

Michael Honegger

A Differentiated View on the Interplay Between Democratic and Territorial Peace Theory

Abstract: Democratic peace theory has strongly influenced peace research and Western foreign policy but is strongly contested by territorial peace theory. The current literature underestimates the role of civil society when assessing the effects of political systems on conflict behavior. The work presented here claims that the democratic peace holds when the civic component of democracy is taken into account, even when controlling for border settlement. Furthermore, it is argued that the relationship between horizontal checks and balances within the political system and peace is confounded. The hypotheses are tested, applying a quantitative approach assessing data on militarized interstate disputes (MID) from 1816 to 2001. The different models estimated suggest that a well-established democratic civil society has an appeasing impact on the relations between democracies which is not confounded. However, the results do not support the claim that the relationship between horizontal checks and peace is spurious.

Keywords: International Conflict, Democratic Peace, Territorial Peace, Democratic Institutions, Peace and Conflict Research, MIDs

Michael Honegger studied Economics, Political Science and European Global Studies at the Universities of Bern, Basel and Trento. Since graduating from the Institute for European Global Studies Basel in October 2023, he has worked at the Department for Military Sociology at the Military Academy at the ETH Zurich and is co-author of the study “Security 2024”.

Introduction

“Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don’t attack each other.”¹ This quote from Bill Clinton’s 1994 State of the Union Address exemplifies the role the promotion of democracy took in Western foreign policy over the last decades. The belief that democracies are more peaceful – at least vis-a-vis other democracies – has shaped the West’s foreign policy agenda and has been one of the main explanations for interventions in foreign countries.² This policy was strongly influenced by the academic discussion on so-called democratic peace theory.

However, democratic peace theory is far from uncontested. Scholars have suggested that the relationship between democracy and peace is spurious and driven by an omitted variable.³ Possibly, the most convincing of these arguments is Gibler’s territorial peace theory. According to this, both peace and democracy are promoted by settled borders.⁴

The thesis presented here argues that neither perspective goes far enough and adds a differentiated view on the interplay between democratic and territorial peace theory. The current literature suggests that controlling for border settlement indeed annuls the relationship between state institutions and conflict behavior. The work presented here proposes that the democratic peace is not confounded by territorial threats when the civil society component of democracy is considered.

The hypotheses are tested by applying a quantitative approach using data on militarized interstate disputes (MID) from 1816 to 2001. Various logistic regression models are estimated including different specifications. The results suggest that the democratic peace holds when the effects of civil society are considered. The impact is especially pronounced in the models using the normal weak link specification. The models applying a second specification introduced by Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell⁵ have more ambiguous results. The effect of democracy does not vanish but becomes partially insignificant once the model controls for settled borders. Furthermore, the

1 William Clinton, “1994 State of the Union Address” (Washington DC, January 25, 1994), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/docs/sou94.htm>.

2 Babak Bahador, Jeremy Moses, and William Lafi Youmans, “Rhetoric and Recollection: Recounting the George W. Bush Administration’s Case for War in Iraq,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2017): 4–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12412>.

3 Michael Mousseau, “The Social Market Roots of Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 33, no. 4 (April 2009): 52–86, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2009.33.4.52>.

4 Douglas M. Gibler, “Bordering on Peace: Democracy, Territorial Issues, and Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2007): 509–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00462.x>.

5 Håvard Hegre, Michael Bernhard, and Jan Teorell, “Civil Society and the Democratic Peace,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 1 (January 2020): 32–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719850620>.

dyadic nature of the democratic peace is clearly underpinned. Only the combination of two democratic states is less conflict-prone than other dyads. The effects of the horizontal checks between the political powers become irrelevant as soon as the social accountability variable is included in the model. Hence, the main hypothesis that the democratic peace holds when a country has a well-established civil society is supported. Nevertheless, the estimates also confirm that border settlement is an important factor for peace.

The following provides a theoretical overview of democratic peace theory and its critiques. On this basis, the hypotheses are developed. The dataset and the models applied are described in part four. Finally, the results and the conclusion are presented in the subsequent sections.

