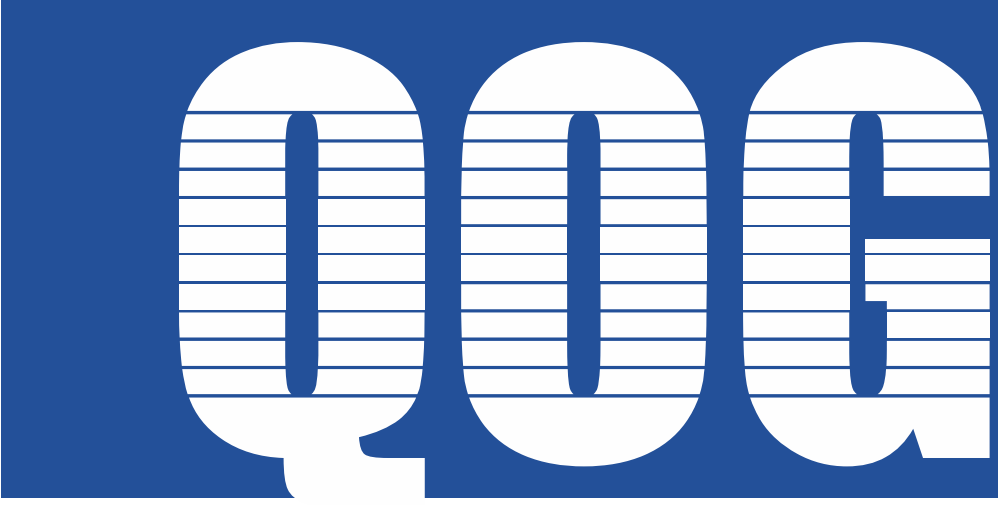

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THE KING IS DEAD: POLITICAL SUCCESSION AND WAR IN EUROPE, 1000–1799

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"The order of succession is not fixed for the sake of the reigning family; but because it is the interest of the state that it should have a reigning family."

- Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748)

"The most plausible plea which hath ever been offered in favor of hereditary succession is, that it preserves a nation from civil wars; and were this true, it would be weighty; whereas it is the most bare-faced falsity ever imposed on mankind."

- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

Seldom is an autocratic regime as fragile as when the autocrat has died, and there is uncertainty—or outright disagreement—over who his successor will be. Conflicting claims to power can easily deteriorate into violent conflict between members of the regime (Acharya and Lee 2017; Brownlee 2007; Frantz and Stein 2017; Herz 1952; Kokkonen and Sundell 2017; Kurrild-Klitgaard 2000; Svolik 2012; Tullock 1987; Wang 2017), since violence is "the ultimate arbiter of political conflicts" in autocracies (Svolik 2012, 20). The oppressed may exploit the power vacuum and revolt, and neighboring states can intervene in the succession process to further their own interests. Autocracies furthermore display considerable variation in how the succession is managed, from the quasi-monarchy of North Korea's Kim dynasty, to the well-oiled mechanisms for cultivating leaders in China, to the uncertainty surrounding the future after Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Instances of autocratic succession has, despite these facts, received scant empirical attention in the war literature (though see Iqbal and Zorn 2008; Jones and Olken 2009).

In this paper, we address this lack of research by providing the first statistical test of how succession and succession arrangements affected the onset of civil and interstate war in Europe in the medieval and early modern period. First, we ask how royal succession affected the risk of civil and interstate war. There are several well-known historical accounts of how succession disputes triggered wars in European history, but we do not know how common these instances really were. It is also often difficult to establish whether it was the succession per se or more profound political instability and power relations that triggered a certain war. We exploit monarchs' natural deaths to get around this endogeneity problem and identify the causal effect of succession on civil and interstate war onset (cf. Besley, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol 2011; Jones and Olken 2005).

Second, we ask how succession arrangements moderated the risk of succession wars. As shown by the opening quotes from Montesquieu and Thomas Paine, prominent political thinkers disagree over whether hereditary succession mitigates or increases the risk of succession wars. In modern research, scholars have claimed that succession wars disappeared over time because dynasticism decreased in importance (Luard 1986; Pinker 2011). Yet, this argument runs contrary to the fact that Europe long into the medieval period was dominated by elective monarchies, in which the death of a king created a period of dangerous uncertainty that ended only after the leading circles of society had assembled and elected a new king (Kokkonen and Sundell 2014)—a process that could take considerable time in an era of bad communication systems (cf. Stasavage 2010, 2016). It was not until relatively late in the period that a majority of European monarchies adopted a succession based on primogeniture, according to which the eldest son automatically inherited the throne at his father's

death (Acharya and Lee 2017; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014). We test whether this institutionalization of dynasticism—and the reduction in uncertainty about the succession it brought about—mitigated dynastic wars.

To answer our questions, we combine war data from several sources to create a novel robust measure of war and conflict in Europe between 1000 and 1799 AD, which we link to data on monarchs and their political fates. We find that successions that followed monarchs' natural deaths increased the risk of civil war considerably throughout the period, and more so in elective monarchies than in monarchies practicing primogeniture. Successions also increased the risk of interstate war, primarily because monarchies were more likely to be attacked by neighboring states in the aftermath of successions. However, there is no evidence that primogeniture moderated successions' effects on interstate wars. Incentives to start civil and interstate wars in the wake of a succession thus seemingly differed.

Succession wars never disappeared, but the civil ones declined in numbers with the spread of primogeniture. Despite earlier claims to the contrary, it was thus the triumph of dynasticism that was responsible for the decline in succession wars. The rest of the article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss why succession creates problems for the elite and why primogeniture mitigates the problems. The third section describes the data collection and empirical strategy, the fourth examines the results, and the fifth conducts robustness checks. The sixth section concludes.

Previous research

Succession disputes have troubled societies since ancient times, and many prominent political thinkers have weighed in on the subject of how to regulate it. The most common argument against hereditary succession—put forth by notables such as Machiavelli (1517), Rousseau (1750), and Paine (1776)—is that the person most suitable for leadership is unlikely to be the child of the previous leader, and that absolute power may be bestowed on a mere child or a lunatic (though already David Hume pointed out that due to the high stakes of a royal election, the actual merit of the candidates is unlikely to be a decisive factor (Sabl 2012, 141). While conceding this point, other thinkers have argued that the predictability and order of hereditary succession outweighs the drawbacks. Jean Bodin (1576) and Montesquieu (1748) argued that not fixing the succession risks leading to uncertainty and conflict between rival contenders for the throne.

Modern scholars agree that the transfer of power from one leader to another causes instability in autocracies (Acharya and Lee 2017; Brownlee 2007; Frantz and Stein 2017; Herz 1952; Kokkonen and Sundell 2017; Kurrild-Klitgaard 2000; Svolik 2012; Tullock 1987, Wang 2017). But while some argue that hereditary succession has been a force for stability (Brownlee 2007; Frantz and Stein 2017; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014; Kurrild-Klitgaard 2000; Tullock 1987; Wang 2017), others argue the opposite. For instance, Steven Pinker (2011, 233) claims that "the idea of basing leadership on inheritance is a recipe for endless wars of succession."

Few studies have, however, investigated the assumption that autocratic succession increases the risk of war. A number of studies have shown that (both autocratic and

democratic) leaders are more prone to participate in international conflicts early in their tenure (Chiozza and Goemans 2004; Gaubatz 1991; Gelpi and Grieco 2001). Although these studies prove a positive correlation between successions and interstate wars, they are afflicted by endogeneity problems, as leader change is not exogenous to factors that affect the risk of interstate war (indeed the whole point of Chiozza and Goemans 2004 is to prove the endogenous relationship between leadership change and war, by showing how one leads to the other). International tensions may, for example, result both in dovish leaders being replaced by hawkish leaders and an outbreak of war. A similar point can be made about Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn's study from 2008, which finds that assassinations of heads of state are associated with an increased risk of political instability and civil war (especially those that contain an element of international involvement) in states lacking regulated succession arrangements.

Benjamin F. Jones and Benjamin A. Olken (2009) come closest to identifying a causal effect of successions on war by contrasting successful and unsuccessful assassination attempts of heads of state, finding that successful assassinations lead to an increase in the intensity of (both civil and interstate) small-scale conflicts relative to failed assassinations. However, the focus on assassinations makes it difficult to draw more general conclusions on how successions affect war risks.[1]

Despite its long history, the question is thus far from settled empirically. Theoretically, there is, however, ample reason to assume autocratic successions to increase the risk of both civil and interstate war from a rationalist perspective. In the

[1] Jones and Olken's focus is also on the effect of assassinations per se and not the effect of successions in general.

following, we describe the mechanisms through which they do so and how different principles of succession may mitigate the risk.

