

## **POLITICAL REACH, STATE FRAGILITY, AND THE INCIDENCE OF MARITIME PIRACY EXPLAINING PIRACY AND PIRATE ORGANIZATION, 1993-2012**

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According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), in 2012 pirates carried out 278 piracy incidents, 27 hijackings, and taken more than 200 crew members as hostages. Despite the resurgence of piracy and the economic and security concerns associated with it, academic researchers have largely neglected the study of piracy. Research on maritime piracy consists mostly of case studies of countries or regions with particularly pressing piracy problems. We lack systematic explanation and analyses, in part due to the absence of comprehensive and systematic data on pirate attacks. While international organizations such as the IMB collect information on piracy incidents, there is no unified data source. In addition, data on incidents collected by these organizations provide almost no information on the pirates and their organizational structure.

This project pursues four objectives to alleviate the above shortcomings. The first goal is to provide a comprehensive and novel theoretical explanation of piracy. Existing studies of pirate prone regions identify state capacity and economic opportunities as the main drivers of piracy. Yet, we believe that such arguments neglect the importance of a government's political reach. The authors argue that the effect of state capacity and economic opportunities on piracy is a function of the government's ability to project power over the country's entire territory. It is therefore expected that government reach – a function of the distance between a country's capital and its coastline, or the length of a country's coastline - conditions the effect of other factors on piracy. Second, to evaluate these expectations systematically, the authors propose the creation of a comprehensive database on piracy incidents that combines information from all four organizations currently engaged in data collection. Existing data sources suffer from diverging or incompatible formats, partly overlapping data, or a lack of public access. A comprehensive database is thus needed. Third, to address the lack of information on pirates and their organizational characteristics, the project involves the conduct of expert surveys in several countries identified as particularly piracy prone. To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to collect data on pirate organizations. Finally, out-of-sample tests will be conducted to predict piracy events into the future which will benefit policymakers interested in identifying at-risk states.

Several methods will be used to advance these objectives. With the help of graduate and undergraduate research assistants, the authors will collect data on piracy incidents based on reporting by the four major organizations involved in collecting piracy data. The data will be uploaded into an online database with mapping capabilities and will be available in incident and country-level format. To improve existing knowledge of pirate organizations, expert surveys on pirate groups in four countries identified as particularly piracy prone regions by the IMB will be conducted. Surveys include questions on pirate group location, size, ports used by the organizations, among others. The resulting data will be uploaded into a database that is publicly accessible. Using these data, the authors will conduct quantitative analyses to evaluate our argument on the relationship between state strength, economic opportunities, and reach for both the global sample of piracy and the subset of piracy prone regions. Moreover, statistical techniques designed for predictions will be used to forecast which countries are particularly likely to suffer from piracy problems in the future.

We anticipate that this project will enhance infrastructure for research and education, disseminate scientific understanding, and advance discovery and understanding. First, the project includes the creation of two databases useful for other researchers and policymakers. Comprehensive data on piracy incidents will allow researchers in political science and related disciplines to systematically analyze maritime piracy. Moreover, data on pirate organizations collected for the project will for the first time provide researchers with the opportunity to investigate the micro-dynamics of piracy. Second, the resulting research findings will be presented at interdisciplinary conferences and published in peer-reviewed journals and as a book, which will enhance the scientific understanding of piracy. Third, participating in this project will familiarize graduate students in political science with the topic of maritime piracy and thus contribute to the training of future policymakers and researchers. Fourth, the project has clear implications for policymakers engaged in counter-piracy efforts. Understanding the incidence and evolution of maritime piracy is essential for developing effective counter-piracy strategies. Policymakers need to know where and why incidents are occurring, but also how pirate groups are organized, to counter the pirate threat. Improving our understanding of the determinants of piracy and the characteristics of pirate organizations thus provides important benefits for national defense and other government agencies.