Democratic Peace Theory and Its Critiques

Democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with each other. Since the introduction of the Westphalian state system, two democracies have never fought a major war against each other. The exceptions mentioned by scholars can be counted on the fingers of one hand and may all be contested.⁶ This empirical connection of a state's domestic political institutions and its war-proneness is known as the democratic peace and has become one of the most highly regarded results of the study of international relations. The correlation has been confirmed in countless articles and proved to be very robust in a wide range of models controlling for various other influences on interstate conflict.⁷ In his groundbreaking article Stuart Bremer showed that domestic political institutions not only have a statistically significant effect on peace, but are also among the most relevant factors.⁸ The further empiric assessment of the conflict behavior of democracies has revealed the scope of the correlation. While democracies virtually never go to war with each other, they act no more peacefully towards non-democratic states. It seems that democratic institutions cannot exert their pacifying effect in mixed dyads.⁹

6 Bruce M. Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, The Norton Series in World Politics (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

7 Russett and Oneal; Stuart A. Bremer, "Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no. 2 (June 1992): 309–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002792036002005>; Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938740>.

8 Bremer, "Dangerous Dyads."

9 Maoz and Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986"; Russett and Oneal, *Triangulating Peace*.

Nevertheless, the strong performance of the democratic peace in general helped generate a broad body of theoretical literature claiming that the democratic peace is not merely a correlation – a statistic artefact – but a causal relationship. Most of the various explanations for the democratic peace focus on the norms developed within democracies or the structures of democratic institutions.

The normative explanation assumes that the norms established within a polity are externalized and shape a state's actions in the international realm, too. In democracies, politicians compete for power without resorting to violence and policies are the results of compromises. According to this explanation, democratic governments apply the same principles in the international sphere and seek to resolve conflicts peacefully. In non-democracies, on the other hand, political decision-making is often shaped by coercion and violence. When an autocracy triggers a conflict with a democratic state the latter is forced to answer to the threat. If necessary, the government needs to abandon its democratic norms and resort to military violence to ensure the state's bare survival. When a jointly democratic dyad faces a dispute, a violent settlement mechanism is excluded in advance, the democratic norms remain in place and the conflict will not escalate. Thus, this reasoning explains not only why democracies do not fight each other but also why conflicts between democracies and autocracies are not particularly rare.¹⁰

The structural argument already described by Kant assumes that the citizens, as the democratic sovereign, would never decide in favor of war since they have to bear the costs of war themselves.¹¹ In representative systems, present in most modern democracies, citizens do not directly vote upon going to war or not but choose leaders who decide. When the elected officials take unpopular decisions, they may not get reelected for the next term: democratic leaders face high audience costs. In autocracies leaders must worry far less about such audience costs.¹²

However, the difference in audience costs alone cannot explain the democratic peace. Democracies are not less war-prone when their adversaries are non-democratic states. Maoz and Russett add a decisive piece to the structural argument that accounts for this.¹³ They state that every political leader needs the support of the group that legitimizes him for going to war. This group is much

10 Maoz and Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986."

11 Wolfgang Kersting, "5 *Die Bürgerliche Verfassung in Jedem Staate Soll Republikanisch Sein*" In *Immanuel Kant: Zum ewigen Frieden*, ed. O. Höffe (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110782462-007>.

12 Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 154.

13 Maoz and Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986."

larger in democratic societies. There are very few goals that enough people consider legitimate reasons for war. Even if such reasonable goals are present, it takes considerable time for an elected leader to gather the necessary support. When two democracies face each other, both leaders must find backing. This, in turn, creates a time slot for diplomats to settle the conflict without military force. Autocrats need less time to rally their legitimizing groups behind them and need to pay little attention to public opinion. Hence, they are prepared to wage war more quickly. When autocrats threaten democratic societies, as described above, elected leaders manage to receive support faster. Thus, in mixed dyads, war-proneness of the relevant groups is more easily achieved than in jointly democratic dyads.

Maoz and Russett empirically assess the normative and the structural model.¹⁴ Their findings provide support for both explanations. The effect of democratic institutions, however, proves to be less robust than the impact of norms. The theories, however, are not mutually exclusive but very interactive. Thus, they certainly both influence one another.

Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell aim for a deeper understanding of the mechanism behind the democratic peace.¹⁵ The authors focus on the accountability of leaders and thereby apply a more complex concept of democracy. They assess three independent mechanisms of democratic accountability: electoral, horizontal, and social accountability. The existing literature emphasizes the electoral mechanism. The structural argument reviewed above is essentially based on the possibility that unpopular leaders are removed from office through elections. The second mechanism is guaranteed by the horizontal separation of powers and the institutionalized checks and balances between them. The control of the executive power by the parliament and the courts is key to establishing horizontal accountability. Although present in the literature, this argument is less prominent.