Theory

A rationalist explanation for war

The fundamental question in rationalistic explanations of war is why the involved actors fail to reach a settlement that avoids war, given that war is always a costly option ex post (Fearon 1995). One answer is that the actors have private information about their resolve (i.e., their subjective assessment of the costs of war) and capability to wage war that they have strong incentives to misrepresent in bargaining situations, in order to arrive at a better settlement (Fearon 1995; Walter 2009; Wolford 2007). If the information asymmetries become too large, the actors may find it impossible to agree on a peaceful settlement. We argue that instances of autocratic succession make these problems especially acute, both when there is and when there is not a designated successor. In addition, we argue that when there is not a designated successor the regime may end up with a commitment problem vis-à-vis potential successors, which may result in war. In the following, we describe the two situations in turn.

A successor has not been designated: The coordination problem

From the perspective of influential members in the regime—ministers, generals, princes, dukes, and barons—a succession promises both opportunity and risk (Brownlee 2007; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014). On the positive side, it offers the members of the regime with the opportunity to improve their standing. Ultimately, they may even become the new autocrat. The downside is that they also risk losing

the rents they enjoyed under the old autocrat—and ultimately their lives (cf. Egorov and Sonin 2015)—if they end up on the losing side in a succession struggle.

Milan Svolik (2012, 95) notes that the latter risk is so great that "fear of joining the losing side outweights any substantive preferences over who prevails." Add the fact that war is always a costly option ex post for the winning side (cf. Fearon 1995), and members of the regime have a strong incentive to prefer the status quo to pursue a potentially dangerous power struggle if they can.

However, if the incumbent autocrat does not appoint a successor they will find it difficult to coordinate their attempts to uphold the regime. Grooming a successor without the autocrat's approval entails huge risks if the autocrat finds out about the plans, as the successor poses a potential threat to him (Herz 1952; Goody 1966; Tullock 1987), and is hardly an option. Thus, the regime will find itself in a power vacuum when the autocrat dies. As Bodin (1576, 209) wrote, "all elective monarchies are constantly menaced by the danger of a relapse into anarchy on the death of each king."

Although members of the regime may reestablish order by negotiating a new autocrat among themselves, information asymmetries will make it difficult for them to do so. Autocracies are characterized by secrecy about relative power relations to prevent members of the regime and outside actors from coordinating coups and rebellions (Shih 2010). Sharing information about military strength and the security apparatus without the autocrat's permission tends to be strictly forbidden, and regime members are usually given access only to the information they need for carrying out their tasks.

The demise of the autocrat also alters facts on the ground in ways that increase the amount of private information in the system and make the distribution of power even less transparent than in ordinary circumstances: For example, it may be difficult to know who actually controls the loyalty of military regiments and economic resources that were formerly under the direct personal control of the autocrat. In such circumstances, regime members may easily end up disagreeing about their relative strengths.

At the same time, members of the regime have reason to misrepresent their true strength both before and after the succession. Before the succession important members of the regime often have an incentive to hide their true capabilities and resolve in order to not appear as a threat to the autocrat (cf. Egorov and Sonin 2011). Georgy Zhukov, perhaps the most successful Soviet general during World War II, was, for example, stripped from his position as commander-in-chief and sent into exile in Odessa less than a year after the end of the war because Stalin feared his popularity among the army (Spahr 1993, 200–05).

In the wake of the succession the incentives to misrepresent strength change. Members of the regime who aspire to become the new autocrat now have a strong incentive to appear stronger than they in fact are, in order to persuade possible contenders to back down and convince those regime members who are uncertain about whom to support to bandwagon behind them (Brownlee 2007; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014; Tullock 1987). They may, for example, signal their strength and resolve by mobilizing troops under their command and take control over key military

installations. Such signaling may easily spiral into civil war if other contenders for the throne are ready to call the bluff.

Even if the members of the regime can agree on their relative strengths commitment problems may spoil a peaceful settlement over the succession, because power relations will change if one of them becomes the new autocrat (cf. Fearon 1995; Walter 2009; Powell 2004). The new autocrat may, for example, become mightier than the old autocrat if he can add his own power resources to the power resources he inherits from the old autocrat. Historically, this was what happened when Fredrick III was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1440, and the Habsburgs started their long monopoly on the elective throne of the Holy Roman Empire with the help of resources from their personal domains in Austria, Bohemia and (later)Hungary (Bérenger 1994). Another illustration is the election of Margaret I of Denmark and Norway as queen of Sweden 1389, which considerably strengthened the monarchy vis-a-vis the Swedish nobility—and eventually led to the establishment of the Kalmar Union—as Margaret could draw on her Danish and Norwegian resources in addition to the resources she had at her disposal as Swedish queen (Schück 2003). Although it in theory may be possible to compensate the other members of the regime, and re-establish the balance of power by relinquishing control over some of the power resources to them, in such situations, it may be difficult to agree on such a re-distribution in practice (Fearon 1995), as illustrated by the two cases above.

There is also usually little room for lengthy negotiations, as the regime's survival hinges on it showing unity vis-à-vis foreign and domestic enemies. The election of queen Margaret did, for example, take place during a civil war between the nobility

and Swedish king. In the absence of institutional guarantees that forces the potential successor to credibly commit to uphold the agreement he has struck with the regime after he becomes the new autocrat—institutions that seldom exist in autocracies, as power ultimately rests on violence (e.g. Svolik 2012, 20)—some members of the regime may, therefore, try to strike first and prevent the potential successor from becoming the new autocrat, with war as a possible outcome.

From the regime's perspective, it is therefore preferable to have a clear and predictable principle of succession that can defuse the situation and provide its members with an heir, who does not upset the balance of power, around whom they can rally when the incumbent autocrat dies (Iqbal and Zorn 2008).

The confusion and indecisiveness that follows if the regime is left without a successor, or is split between different contenders for power, may also tempt foreign states to invade. The Russian annexation of Crimea in the wake of the ousting of Ukrainan president Viktor Yanukovych in 2014 is a case in point. The War of the Austrian succession is another. Upon the accession of Maria Theresa to the Habsburg throne in 1740, King Frederick II of Prussia disputed her inheritance of the wealthy Silesia, and promptly invaded, sparking the war of the Austrian succession. Frederick did not seek the Habsburg throne for himself, but used the problematic succession of a woman as a pretext for pressing his own agenda. The legal claims to Silesia were "a face-saving afterthought" and not even brought up in the confidential discussions between Frederick and his ministers (Anderson 1995, 69).

In European history, primogeniture—the practice of letting the oldest legitimate son inherit the throne—has been the principle that best solves the problem of avoiding confusion and uncertainty (Kokkonen and Sundell 2014). In theory, other arrangements that clearly point out a successor could also work, but experience shows that unbreakable contracts are often broken and institutions subverted (Kokkonen and Sundell 2014—though see Konrad and Mui 2016 and Wang 2017). Tying the order of succession to biology makes it more credible, as long as the autocrat manages to produce an eligible heir (Acharya and Lee 2017; Wang 2017). As the process becomes virtually automatic, and everyone knows who will inherit in advance of the succession, the elite can rally around the heir-apparent and coordinate their attempts to uphold the regime even before the incumbent autocrat's death (Brownlee 2007; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014; Sabl 2012, 128; Tullock 1987). Primogeniture also has the advantage of not upsetting the balance of power between the autocrat and the regime, as the son usually only inherits his father's power resources without adding any of his own. In contrast, other succession arrangements risk upset the balance of power if the chosen successor brings his own power resources with him into office, as illustrated by the elections of Frederick III and Margaret I. Due to the coordination problem, we expect successions to increase the risk of war—both civil and interstate—but less so when the principle of succession (i.e., primogeniture) reduces uncertainty by automatically appointing an heir among the leader's relatives.

A successor has been designated: The resolve problem

Does a designated successor completely dispel the threat of war? The answer hinges on whether the successor is trusted to uphold the status quo. An autocrat and his successor can differ both in their resolve (Wolford 2007) and in their capabilities to

fight wars (Wolford 2016). Scott Wolford (2007) argues that this fact leaves antagonistic states with an incentive to challenge a new leader to test his resolve (or capability), at the same time as the new leader has an incentive not to back down to the challenge in order to establish a reputation as a strongman, which will benefit him in future bargaining situations (see Walter 2009 for a similar analysis of civil wars). As long as the new leader has private information about his true resolve (or capability to fight wars) this dynamic makes the succession "a kind of informational trap" that risks triggering war (Wolford 2007, 773).

A similar argument can be made for the relationship between a new autocrat and his regime (and other domestic actors): In the wake of a succession, members of the regime have an incentive to challenge the new autocrat and try to renegotiate the contract they had with the old autocrat to their favor. Although such negotiations over contractual obligations are seldom made in public in contemporary autocracies, they were commonplace in history. In medieval and early modern Europe, states were held together by contractual obligations between the constituent parts and the monarch (Nexon 2009). Historians have documented that the bargaining over these obligations was most intense during successions (Bisson 2009, 102). Kings in the medieval Crown of Aragon did, for example, have to reconfirm the rights of the nobility when ascending the throne (Kagay 1981). If the king refused, the nobility had the right to deny him their allegiance, which naturally had negative consequences for political stability. Similar arrangements were the norm throughout Europe.

