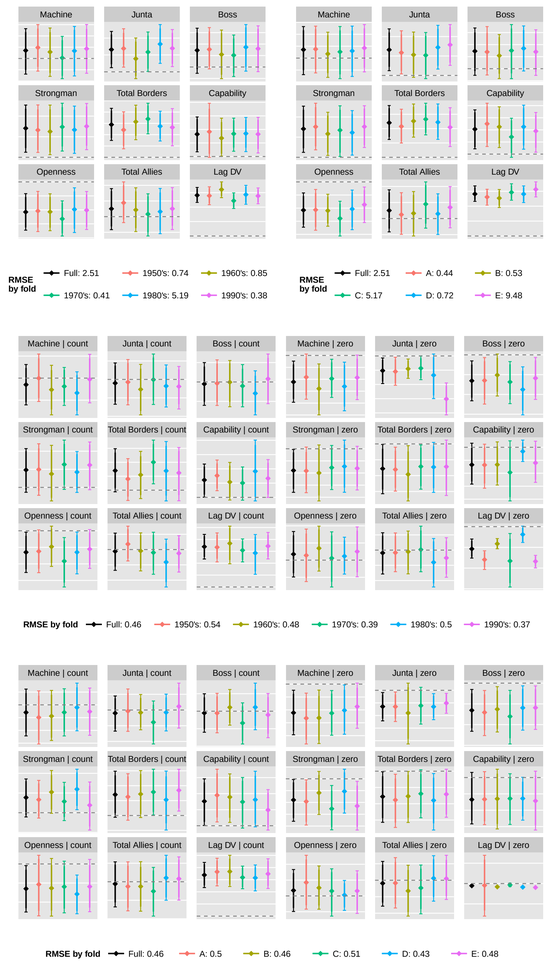


Simulated Scenarios

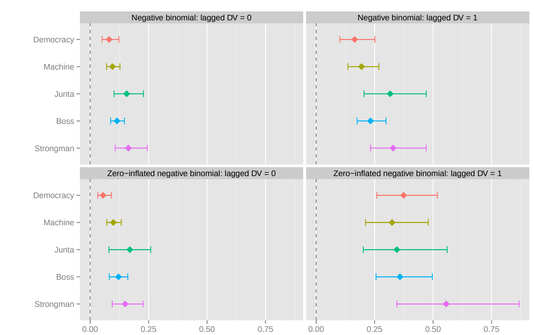
X-axis: above - negbin | below - zero-inflated negbin
Diagonal: above - lag DV 0 | below - lag DV 1



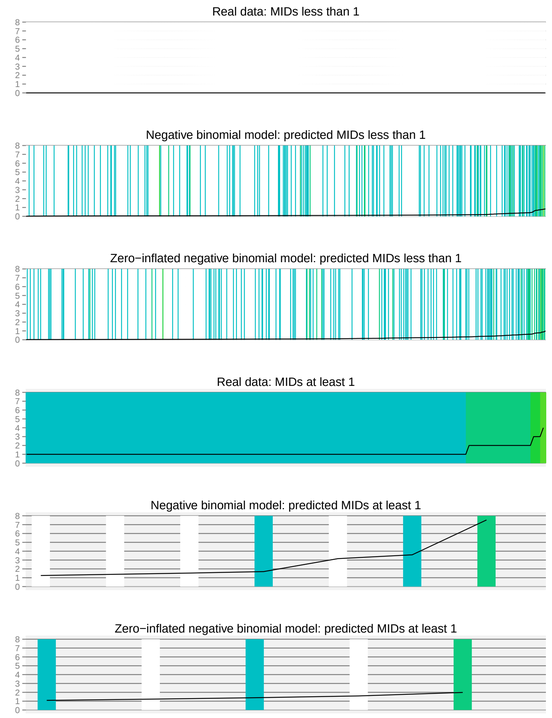
Cross-Validation



Scenario Confidence Intervals



Out-of-Sample Pseudo-Separation Plots



Out-of-Sample Data and Conclusions

My dataset contains 190 major MIDs over 161 country-years from 1993 to 2006. 97.2% of the 860 observations $\in \{0, 1\}$.

1) LS applied the wrong model. With a zero-inflated negative binomial, all authoritarian subtypes are prominent in the zero process and irrelevant in the count process.

2) The use of democracy as the reference category is problematic. Significant differences between military subtypes and democracy coupled with insignificant differences between the latter and party subtypes do not necessarily entail significant differences between military and party subtypes.

3) LS only examined substantive effects for the statistically significant variables and then only via differences in point estimates. Had they accounted for uncertainty and examined all five regime types, regardless of supposed significance, they would have discovered no evidence for their theory.

4) Ultimately, we need more informative covariates, as authoritarian subtypes do not meaningfully affect conflict initiation. In and out of sample, the zero-inflated model RMSE is around 0.5, terrible when one considers that over 97% of all observations were ones and zeros.