The differentiated view on democracy – in particular, the introduction of social accountability into the model – is the main contribution of the authors' work. Social accountability is established through the engagement of civil society. A powerful civil society can effectively influence leaders between elections. Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell describe the non-electoral means available to civil society organizations (CSO) to control the government: First, they can organize protests. These have the ability to set the political agenda and draw attention to unpopular decisions. Turmoil alone can force leaders to give in. In a democracy, however, civil society

¹⁴ Maoz and Russett.

¹⁵ Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell, "Civil Society and the Democratic Peace."

actions also support electoral accountability, as ignoring or even suppressing protests seriously endangers reelection. Secondly, CSOs can also monitor institutions and create transparency and awareness for discrepancies. Lastly, civil society can also directly pressure the ruling elite, be it via petitions, litigation, or engagement with the institutions. All these means restrict leaders by placing audience costs on the government between elections.

The authors assess the impact of the three forms of accountability on the conflict behavior of states. Tested individually, all three mechanisms perform well and support the democratic peace argument. As the authors put all three forms of accountability together in one model and analyze their relative effects, they find that the influence of electoral checks is not significant anymore. The effects of horizontal and social accountability, on the other hand, are still different from zero. Hence, the democratic peace appears to be mainly influenced by horizontal checks within the political system and the engagement of civil society. Accordingly, the existing literature seems to overemphasize the importance of elections, while substantially undervaluing the impact of civil society.¹⁶

Democratic peace theory has been the subject of numerous criticisms. Scholars have argued that this relationship is not based on a causality, but is driven by an omitted variable that influences both democracy and conflict behavior. The most important criticism to democratic peace theory is presented by Douglas Gibling.¹⁷ In various articles he develops the territorial peace argument and provides notable empiric support for his idea. The theory suggests that the stability of a country's borders is the omitted variable that creates the seemingly spurious relationship between democracy and peace. Hence, border stability influences both conflicts and domestic political institutions, according to Gibling.

If the borders of a state are not stable, its territory is potentially in danger. The relationship between territory and conflict is straightforward. Territorial threats are extraordinarily salient and threaten peace. They escalate into war more often than other conflicts, have higher fatality rates, and are responsible for more than 50 percent of all wars in some datasets.¹⁸ The link between

16 Monty G. Marshall, "Polity5: Users' Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2018" (Center for Systemic Peace, 2020), www.systemicpeace.org.

17 Gibling, "Bordering on Peace"; Douglas M. Gibling, "Outside-In: The Effects of External Threat on State Centralization," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 4 (August 2010): 519–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002710370135>; Douglas M. Gibling and Marc L. Hutchison, "Territorial Issues, Audience Costs, and the Democratic Peace: The Importance of Issue Salience," *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 4 (October 2013): 879–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000923>.

18 See eg. Senese, 1996 and Hensel, 1996, as cited in (Gibling, "Outside-In")

border stability and democracy is less obvious. Gibler's argument is mainly based on the "rally around the leader" effect. According to this, a territorial threat to a country provokes a rise in patriotism and an uncritical approval of the government among the electorate. Leaders can take advantage of this and limit the democratic control of their power. This process leads to an autocratization of the political system. Intuitively, the "rally around the leader" argument seems very plausible. The empiric results of the theory, however, are mixed at best.¹⁹ Many scholars have shown that rally effects are less important than expected. They seem to be small and non-durable under most conditions.²⁰

Gibler addresses the empiric inconsistency of the rally effect by proposing a different rally mechanism.²¹ He claims that in both democracies and autocracies, it is not the public that unites behind their leader, but the political elites. The author furthermore provides empiric support for the rally among elites. Using a rather crude measurement for party polarization, he shows that party systems are more centralized when a territorial conflict threatens the country. Consequently, it can be argued that the opposition provides the government with more discretionary room. The latter can then take advantage of this, generating a de-democratizing effect.

Territorial peace theory receives impressive support from many empiric studies. Early studies employing rather simple operationalizations and models as well as more sophisticated works confirm the effect of stable borders. Moreover, the effect of democratic institutions is no longer significant in most of these estimations.²²

A Differentiated View on Democratic and Territorial Peace Theory

The locus of the rally effect as described in territorial peace theory and the conventional operationalizations of democracy open up new research prospects. Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell introduced the V-Dem dataset to the body of peace research literature, providing an understanding of

19 William D. Baker and John R. Oneal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the 'Rally 'Round the Flag' Effect," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 5 (October 2001): 661–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045005006>.