There are numerous historical examples of how political actors took the opportunity to modify the contractual relationship and extract concessions for themselves on such

occasions if they deemed the would-be-king to be in a weak position (Nexon 2009, 83). One of the more famous examples is the underage Henry III, who could only succeed to the throne of England in 1216 after his protectors reissued the Magna Carta, which his father John Lackland had first accepted and then annulled in 1215 (Carpenter 1990; Maddicott 2010). Had his regime refused to give in to the barons' demands they would likely not have laid down their arms and would have continued the First Baron's War. Thus, a designated successor does not automatically dissolve the threat of civil war in the wake of a succession as long as there is uncertainty regarding his resolve and capability to wage war.

However, if the principle of succession allows the regime to get to know the successor—and find out about his resolve and capabilities—before the succession, the risk of war may be avoided. Historically, many monarchs allowed the heir apparent to govern a part of the kingdom, so that he could familiarize himself with his future subjects and councilors (for a discussion of the Chinese case see Wang 2017).

In modern times, many autocrats have allowed their sons to take up important positions in the army and the state apparatus for similar reasons, but the dynamic is not isolated to hereditary succession. Anne Meng (2017) does, for example, find that a peaceful leadership transition is more probable in modern autocracies if the post of vice president or prime minister has been occupied by the same person for a long time, having allowed the elite to get to know a likely successor.

Uncertainty about the successor's resolve and capabilities will not go away entirely, as he will not be allowed to take full control over state affairs and show his true nature

before the autocrat dies. But a designated successor who is also the child of the autocrat will likely be allowed more freedom of action and can thus to more clearly show his resolve and capabilities than other potential successors. Richard the Lionheart was, for example, forgiven by his father Henry II for his many rebellions—a fate far more lenient than what other rebels could expect to face if defeated (Weiler 2007).

On the basis of these observations, we propose two simple hypotheses:

H1. Autocratic succession increases the risk of war, both civil and interstate.

H2. Primogeniture mitigates the effect of autocratic succession on war.

Empirical strategy and data

War and leadership change are often related. Leaders who lose wars tend to resign or be deposed (e.g., Croco 2011; Chiozza and Goemans 2004, 2011). Earlier, leaders also ran the risk of dying in battle. Disentangling causality between leadership change and war is therefore problematic. To isolate a causal effect of autocratic succession on war propensity we should ideally induce leadership changes exogenously, which is obviously impossible.

In this paper, we follow the alternative strategy of Jones and Olken (2005), who exploit deaths incurred by natural causes and accidents to gauge the effect of leader quality on economic growth. For the purpose of their paper, a natural death is plausibly exogenous, as it is unlikely to be connected to economic growth. We argue that the same holds true for the relationship between the natural deaths of monarchs and war onset in medieval and early modern Europe. Although wars can cause

abdications, battle deaths, and depositions they are unlikely to increase the risk of natural deaths significantly (see the robustness check for confirmation of this assumption).

One potential caveat is that natural deaths can be suspected to occur more often in politically stable autocracies than in politically unstable autocracies, as leaders risk being deposed or killed before they die of natural causes in the latter states. Under the reasonable assumption that the risk of succession wars is lower in stable autocracies our results will therefore be biased downwards. However, this argument builds on the assumption that natural deaths overwhelmingly come late in life. This may be true today, but it was less true historically. Harking back to the age before modern medicine, simple illnesses and infections could mean an early death also for the higher echelons of society. Living to high age was the exception rather than the rule. The fate of the children of Henry VIII, who himself died from bad health at 55, illustrates the point. Edward VI died of fever at 15; Henry FitzRoy was 17 when he died of illness; Mary I passed away from cancer at 42. Only Elizabeth I lived to the relatively old age of 69 (Guy 2013).

Henry VIII's children were not exceptional. The descriptive statistics show that half of the monarchs in our dataset who died of natural causes did so before turning 53. Although death rates climbed steeply after 50, natural deaths were fairly common in young ages (see figure A1 in the appendix). Hence, we should not expect drastic differences in natural death rates between stable and unstable monarchies, in spite of the fact that monarchs in the latter states were more likely to be deposed (and thus on average had shorter tenures). A comparison of countries and country-periods with and

without primogeniture (a factor that has been shown to affect the risk that monarchs were deposed in previous research, e.g., Kokkonen and Sundell 2014), presented in table 1, confirms our expectation: Natural deaths were equally common in states practicing and not practicing primogeniture, even though more monarchs were deposed in the latter states.[2]

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	All	*Primo-geniture*	*Other*	*P-value for difference*
Mean leader age	39.2	39.3	39.2	.943
Percent years with leader change	5.3	4.6	6.6	.000
Years with leader change in which leader:				
Died natural death	*3.3*	*3.4*	*3.2*	*.456*
Abdicated peacefully	*0.2*	*0.2*	*0.2*	*.527*
Was deposed or murdered (not by foreign enemies)	*1.4*	*0.7*	*2.8*	*.000*
Died in battle or on campaign against foreign enemies	*0.3*	*0.3*	*0.3*	*.567*
Percent years with civil war onset	2.9	2.4	3.7	.170
Percent years with ongoing civil war	16	11.1	24.5	.009
Percent years with international war onset	7.5	6.6	8.9	.245
Percent years with ongoing international war	40.6	38	45.1	.278
Country-years	13575	8682	4893	

Note: Standard errors for the difference are clustered on countries. The age variable is only calculated for those years there was a monarch (i.e., years with interregnums are excluded).

We therefore focus on successions that took place after monarchs died in office for nonpolitical reasons, such as disease or accidents – hereafter referred to as "natural

[2] Even if we are wrong and our design yields conservative estimates, it complements previous studies in the field that employ the alternative design of contrasting successful assassinations with failed assassination attempts to isolate the causal effect of leadership change on conflict (e.g., Jones and Olken 2009), as assassinations and assassination attempts are more likely to occur in politically unstable autocracies in which the risk of succession wars likely is relatively high.

deaths". We exclude successions that followed abdications, depositions, battle deaths, and deaths that occurred during military campaigns in foreign countries (as life on military campaign in foreign countries is likely to have increased the risk of infection and accidents). To separate natural and unnatural deaths from each other we use the dataset collected by Andrej Kokkonen and Anders Sundell (2014) on European monarchs and their political fates. This dataset provides detailed information on 961 monarchs from 42 European states between 1000 and 1800 AD. Most important, it contains information on how the monarchs left office, allowing us to code whether they died in office or not, and the nature of death. In addition, we have collected similar data for the Ottoman Empire, due to its historical importance in European political history. After having excluded states for which we found no reliable war data we ended up with 28 European states, which are presented in table 2, and 453 country-years when a monarch died naturally.[3]

[3] In tables A1 and A2 in the appendix we use Jackknife models to show that our main results are robust to the inclusion and exclusion of individual countries.

Table 2. States in the sample

State	*First year in sample*	*Last year in sample*
Aragon	1035	1479
Austria	1359	1792
Bavaria	1651	1799
Brandenburg/Prussia	1356	1799
Byzantine Empire	1025	1453
Bohemia	1230	1740
Castile	1035	1516
Denmark	1014	1799
England	1066	1799
France	1031	1793
Hungary	1001	1740
Holy Roman Empire	1002	1378
Leon	1028	1230
Lithuania	1382	1569
Naples	1071	1504
Navarre	1004	1610
Norway	1000	1559
Ottoman Empire	1359	1789
Palatinate	1356	1799
Poland	1290	1795
Portugal	1095	1788
Russia	1359	1799
Savoy	1383	1799
Saxony	1356	1799
Scotland	1034	1707
Sicily	1282	1409
Spain	1516	1788
Sweden	1130	1792

We use this data to test whether there was a higher risk that war broke out in years when a monarch died naturally than in other years (including years when there were unnatural successions).[4]

[4] Years in which more than one monarch died naturally are counted as years in which one monarch died naturally. Years in which a monarch died naturally and another monarch was deposed (of which there are eight in the data) are not counted as years with a natural succession, due to the risk of reverse causality. However, our results are robust to including these years as natural succession years (see tables A3 and A4 in the appendix).

Succession arrangements

We use data from Kokkonen and Sundell (2014) to separate between states that had succession arrangements based on primogeniture and succession arrangements based on election. In addition, we also coded the succession arrangements of the Ottoman Empire, which are not covered by Kokkonen and Sundell, based on Alderson (1956, Peirce (1993), and Quataert (2005). The resulting variable distinguishes between country-years in which (1) primogeniture was practiced and (0) country-years in which it was not (see table B1 in the appendix for a description of succession arrangements in the included states).

Wars

There are several well-established datasets for the statistical study of war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the Correlates of War dataset (Sarkees and Wayman, 2010) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program datasets (Gleditsch et al. 2002). For the period before 1800, data is scarcer and less structured. Studies that deal with war have relied on compilations by historians, not put together solely for academic purposes or statistical analysis. Table 3 presents the compilations that include data on several European states we have been able to identify in previous research. They are by no means independent; the later compilations to a large degree build on the efforts of the earlier.

Table 3. Datasets of historical wars

Author	Title	Year of first edition	Covered time period	Articles that use the data (examples)
Wood and Baltzly	*Is war diminishing?"*	1915	1450–1900 (11 states)	Stasavage 2010
Sorokin, Pitrim Aleksandrovich	*Social and cultural dynamics, Vol 3*	1937		
Wright, Quincy	*Study of war: Volume 1*	1942	1480–1964	Dube and Harish 2017; Zhang et al. 2007
Dupuy, Ernest and Trevor Dupuy	*The encyclopedia of military history*	1970	Antiquity to present day	Bennet and Stam 1996; Reiter and Stam 1998
Levy, Jack	*War in the modern great power system 1495-1975*	1983	1495–1973 (Only the "great powers")	
Kohn, George	*Dictionary of wars*	1986	Antiquity to present day	Acemoglu et al. 2005; Acharya and Lee 2017; Zhang et al. 2011
Luard, Evan	*War in international society: A study in international sociology*	1986	1400–1986	Zhang et al. 2007
Clodfelter, Michael	*Warfare and armed conflicts: A statistical reference to casualty and other figures*	1992	1494–present day	Karaman and Pamuk 2013; Reiter and Stam 1998; Dincecco and Onorato 2016
Brecke, Peter	*Conflict catalog*	1999	1400–present day	Besley and Reynald-Querol 2014; Iyugin 2008; Zhang et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2011
Philips, Charles and Alan Axelrod	*Encyclopedia of wars*	2005	Antiquity to present day	Croco 2011

Despite wars being major events that affect millions of lives and change the political trajectories of nations, there is less agreement than one could expect between different sources in which wars are described. Even in the modern period, for which there is incomparably much more information available than for the period we study, agreement is far from perfect. Nicholas Sambanis (2004) finds that for the period 1960–1993, correlations between measures of civil war onset is often in the range of 0.6–0.7. When comparing the compilations of wars between the fifteenth and

twentieth centuries by Pitirim Sorokin (1937) and Quincy Wright (1942), Jack Levy (1983, 57) finds that only two-thirds of the wars that are mentioned in one list are mentioned in the other. Even when the same war is mentioned there is sometimes disagreement over its start and end dates. It is therefore advisable to base analysis on either composite measures or to conduct analyses on several datasets and compare the results (Levy 1983, 57)—at least if there is no apparent reason to assume one compilation to be of superior quality to all others.

We therefore aim for an inductive approach, assembling data from five of the most comprehensive and widely used war compilations in previous research, namely by Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod (2005), George Kohn (2013), Richard Ernest Dupuy and Trevor Dupuy (1970), Evan Luard (1986), and Michael Clodfelter (2008).[5] We use this data to construct two dependent variables: 1) onset of civil war in a country-year, and 2) onset of interstate war in a country-year.[6] In the latter case, we have also constructed two variables that distinguish between wars in which the state in focus initiates the war and wars when it is attacked. Luard (1986) does this coding in his compilation, while we have done the coding for the other compilations using the supporting text.

We find it reasonable to assume that the omission of a war in a compilation generally does not imply that the authors deny the existence of the conflict, only that they

[5] We do not include the Brecke Conflict Catalog (1999), which has been used in some previous articles, in our dataset, as it does not contain enough information about wars to determine if they were civil wars or international wars. It only contains information on the war's name and which countries were involved. We do, however, show in table A4 in the appendix that our civil war results are robust when using a dataset that also counts all wars in Brecke's data that only involve one country as civil wars.

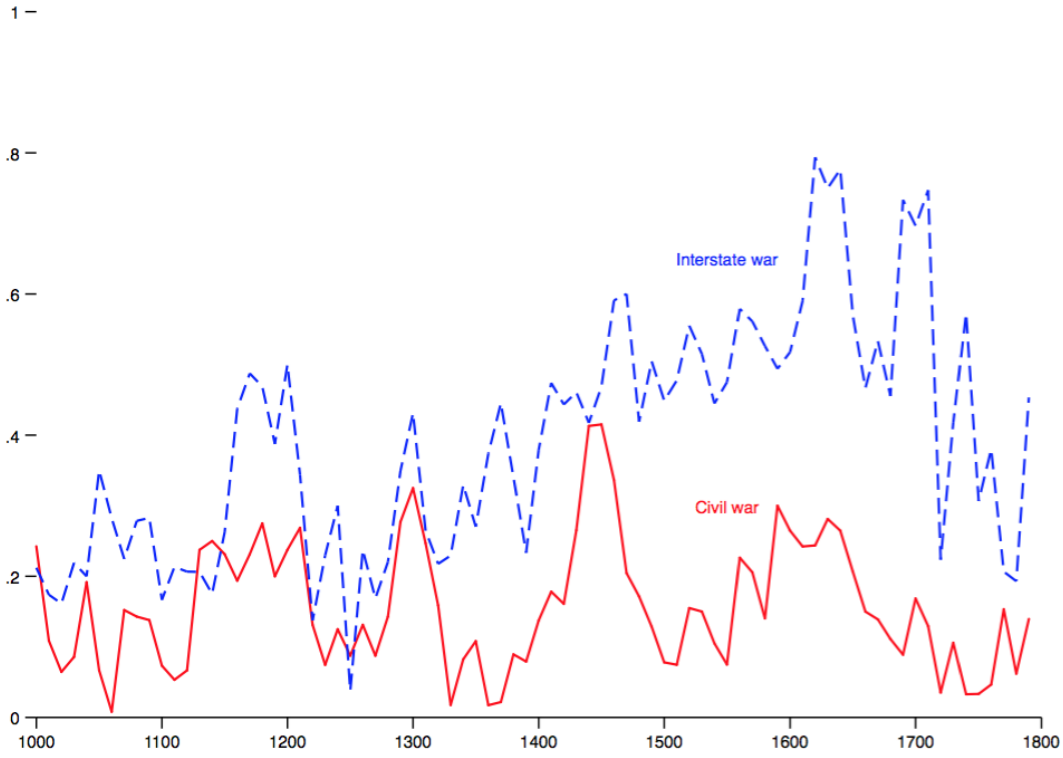
[6] Wars can be coded both as interstate and civil at the same time, and this may differ for different participating states. For instance, when one state supports a revolt in another state (with troops), it is coded as an interstate war for the intervening country, and both a civil and interstate war for the country where the revolt is taking place.

lacked information about the conflict or its specific elements.[7] We, therefore, opt for an inclusive strategy and include all wars that are mentioned in at least one source when combining our lists.

Wars often appear in the compilations under different names and with different start and end dates. We have therefore used textual information in the compilations to identify all unique wars and gave each a common id number in all datasets.[8] This allows us to distinguish between omissions of wars and simple disagreements over their exact dates. In our main analyses, we use the most expansive dates, that is, the first start date and the last end date. However, we show in tables A5 and A6 in the appendix that our main results are robust to using the least expansive dates (i.e., the last start date and the first end date). Even after harmonizing the start dates of wars in this way the average correlation for war onset between the compilations is a mere 0.40, which reassures us that our strategy of combining the different compilations is the most viable option to obtain robust results. Figure 1 shows the proportion of countries in the sample that were in war each year, averaged by decade. The peak in the international war line is the 1620's, when the Thirty Years' War engulfed most of the countries on the continent.

[7] For instance, conflicts that are given a separate heading in source *A* may be mentioned in passing in source *B*, but without the information necessary to code it using source B alone.
[8] For instance, the conflict erupting in France in 1562 is described as the "First War of Religion" in four datasets, the "First Huguenot War" in one, and simply noted as "France (Huguenots, with intervention by England)" in one.

Figure 1. The proportion of countries that were involved in at least one international or civil war each year, averaged by decade.



Royal children

To gauge whether the availability of male heirs reduced the risk of succession wars (e.g., Acharya and Lee 2017,), we have gathered information on monarchs' children. We primarily rely on two sources for this information. The first is the "Medieval Lands" database, compiled by Charles Cawley (2006), which is based on an impressive number of primary and secondary sources. The Medieval Lands database only covers the period up until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for most countries. For the subsequent period, we use the 29-volume genealogical collection Europäische Stammtafeln, compiled over more than 60 years by Wilhelm Karl von Isenburg, Frank Baron Freytag von Loringhoven, and Detlev Schwennike (1975; 2005), which contains detailed information on hundreds of European royal and noble families.In a few instances, when our main sources lack information on certain monarchs we have

augmented it with information from other secondary sources (detailed in the appendix).