20 Baker and Oneal.

21 Gibler, "Outside-In," 523 ff.

22 Gibler, "Bordering on Peace"; Andrew P. Owsiak, "Foundations for Integrating the Democratic and Territorial Peace Arguments," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36, no. 1 (January 2019): 63–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216650635>.

how different forms of democratic accountability promote peace. As described above, horizontal checks and an active civil society are the most significant factors for the democratic peace. Electoral accountability, on the other hand, is less important but has been the main focus of democratic peace scholars.²³

The literature on rallies has shown that citizens do not blindly follow their leaders in war. However, the elite does rally behind the government. Horizontal checks on leaders thus become less restrictive and centralization of power and de-democratization are more likely. Hence, within the political elite, border disputes have exactly the negative effect on democracy that territorial peace theory suggests. According to Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell's findings, a crucial mechanism of the democratic peace is thereby lost. This is shown by the dashed line that horizontal accountability has in Figure 1.

Nevertheless, the rally literature provides no evidence that social accountability becomes significantly smaller when a country is at war. Accordingly, the constraints a leader faces due to an active civil society remain and a democratic backsliding is at least partially prevented. This is indicated by the solid line in Figure 1. The second key mechanism of the democratic peace is still in place regardless of the border situation. The latter effect might be overlooked in the democratic and territorial peace literature, as the commonly used democracy indices do not provide a differentiated picture of a state's democratic institutions.²⁴ This leads to the following research questions and the corresponding hypotheses: Does democratic peace theory hold in models controlling for territorial peace variables when the democracy measurement includes social accountability? And is the relationship between horizontal checks and balances and peace indeed spurious?

Hypothesis 1. *Dyads with jointly higher social accountability are less conflict-prone than dyads with jointly lower social accountability even when the degree of border settlement is considered in the model.*

Hypothesis 2. *The effect of horizontal accountability is confounded by border settlement.*

²³ Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell, "Civil Society and the Democratic Peace."

²⁴ Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell.

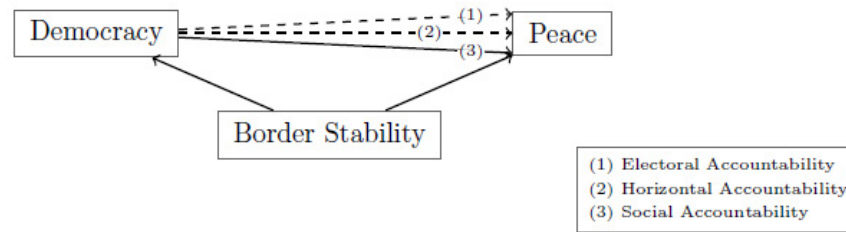


Figure 1: The three ways of democratic accountability and the territorial peace argument

Data and Model

The presented work aims for a better understanding of interstate war. Hence, the data used only considers conflicts between countries and no intrastate wars. Since Bremer introduced the approach, the dyad-year has established itself as the standard unit-of-analysis in the peace research field. According to this approach, each entry in the dataset comprises a pair of states – a dyad – in a given year.²⁵ A corresponding non-directed dyad-year dataset based on the data of the Correlates of War (COW) project has been established. The set encompasses 200 years – from 1816 to 2016 –, 243 countries that existed during this time period, and 20,622 different dyads. The number of active dyads per year grows almost constantly, with its increase being especially big during the period of decolonization and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Altogether, the complete set consists of 956,171 entries.

Dependent Variable: The Onset of MIDs

The dependent variable in the estimated models is the onset of militarized interstate disputes (MID). According to the COW's definition a MID is composed of militarized interstate incidences (MII). An incident happens when at least one state threatens, displays or uses force against one or more target states.²⁶ Even if the ultimate goal of the literature is to explain interstate wars, wars are rarely used as dependent variables. As wars are very rare events, focusing on MIDs – situations short of war that have the potential to escalate – helps to get enough variance on the

²⁵ Nathaniel Beck, Jonathan N. Katz, and Richard Tucker, "Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (1998): 1260–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2991857>.