We have combined these sources to construct a dataset that contains information on every monarch's children, the years of each child's birth and death, and their genders. This allows us to construct a dummy variable that for each year measures whether a monarch had a living son or not. We interact this variable with the dummy measuring monarchs' natural deaths to test whether the availability of a living sons reduced the risk of succession wars.

Control variables

Although data is limited, we have constructed a reasonable set of control variables. First, we control for time periods with century dummies, as time is correlated both with leader tenures and modes of exit for monarchs (Blaydes and Chaney 2013; Eisner 2011; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014) as well as with the availability of data. As is standard in the literature on war onset, we control for peace spells between wars with variables that measure years since last war and years since last war squared (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Using the alternative strategy of whether a country had an ongoing war the previous year (c.f. Fearon and Laitin 2003) does not alter our results. We also control for the length of a monarchs' tenure, as previous research has shown that leaders are more prone to engage in war early in their careers (Chiozza and Goemans 2003, 2004; Gaubatz 1991; Gelpi and Grieco 2001). Scott Abramson and Carlos Velasco Rivera (2016) argue that monarchs accumulated power over time, which they could bestow on their successors. To control for how such power transfers

affected war risks, we include a variable that measures how long a tenure a monarch's predecessor had.[9] We also control for a monarch's age and age squared.

Following the considerable literature on the importance of parliaments for leader-elite negotiations (e.g., Downing 1993; Stasavage 2010) and the positive relationship between the establishment of parliaments and warfare found in many studies (Blank et al. 2017; Boucoyannis 2015; Møller 2016; Stasavage 2016), we include a variable for parliamentary activity during the century, coded by Eltjo Buring, Maarten Bosker, and Jan Luiten van Zanden (2012). We control for interregnums (i.e., periods when a country did not have a monarch) with a dummy variable.

As larger countries for natural reasons are likely to be more exposed to local revolts and have longer borders to protect against foreign enemies, we control for the log of the geographical area, measured in 100-year intervals using data from Euratlas.net. Using the same data, we also include a variable for mountainous terrain, which could make it easier for rebel groups to evade capture (Blattman and Miguel 2010; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Our variable is constructed as the percentage of the country located at an altitude of at least 500 meters.

Model specifications

We code our dependent variable, onset of civil (international) war, as 1 for all years in which a civil (international) war broke out and 0 for all others. Years in which a war continues are coded as 0 and are included in the analysis, since new wars sometimes broke out while old wars still raged on (cf. Fearon and Laitin 2003). Years in which

[9] Abramson and Velasco Rivera only focus on leaders whose predecessors died natural deaths. In contrast, we also include the tenures of leaders whose predecessors were deposed. Our control variable is, thus, in a sense much stronger, as it picks up all factors that affect political instability.

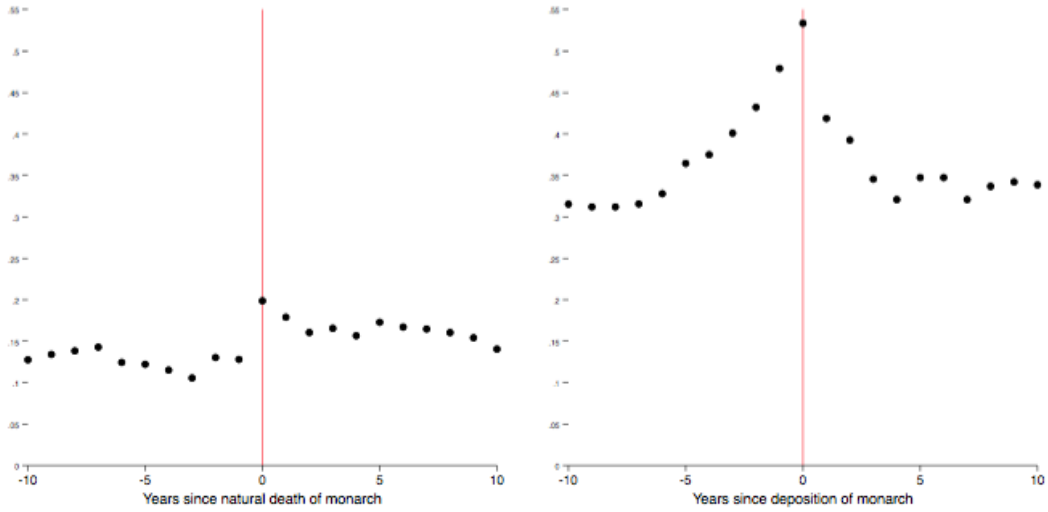
more than one war broke out are treated similar to years in which only one war broke out (i.e., as a year with one war onset). The results presented below are based on logit and conditional logit analyses, where the latter analyses control for country fixed effects and thus limit the analysis to the within-state variation in war onset (Chamberlain 1980; Buhaug and Skrede Gleditsch 2008; Besley and Persson 2011). We show in the appendix that our results are robust to using linear probability models instead (see tables A8–A10 in the appendix). All standard errors are clustered at the country level.[10]

Results

As a first display of how successions were related to war, we in figure 2 plot the proportion of countries in the sample that were involved in at least one civil war the years before and after the natural death of a monarch (left graph) and the deposition of a monarch (right graph). In the year before the natural death of a monarch, the countries in the sample were involved in a civil war in about 13% of the cases, but this figure jumps to 20% in the year of succession. In contrast, the years leading up to depositions were much often marked by civil war; the figure then drops after the deposition.

[10] Given the long time period of the study (800 years) it could make sense to cluster at country-centuries instead of countries, given that countries can change drastically from one century to another (see Dube and Harish 2017 for a similar strategy). Clustering at country-centuries also avoids the problem that standard errors can be underestimated when the number of clusters (in our case 28) is relatively small (e.g., Cameron, Gelbach, and Miller 2008). We, therefore, show in tables A11 and A12 in the appendix that our results are robust to clustering at country-centuries instead of countries.

Figure 2. Proportion of countries involved in at least one civil war the years before and after a natural death of a monarch (left graph) and before and after a deposition (right graph).



The graphs suggest two different dynamics: natural deaths occur at the start of a period of conflict, and depositions at the peak. Depositions are probably in many cases caused by the conflict. As we are interested in the effects of successions on conflict, we in the following focus on natural deaths.

Table 4 compares the observed risk of civil war in a country-year, depending on whether a monarch died a natural death that year and whether the country practiced primogeniture or not. The table shows that the risk of civil war onset was higher in years when a monarch died naturally, but the pattern is more accentuated in states not practicing primogeniture. Without primogeniture, civil wars broke out in 3.2% of the normal country-years and in 17.7% of the country-years when a monarch died a natural death. With primogeniture civil war broke out in 2.3% of normal years and in 5.1% of the years when a monarch died a natural death.

Table 4. Frequency of war onset in a country-year. Number of cases in parentheses.

Civil war		
	No death	Death
Primogeniture	2.3% (8388)	5.1% (294)
Other	3.2% (4735)	17.7% (159)
Interstate war		
	No death	Death
Primogeniture	6.5% (8388)	11.2% (294)
Other	8.7% (4735)	14.6% (159)

The risk of civil war in years when no monarch died was slightly (0.9 percentage points) lower in states practicing primogeniture. There is thus a possibility that the observed difference is due to primogeniture states being different in some other way. It is therefore necessary to control for other variables in a regression framework, which we now turn to.

*** Table 5 ***

In our main model, we estimate the risk of civil war onset in a country-year. We test our hypotheses through the dummy variable indicating whether there was a natural death in a country-year, the dummy for primogeniture, and the interaction between the two. The results strongly support our first hypothesis: The natural death of a monarch increased the risk of civil war. However, as model 2 shows, the increase was significantly weaker in states practicing primogeniture. These patterns remain even when controlling for country fixed effects in models 3 and 4. Thus, our second

Table 5. Determinants of civil war onset. Logit and conditional logit analyses

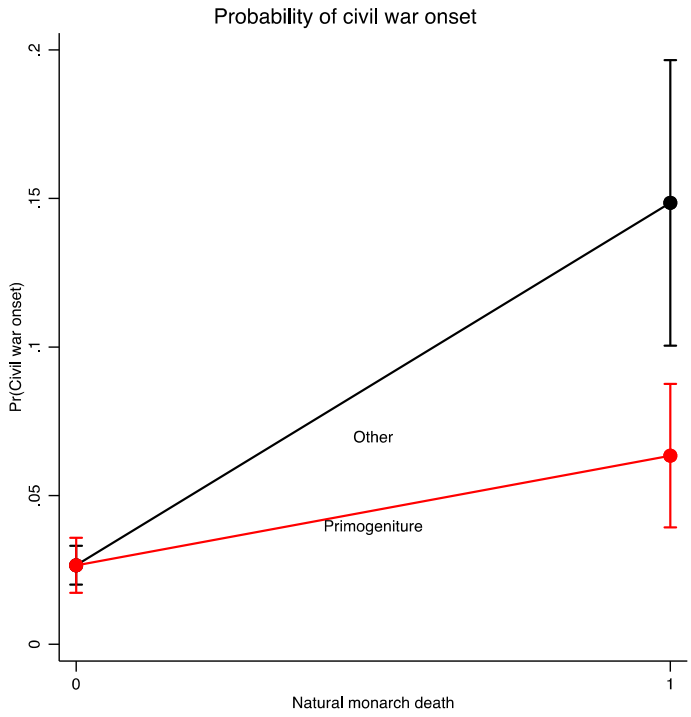
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Natural death	1.487***	1.968***	1.546***	1.993***
	(8.573)	(9.803)	(8.534)	(9.525)
Primogeniture	-0.096	-0.001	-0.431	-0.347
	(0.434)	(0.004)	(1.785)	(1.414)
Natural death x primogeniture		-1.024***		-0.975**
		(3.671)		(3.168)
Peace spell	-0.020***	-0.020***	-0.014***	-0.014***
	(5.940)	(5.966)	(4.464)	(4.554)
Peace spell^2	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(6.626)	(6.674)	(4.454)	(4.506)
Age	0.005	0.004	0.007	0.007
	(0.364)	(0.299)	(0.506)	(0.489)
Age^2	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.319)	(0.253)	(0.444)	(0.436)
Tenure	-0.005	-0.004	-0.005	-0.004
	(0.852)	(0.716)	(0.910)	(0.776)
Previous tenure	0.007	0.007	0.004	0.004
	(1.815)	(1.765)	(1.031)	(0.985)
Parliament	0.372	0.373	0.178	0.177
	(1.731)	(1.721)	(1.005)	(0.988)
Ln(Area)	0.408***	0.405***	0.404**	0.400***
	(5.119)	(5.110)	(3.262)	(3.314)
Mountains	-0.011	-0.011	-0.009	-0.009
	(1.279)	(1.238)	(1.070)	(1.055)
Interregnum	0.245	0.273	0.218	0.249
	(0.524)	(0.594)	(0.486)	(0.566)
Century dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	13575	13575	13372	13372
Pseudo R^2	0.103	0.105	0.056	0.058

Note: Absolute *t* statistics in parentheses. Standard errors clustered at the country level. Constants not shown. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

hypothesis is also confirmed for civil wars: Primogeniture moderates the effect of autocratic succession. The results hold also with linear probability models, with the coefficients being somewhat larger in relation to the standard errors than in the logit and conditional logit models.

Figure 3 illustrates the predicted probabilities of civil war onset calculated from the average marginal effects from model 3. It shows that a monarch's natural death increased the risk of civil war from 2.7% to 6.3% in states practicing primogeniture and from 2.7% to 14.9% in states not practicing primogeniture, indicating both that successions substantially increased the risk of civil war and that primogeniture sharply reduced the risk of such succession wars.

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of civil war onset



The models also show that civil wars were more common in larger countries and less common after extended periods of peace. None of the other control variables are significant.

Interstate wars

Next, we turn to the relationship between autocratic succession and interstate wars. The analyses use three different dependent variables: In the first models, we focus on international war onset regardless of which state was the aggressor, while we in the last models separate between onset of wars in which the country in focus was on the attacking side and onset of wars when it was attacked. The results from the first models show that a monarch's natural death increased the risk of interstate war significantly, thus confirming our first hypothesis. The effect is substantial, with a succession increasing the risk of interstate war onset from 7.3% to 12.1%. However, there is no significant interaction between natural deaths and primogeniture, meaning that–in contrast to our theoretical expectations–primogeniture did not moderate the succession's effect on interstate wars.

We can only speculate on the reasons for why primogeniture had a moderating effect on civil wars but not on interstate wars. One possible explanation is that monarchs were hesitant to delegate important decisions on war and peace to their heirs, while they often delegated the rule of a part of the country to their heir. Thus, their heirs really never had the opportunity to show their true nature in international relations, whereas they had more chances doing so in domestic policies. The secrecy that shrouded international relations between European monarchies may also have made it difficult for states to attain correct information about the true nature of neighboring

states' heirs: Royal propaganda was, characteristically, set on aggrandizing crown princes' accomplishments and hide their weaknesses. In contrast, the regime's members had firsthand information on the crown prince's behavior, and could easily see through the propaganda.

*** Table 6 ***

When we separate between wars when the country in focus was attacked (or on the same side as the attacked country) and when it was attacking (or was on the same side as the attacking country), we see that the effect is primarily driven by the fact that countries were being attacked in the wake of successions. While natural deaths significantly increased the risk that a country was attacked, they did not significantly increase the risk that a country engaged in offensive war. These results should, however, be interpreted with some caution as it is often difficult to ascertain who was the aggressor.

Regarding control variables, a monarch's age did not significantly affect the risk of his country being attacked, but it did affect his propensity of attacking other countries. The effect is curvilinear, with the estimated probability of attacking being highest around the age of 35. Larger countries were more likely both to attack and be attacked, but the former effect ceases to be significant when including country fixed effects. Mountainous countries were also more likely to attack other countries but were only more likely to be attacked if country fixed effects are included.

Table 6. Determinants of international war onset. Logit and conditional logit analyses

	(1) All wars	(2) All wars	(3) All wars	(4) All wars	(5) Was attacked	(6) Attacker	(7) Was attacked	(8) Attacker
Natural death	0.593**	0.467	0.621**	0.498	0.620***	0.436	0.658***	0.461
	(3.137)	(1.517)	(3.284)	(1.721)	(3.349)	(1.704)	(3.511)	(1.797)
Primogeniture	0.018	0.008	-0.148	-0.158	0.004	0.026	-0.270	0.009
	(0.181)	(0.074)	(1.147)	(1.195)	(0.035)	(0.158)	(1.330)	(0.035)
Natural death x primogeniture		0.214		0.211				
		(0.591)		(0.598)				
Peace spell	-0.015***	-0.015***	-0.007*	-0.007*	-0.020***	-0.008	-0.013**	0.000
	(4.345)	(4.347)	(2.357)	(2.351)	(3.705)	(1.650)	(2.918)	(0.072)
Peace spell^2	0.000**	0.000**	0.000	0.000	0.000**	0.000	0.000***	-0.000
	(3.182)	(3.183)	(1.821)	(1.810)	(3.159)	(0.042)	(3.650)	(0.961)
Age	0.033**	0.033**	0.031**	0.031**	0.020	0.049***	0.019	0.044**
	(3.271)	(3.254)	(3.070)	(3.065)	(1.596)	(3.626)	(1.574)	(3.070)
Age^2	-0.000**	-0.000**	-0.000*	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.001***	-0.000	-0.001***
	(2.607)	(2.595)	(2.501)	(2.494)	(0.357)	(3.743)	(0.486)	(3.318)
Tenure	-0.006	-0.006	-0.005	-0.005	-0.012*	0.003	-0.010	0.003
	(1.308)	(1.328)	(1.125)	(1.148)	(2.124)	(0.489)	(1.752)	(0.489)
Previous tenure	0.004	0.004	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.006	0.003	0.004
	(1.767)	(1.767)	(1.356)	(1.355)	(0.967)	(1.679)	(1.001)	(1.037)
Parliament	0.125	0.125	0.053	0.053	0.282*	-0.038	0.013	0.095
	(0.993)	(0.993)	(0.366)	(0.366)	(1.971)	(0.202)	(0.081)	(0.441)
Ln(Area)	0.403***	0.403***	0.194*	0.194*	0.339***	0.432***	0.222***	0.179
	(9.299)	(9.347)	(2.377)	(2.390)	(6.340)	(8.143)	(3.382)	(1.397)
Mountains	0.010*	0.010*	0.032***	0.032***	0.004	0.015*	0.018*	0.038*
	(2.003)	(2.002)	(3.550)	(3.572)	(0.490)	(2.266)	(2.505)	(2.572)
Interregnum	0.348	0.344	0.417	0.415	0.438	0.251	0.728	0.071
	(1.047)	(1.036)	(1.313)	(1.303)	(1.096)	(0.477)	(1.913)	(0.123)
Century dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	13575	13575	13575	13575	13575	13575	13575	13447
Pseudo R^2	0.083	0.083	0.024	0.024	0.067	0.075	0.027	0.020

Note: Absolute *t* statistics in parentheses. Standard errors clustered at the country level. Constants not shown. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To summarize, we have shown that autocratic successions caused by largely exogenous factors such as illness and accident had strong effects on political stability. They increased the risk of civil war, especially when there was ambiguity about the succession (i.e. when primogeniture was not practiced). They also increased the risk that foreign enemies attacked the country, taking advantage of the regime's confusion and the new monarch's inexperience.