²⁶ Palmer et al., 2015, as cited in (Zeev Maoz et al., "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 3 (March 2019): 811–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718784158>)

dependent variable.²⁷ This work uses Maoz' dyadic conflict dataset that is based on the MID documentation of the COW.²⁸

Only the onset of MIDs are assessed. In practice this means that for longer lasting conflicts, only the first year of the dispute will be considered. The subsequent years are set to missing and hence dropped from the inquiry. This is one of the standard solutions for dealing with the independence problem inherent in the data structure.²⁹ In the considered period of time from 1816 to 2014, 3,290 disputes were initiated.

Main Explanatory Variables

The testing of the hypotheses presented above requires a very fine-grained measurement of democracy as provided by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset. Furthermore, the set covers the full time span of the COW project. Hence, it has some crucial advantages compared to the standard measures of democracy used in the peace research literature such as the Polity dataset. Accordingly, the V-Dem dataset was included in the data.³⁰

The work presented here closely follows Hegre, Berhard and Teorell's use of the data. In particular, the indices for social and horizontal accountability, used as democracy indicators in the following analyses, are coded as in their article. Considering their results, no variable measuring the electoral accountability is included in the models.

The horizontal accountability index measures the checks between the different powers of the state. A higher horizontal accountability is equal to more constraints on the government and a more democratic system. The variable is the average of two indices provided by V-Dem: the judicial and the legislative constraints on the executive indices. The judicial constraints data is based on measures of the independence of different courts and the compliance with court rulings and the constitution. The legislative checks index, on the other hand, consists of information on the legislative's performance in questioning, overseeing and investigating the government as well as on the role of opposing parties. The measured values for the horizontal accountability index range from 0.021 to 0.988 and have a mean of 0.52.

27 Daniel M. Jones, Stuart A. Bremer, and J. David Singer, "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15, no. 2 (September 1996): 163–213, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073889429601500203>.

28 Maoz et al., "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) Dataset Version 3.0."

29 Beck, Katz, and Tucker, "Taking Time Seriously."

30 Michael Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Methodology V12," 2022.

Social accountability is operationalized by the unaltered civil society participation index from V-Dem. This index indicates the activity of any kind of civil society organisations (CSO). In the dataset its values range from 0.014 to 0.99 with a mean of 0.52. The indices for social and horizontal accountability measure two different layers of one political system – democracy. With a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.8, the indices are quite strongly correlated. Thus, there is some multicollinearity that needs to be considered in the interpretation of the results.

Controls

Border stability is the essential control variable for the forthcoming analyses. As described above, the territorial peace argument is based on the claim that controlling for border stability eliminates the allegedly spurious relationship between democracy and peace. The operationalization of border stability is provided by the International Border Agreements Dataset (IBAD) by Andrew P Owsiak, Allison K Cuttner, and Brent Buck³¹. The compilation includes dyadic data on border settlements from 1816 to 2001. Hence, data from the last two decades are missing, which significantly limits the temporal scope of the analyses presented.

The authors correctly note that border settlement is an imperfect operationalization of border stability respectively territorial threat. There are cases in which borders are de facto unstable or contested even if they are de jure settled. However, a de jure border agreement removes the latent territorial threat that an unsettled border poses.

The presence of a major power within the dyad, military alliance treaties and power parity are used as further controls.³² This selection was made because minor and major powers behave differently in the international sphere.³³ Through the inclusion of military alliances operationalized by the presence of a defense pact, the model controls for the common interests of democracies respectively autocracies.³⁴ Furthermore, the realist literature suggests that states provoke con-

31 “The International Border Agreements Dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 5 (2018): 559–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216646978>.

32 The COW defines the following as major powers: United States (1898-2016), United Kingdom (1816-2016), France (1816-1940, 1945-2016), Germany (1816-1918, 1925-1945, 1991-2016), Austria-Hungary (1816-1918), Italy (1860-1943), Russia (1816-1917, 1922-2016), China (1950-2016) and Japan (1895-1945, 1991-2016). The data on military alliances is provided by the COW Project. Power parity is measured as the ratio between the two state’s Composite Indicator of National Capability (CINC) figures. The Master’s Thesis presented here further offers robustness checks including the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the trade volume between the countries and peace years within the dyad to address the dependence problem.

33 Susan G. Sample, “The Outcomes of Military Buildups: Minor States Vs. Major Powers,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 6 (2002): 669–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343302039006002>.