Alternative and complementary explanations

Children and succession crises

Primogeniture solves the coordination problem by tying the succession to biological processes. But it also requires that there are eligible heirs, and reproduction was therefore a constant worry for monarchs. Henry VIII of England's attempts to produce a male heir to avoid future civil strife illustrates the importance of the issue, as they eventually led to England breaking with the Catholic Church when the Pope refused to grant Henry a divorce. Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee (2017) argue that most elective monarchies also operated under a norm that gave a monarch's male children precedence in the order of succession—well illustrated by the Habsburgs' continuous occupation of the throne of the Holy Roman Empire between 1438 and 1740—and that failure to reproduce male heirs was a universal source of succession disputes in European history regardless of de jure succession order (also see Wang 2017). They substantiate their claim by showing that the absence of male heirs increased the likelihood that European regions were embroiled in civil wars (using Kohn's compilation of wars, 2013).[11] Moreover, Oeindrila Dube and S.P. Harish (2017) argue that unmarried female monarchs were more susceptible to attacks than their male

[11] Acharya and Lee's dependent variable is ongoing civil war and not war onset as is the focus in this paper.

counterparts, due to their perceived weakness. These findings raise the question of what role the availability of male heirs played for the risk that succession wars broke out and how it interacted with primogeniture in shaping war outcomes.

Table 7 presents the observed frequency of war depending on whether the monarch had at least one son alive when he died and on whether the state practiced primogeniture or not.

Table 7. Percentage of years with civil war onset depending on natural death, existence of at least one living son, and primogeniture. Number of country-years in parentheses.

No natural death		
	No living son	At least one living son
Primogeniture	2.3% (3681)	2.3% (4707)
Other	2.8% (2311)	3.6% (2424)
Natural death		
	No living son	At least one living son
Primogeniture	8.4% (107)	3.2% (187)
Other	21.9% (73)	14.1% (86)

The table shows that the risk of civil war was considerably lower following a monarch's death if the monarch was survived by one of his sons. In states practicing primogeniture the risk of civil war was 3.2% if the monarch had a living son when he died and 8.4% if he did not. The corresponding risk for states not practicing primogeniture was 14.1% if the monarch had a living son and 21.9% if he did not. The patterns seemingly confirm that a monarch's ability to produce healthy sons was

important for avoiding succession wars regardless of which succession arrangements were practiced. However, it is necessary to control for other confounding factors, which we do in table 8.

Table 8. Determinants of civil war onset. Logit and conditional logit analyses

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Natural death	1.488***	2.425***	1.900***	1.547***	2.465***	1.919***
	(8.582)	(8.440)	(5.347)	(8.463)	(8.283)	(5.186)
Primogeniture	-0.097	-0.005	0.001	-0.431	-0.341	-0.345
	(0.441)	(0.024)	(0.005)	(1.744)	(1.391)	(1.404)
At least one son	0.023	0.118		0.012	0.111	
	(0.125)	(0.551)		(0.064)	(0.504)	
Tenure	-0.005	-0.004	-0.005	-0.005	-0.004	-0.005
	(0.819)	(0.672)	(0.783)	(0.904)	(0.753)	(0.830)
Natural death x primogeniture		-0.980***	-1.051***		-0.934***	-1.002***
		(3.908)	(4.145)		(3.335)	(3.578)
Natural death x at least one son		-0.902*			-0.928*	
		(1.967)			(2.027)	
Natural death x tenure			0.004			0.005
			(0.349)			(0.363)
Peace spell	-0.020***	-0.020***	-0.020***	-0.014***	-0.014***	-0.014***
	(5.969)	(5.988)	(5.964)	(4.457)	(4.525)	(4.570)
Peace spell^2	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(6.667)	(6.700)	(6.670)	(4.450)	(4.527)	(4.538)
Age	0.004	0.000	0.005	0.006	0.003	0.007
	(0.316)	(0.031)	(0.348)	(0.490)	(0.219)	(0.542)
Age^2	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.258)	(0.009)	(0.301)	(0.419)	(0.202)	(0.479)
Previous tenure	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.004	0.004	0.004
	(1.751)	(1.694)	(1.778)	(1.009)	(0.940)	(1.001)
Parliament	0.374	0.374	0.373	0.179	0.171	0.178
	(1.724)	(1.725)	(1.720)	(1.003)	(0.975)	(0.994)
Ln(Area)	0.407***	0.406***	0.405***	0.405**	0.401**	0.401***
	(5.029)	(5.034)	(5.106)	(3.162)	(3.198)	(3.305)
Mountains	-0.011	-0.011	-0.011	-0.009	-0.010	-0.009
	(1.238)	(1.213)	(1.221)	(1.077)	(1.235)	(1.036)
Interregnum	0.237	0.263	0.276	0.214	0.237	0.253
	(0.543)	(0.602)	(0.603)	(0.516)	(0.574)	(0.576)
Century dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	13575	13575	13575	13372	13372	13372
Pseudo R^2	0.103	0.107	0.105	0.056	0.061	0.059

Note: Absolute *t* statistics in parentheses. Standard errors clustered at the country level. Constants not shown. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In models 2 and 4, in addition to the interaction term between natural deaths and primogeniture, we include an interaction term between natural deaths and the dummy measuring whether a monarch had at least one living son. The interaction is

significant and goes in the expected direction, while the interaction between natural deaths and primogeniture retains its significance and most of its effect. Thus, it seems as if both the de jure institution of primogeniture and the opportunity to engage in de facto primogeniture reduced the risk that a monarch's death ended in civil war. The effects are of similar magnitudes, reducing the risk that the death of a monarch resulted in civil war with about 7 (sons) and 8 (primogeniture) percentage points respectively. The presence of living sons did not affect the risk of civil wars in years without successions.

Further models (see models 1 and 3 in table A13 in the appendix), which include a triple interaction between natural deaths, primogeniture, and the availability of living sons, show that the effect of the availability of living sons did not vary between countries practicing primogeniture and countries with other succession arrangements, suggesting independent effects of primogeniture and having living sons.

Acharya and Lee (2017) thus seem correct in assuming that the availability of living sons made power transitions easier regardless of de jure succession arrangements—likely because it seemed natural for many contemporaries that the monarch's eldest son should inherit the throne regardless of succession order. However, primogeniture's independent effect points to the conclusion that the principle further reduced uncertainty about the succession, by legitimizing the eldest son's claim. The fact that primogeniture delineates a clear line of succession also when the monarch lacks living sons, as long as he has other living relatives (such as grandsons, brothers, nephews, or daughters, if female inheritance is allowed), may explain why the principle had a positive effect on political stability also in the absence of living sons.

The presence of living sons did not moderate the risk that countries were attacked by foreign enemies in the wake of a monarch's death (see table A14 in the appendix). Neither did it have an independent effect on the risk that countries were attacked by foreign enemies.

Legacies of political stability and succession crises

Abramson and Velasco Rivera (2017) show that monarchs who were fortunate to enjoy long tenures were able to accumulate power, which benefited their successors' chances of surviving in office. To test the reasonable hypothesis that a monarch's accumulated power also reduced the risk that a succession war broke out at his death, we introduce an interaction term between monarchs' tenures and natural deaths in models 3 and 6 in table 8. However, the interaction term is not significant in any of the models. Triple interactions (see models 2 and 4 in table A1 in the appendix) show that the (null) effect of tenure is not dependent on whether the monarch had living sons upon which he could bestow his accumulated power when he died. Long tenures were as likely as short tenures to end in civil war after the monarch's death. Neither did a monarch's tenure affect the risk that his country was attacked by foreign enemies in the wake of his death (see models 3 and 6 in table A14 in the appendix).

Robustness checks

Natural deaths

The perhaps most important objection to our analyses is that of reverse causality. Could the deaths of monarchs have been caused by the wars, instead of the other way around? Even though this is the reason we exclude murders, depositions, and battle deaths, one could still imagine that war heightens the tensions on the monarch, which

could induce a natural death. To determine whether that is the case, we take two approaches. First, we simply reverse our analysis and set natural leader death in a country-year as the dependent variable and variables for ongoing civil and interstate war as our independent variables, together with all the previously used controls. We here exclude years in which a war started, since our main analyses already show that there is a positive correlation between a natural death and the outbreak of war, and it is impossible to determine the direction of causality relying only on statistics. However, if war-induced stress is a cause of natural deaths, we should observe an effect also in the years of war. The results are presented in table 9, with separate models for civil and interstate wars and a combined model.

*** Table 9 ***

Models 1 and 4 show that the risk that a monarch died a natural death was not higher in years with civil war. In fact, the only consistent significant predictor of natural deaths is the age of the monarch. The relationship is curvilinear, with the risk of natural death increasing substantially around the age of 50. Looking at model 5, we can, however, see that there is a significant effect of ongoing international war on natural deaths. But the direction is opposite of that which the stress hypothesis suggests: Monarchs were less likely to die during periods of international war. There is no apparent theoretical explanation for this finding, but for the purpose of this paper it is enough to note that the risk of dying naturally was definitely not higher in times of war.

Table 9. Determinants of natural death of monarchs. Logit and conditional logit analyses

	Civil wars	Interstate wars	Both types of war	Civil wars	Interstate wars	Both types of war
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ongoing civil war	-0.023		0.061	-0.042		0.042
	(0.149)		(0.335)	(0.243)		(0.214)
Ongoing international war		-0.289	-0.277		-0.474**	-0.364
		(1.704)	(1.658)		(2.785)	(1.936)
Primogeniture	-0.041	-0.131	-0.055	0.307	0.281	0.360*
	(0.326)	(0.827)	(0.364)	(1.794)	(1.596)	(2.393)
Civil war peace spell	0.001		0.001	0.002		0.002
	(0.701)		(0.451)	(1.055)		(1.234)
Civil war peace spell^2	-0.000		-0.000	-0.000		-0.000
	(0.352)		(0.230)	(0.359)		(0.659)
International war peace spell		0.008*	0.008*		0.000	0.007
		(2.151)	(2.305)		(0.311)	(1.813)
International war peace spell^2		-0.000*	-0.000*			-0.000
		(2.350)	(2.495)			(1.883)
Age	-0.023	-0.025	-0.023	-0.024	-0.026*	-0.025
	(1.828)	(1.958)	(1.734)	(1.747)	(2.038)	(1.701)
Age^2	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***
	(5.589)	(5.610)	(5.200)	(5.742)	(5.593)	(5.337)
Tenure	0.007	0.007	0.006	0.004	0.005	0.004
	(1.539)	(1.588)	(1.571)	(0.757)	(1.008)	(0.883)
Parliament	0.085	0.088	0.067	0.032	-0.006	-0.049
	(0.647)	(0.591)	(0.450)	(0.222)	(0.041)	(0.345)
Ln(Area)	0.004	0.061	0.049	0.130	0.239*	0.185
	(0.077)	(1.065)	(0.840)	(1.223)	(2.102)	(1.547)
Mountains	0.006	0.010**	0.010**	-0.018	-0.003	-0.012
	(1.940)	(3.159)	(3.107)	(0.921)	(0.132)	(0.566)
Century dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	13016	12397	12145	13016	12397	12145
Pseudo R^2	0.080	0.078	0.080	0.091	0.090	0.091

Note: Absolute *t* statistics in parentheses. Standard errors clustered at the country level. Constants not shown.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

However, one could speculate that the stress of war is highest at a war's outbreak. We have therefore specifically studied the years in which monarchs died of natural reasons and war broke out. What was the order of events, and what do the descriptions of the wars in the sources tell us about their causes? Forty-three civil wars broke out in countries the same year as a monarch died of natural reasons. According to the sources the vast majority were related to the succession or the death of the monarch. Only five of the wars were underway when the monarch died and hence completely unrelated to the death of the monarch. However, it is only natural that during these years wars broke out that were unrelated to the succession. Removing conflicts that erupted before the death of the monarch from the analysis would make these years unnaturally peaceful. The expected number of wars in years in which a monarch died is 12, if the probability of conflict was identical to years in which no monarch died.

For international wars, we have looked at the 33 wars in which the country was attacked in the same year that a monarch died of natural causes. Twenty-five of these wars erupted after the death of the monarch. As a comparison, a country should on average have been attacked by another country in 17 out of the 453 years in which a monarch died a natural death, if the probability of being attacked was identical to years in which no monarch died. Reverse causality does therefore not seem to be an issue. The full list of wars is available in the appendix.

Primogeniture

Reverse causality is not an issue for the association between the interaction between primogeniture and natural deaths on one side and war onset on the other, as years with

natural deaths are assigned the established order of succession at the time of the monarch's death. Changes in succession orders that occurred in the same year after the death of the monarch are only counted as implemented from the year after the monarch's death and consequently do not alter the interaction between primogeniture and natural deaths.

However, omitted variables that affect both the likelihood of adopting primogeniture and the risk of civil war may introduce endogeneity problems to our models. If, for example, weak monarchies were less likely to adopt primogeniture and more likely to experience civil war, the observed negative relationship between primogeniture and civil war onset may be spurious. The risk of endogeneity is foremost a problem for interpreting primogeniture's main effect on civil war. It is less of a problem for interpreting the effect of the interaction term between primogeniture and monarchs' natural deaths on civil war. Maurice Bun and Teresa Harrison (2014) show that under typical conditions regarding higher-order dependencies between endogenous and exogenous variables, interaction terms between endogenous (primogeniture) and exogenous (natural death) variables are consistent—at least for the OLS estimator—as long as the main effect of the endogenous variable (primogeniture) is controlled for (see table A8 in the appendix for confirmation that our results are robust for such models).

To be certain that endogeneity is not a problem we have, however, also instrumented primogeniture with the regional adoption of primogeniture. The rationale behind the instrument is that countries may have been inspired by neighboring countries into adopting primogeniture, whereas neighboring countries' adoption of primogeniture is

unlikely to have affected the risk of civil war in a country in other ways. The resulting IV models are presented in table A15 in the appendix. Interestingly, the endogeneity tests suggest that our ordinary models do not have an endogeneity problem. The results from the IV models are also in essence identical to the results in our ordinary models: Primogeniture does not have a main effect on civil wars, but the interaction between primogeniture and natural deaths is significant in all models and shows that primogeniture reduced the risk of succession wars. The models also demonstrate that the regional adoption of primogeniture is a valid instrument for primogeniture, suggesting that countries were inspired by their neighbors into adopting new succession orders.

Conclusions

Ever since the dawn of man's rule over other men, prominent political thinkers have debated how to arrange leadership succession. In this paper, we have shown that they have done so for good reason by presenting evidence that successions, caused by largely exogenous factors such as the natural deaths of monarchs, severely increased the risk of civil war and foreign invasion in medieval and early modern Europe. We have also brought evidence to the debate on the relative merits of hereditary and elective succession arrangements in autocracies, by showing that a succession based on primogeniture drastically reduced the risk of civil war in the wake of a monarch's death. As primogeniture spread over Europe, the number of civil wars spurred by succession conflicts declined drastically, ensuring the continuity of executive authority across generations. Thomas Paine was, thus, wrong in dismissing the argument that hereditary succession preserves a nation from civil wars as "the most bare-face falsity ever imposed on mankind."

Our findings contribute to a state-building literature that has primarily focused on power-sharing institutions' (i.e. parliaments') contribution to state-building efforts in European history (Ertman 1997; Stasavage 2016; Tilly 1992). In Charles Tilly's (1985) classic description of European state formation, "state making" is defined as the process of eliminating or neutralizing internal enemies. The most obvious example of elimination is a military campaign to suppress a rebellion or an assassination of a rival. But neutralization is equally important, and here we have added crucial evidence that institutions governing the succession were key in preventing conflict in European history.

Our work contributes to a growing body of evidence of hereditary succession arrangements' historical importance for state making in autocracies. Kokkonen and Sundell (2014) have shown that the spread of primogeniture reduced the risk that monarchs were deposed in medieval and early modern Europe. Acharya and Lee (2017) have presented evidence that also the availability of male heirs reduced the risk that monarchs were deposed, as most polities had a tendency to engage in de facto primogeniture if the monarch had a living son when he died. Recently, Yuhua Wang (2017) has extended the argument by showing that Chinese emperors ruled longer than their European counterparts, due to their tradition of engaging in polygamy and concubinage which provided them with more male heirs than their European counterparts. The results in this paper help explain previous findings, as the literature builds on the—previously untested—assumption that primogeniture and the availability of male heirs reduced the risk that monarchs were deposed, because both phenomena provided the regime with the means to avoid a succession war when the incumbent monarch died (Tullock 1987). In short, our study provides the missing link

that explains why hereditary succession arrangements increased monarchs' chances of surviving in office, as bargaining over loyalty in autocracies always takes place in the shadow of the succession (cf. Chiozza and Goemans 2011).

Instances of succession have had momentous consequences for war and peace during a large portion of European history. In fact, moments of leader change are among the most tumultuous and decisive in politics, and are in autocracies often even associated with regime collapse (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz 2016; Svolik 2012). Even though the methods for managing the succession has varied throughout history—from royal elections, to inheritance, to party decisions—the core problem of transferring power in autocracies remains truly timeless.

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