34 Brett Ashley Leeds, “Alliances and the Expansion and Escalation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” in *New Directions for International Relations: Confronting the Method-of-Analysis Problem*, ed. Alex Mintz and Bruce Russett (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

flicts when they have the opportunity to alter the status quo in their interest. This is the case when potential adversaries are equally powerful.³⁵

Base Sample

Given the described scopes of the different datasets used, the base sample covers the period from 1816 to 2001. As territorial peace theory only applies to neighboring countries, only directly contiguous dyads are considered. This significantly diminishes the number of observations. Observations with missing values are dropped. The base sample encompasses 16,662 observations. Amongst these, 1,120 MIDs were initiated.

Models

In the following, a series of logistic regression models are calculated. This specification accounts for the binary nature of the dependent variable and is widely used in the literature³⁶ It is important to acknowledge that the assumption that all observations used are independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.) is violated in the data. It is very unlikely that the behavior of a dyad in one year is completely independent from past events within the same dyad. In such a situation, normal standard errors are no longer valid. Hence, clustered standard errors with the dyads, defined as “clusters”, are used here. However, this does not solve the problem that observations from different clusters are most likely not i.i.d. A war-prone state will affect all its dyads, and major events might influence all countries in a region. One solution to this problem would be the inclusion of fixed effects. Given the very low variance of the dependent variable, this would leave the model with too little information for a decent estimation of effects. Hence, fixed effects have not become established in the peace research literature. Following the majority of the scholars, the following models use clustered standard errors, but no fixed effects.

The first two models in Table 1 each include one of the components of democracy – horizontal or social accountability. These models employ the widely used weak link specification of the explanatory variable.³⁷ In accordance with democratic peace theory, this method assumes that the less democratic state is less restricted when it comes to conflict. Hence, it is the weakest link and relevant for the conflict behavior of the dyad. Accordingly, the effect of the democracy score of

35 William Reed, “A Unified Statistical Model of Conflict Onset and Escalation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000): 84–93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669294>.

36 See e.g. (Owsiak, “Foundations for Integrating the Democratic and Territorial Peace Arguments”; Maoz and Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986”)

37 William J. Dixon, “Democracy and the Management of International Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37, no. 1 (March 1993): 42–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002793037001002>.

the less democratic state is thereby estimated. In the third model both democracy variables are included. Finally, in the last model the settled border variable is added.

Following Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell, a different weak link procedure is used in Table 2. According to the authors, the least constrained country is the militarily stronger state. Furthermore, they not only estimate the effect of the democracy score of the stronger country, but also the effect of the weaker state's democracy and the impact of the interaction of the two. The models following this approach are reported in Table 2.

Results

The results of the weak link models are displayed in Table 1. For the sake of simplicity, the average marginal effects of the explanatory variables are reported instead of the estimated betas.³⁸

As assumed, the effects of both democracy variables are negative and highly significant when tested individually in the first two models. Beyond that, both effects have a notable size, which makes their impact relevant for reality. These results are in line with classical democratic peace theory.

In model three, when both democracy components are included, the effect of social accountability stays negative and significant. Even its size barely changes. The appeasing impact of horizontal checks, on the other hand, is less stable than expected: The effect is now slightly positive, very close to zero and no longer significant at the usual levels. The considerable degree of multicollinearity may account for the sizes of the effects.

When the border stability control is added in the last model, the effect of a well-established civil society is still significant and remains negative. The impact of horizontal checks and balances remains irrelevant. The results do clearly support the claim that the civil component of democracy has a non-spurious effect on interstate dispute. Its effect is not only negative and significant as

³⁸ There is a debate in the literature on whether to report marginal effects for an average case or average marginal effects. In the former case, the marginal effects are estimated for a virtual observation with average values for all explanatory variables. The latter approach first calculates the marginal effects of all explanatory variables for all observations and then takes the average of these effects. Taking an average case seems an intuitive and simpler way to illustrate the results of a logit model. However, there is no guarantee that this is a typical or representative case. The average marginal effects, on the other hand, are based on the estimated effects found in the sample. Hence, they are a better representation of the real effects. (Michael J. Hanmer and Kerem Ozan Kalkan, "Behind the Curve: Clarifying the Best Approach to Calculating Predicted Probabilities and Marginal Effects from Limited Dependent Variable Models," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 263–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00602.x>)

expected, but also relevant for reality. A change in the social accountability score by two standard deviations (roughly equal to 0.6), reduces the probability of a MID onset by 5 percentage points on average. Such an improvement of democracy is not improbable and was, for example, achieved in Tunisia between 2009 and 2012. The predicted reduction of the risk for a dispute seems not huge. However, given the already small probability for a conflict onset across the whole base sample of 6.7 percent, this effect is highly relevant. On the other hand, the obtained results do not support the argument that checks and balances between the state powers restrict leaders in waging war. The relationship seen in the first model is not robust and depends on the exclusion of social accountability and border stability.

Average Marginal Effects of Horizontal and Social Accountability and MID Onset (Weak Link Specification)

Dependant Variable: MID Onset	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Horizontal Accountability (Weak link)	-0.076***		0.007	-0.005
	(0.022)		(0.040)	(0.038)
Social Accountability (Weak link)		-0.107***	-0.113***	-0.084**
		(0.021)	(0.038)	(0.036)
Defense Pact	-0.032***	-0.026^**	-0.025^**	-0.016
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Capacity Ratio	0.049**	0.049**	0.049**	0.045***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.017)
Major Power	-0.005	-0.006	-0.006	-0.006
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Settled Borders				-0.054***
				(0.011)
Observations	16,662	16,662	16,662	16,662

*Note: Average marginal effects of logistic regression models, with standard errors clustered on dyad in parentheses. Including 305 dyads. *** p0.01, ** p0.05, * p 0.1*

The estimates in model four also show the importance of border stability and territorial threat, respectively. The effect is negative, highly significant and large. When a dyad settles its entire common border, the probability of a MID onset decreases by 5.4 percentage points on average. According to the model, this is the most effective individual measure a dyad can take to secure peace. Hence, it is indisputable that border settlement has an independent appeasing impact on a dyad. However, it does not confound the effect of a state’s political institutions when a differentiated perspective on democracy is applied. The other controls’ results are mostly in line with the theory.

As explained above, Table 2 reports the models following Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell's approach which takes into account both states' democracy scores and their interaction. Again, the average marginal effects are reported.³⁹ Considered separately, as in the first two models, both countries' horizontal and social accountability values have a negative impact on the onset of disputes. The effects are, however, small and not significant. When tested together in model 3, the effects remain rather small and insignificant. Adding to this, the horizontal accountability of the state with greater military strength now influences the probability of conflict positively. This does not change when the border settlement control is added in model four. The effects tend to become even smaller and a further estimate turns positive. The settlement of borders, in turn, still has a significant negative impact. Its size – settled borders make the probability of a MID onset 5.8 percentage points smaller – is clearly relevant, too.

These results obviously pose a challenge to democratic peace theory. Even when the model does not control for the stability of borders, the impact of democracy is not significant and less relevant than in the previous results. This outcome might be driven by two factors: Firstly, the correlation between the two democracy parameters reported for each country is very high. This causes the effect to be split between the two variables. Nevertheless, the first two models show that the impacts are also small when only the effects of one layer of democracy are estimated. Hence, the results cannot solely be caused by multicollinearity. The second reason is a bit more technical: The models in Table 2 include an interaction term. All individual effects are positive. The interaction effects, on the other hand, are all negative. This means that an increase of one state's democracy score leads to a higher probability of conflict in the dyad when the second state's democracy figure is low. If the second state has a well-established democratic system, the democratization of the first country has an appeasing effect. Hence, the net impact of greater accountability can be negative or positive. When averaging, some of the effects cancel each other out and bring the average close to zero.

³⁹ Conceptually, it is not possible to change the values of the interaction term without altering the values of the individual effects, too. Hence, Stata does not allow the calculation of the marginal effect of the interaction only. One could calculate the interaction term manually and report its average marginal effect. Nevertheless, this does not change the logical implications.

Average Marginal Effects of Horizontal and Social Accountability and MID Onset (Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell Specification)

Dependent Variable: MID Onset	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Horizontal Accountability (Stronger)	-0.007 (0.018)		0.017 (0.028)	0.008 (0.028)
Horizontal Accountability (Weaker)	-0.025 (0.020)		-0.004 (0.030)	-0.015 (0.027)
Social Accountability (Stronger)		-0.011 (0.019)	-0.024 (0.029)	-0.007 (0.028)
Social Accountability (Weaker)		-0.025 (0.019)	-0.022 (0.026)	0.003 (0.024)
Defense Pact	-0.028*** (0.010)	-0.022** (0.010)	-0.022** (0.011)	-0.012 (0.010)
Capacity Ratio	0.049** (0.020)	0.049** (0.020)	0.049** (0.020)	0.046*** (0.017)
Major Power	-0.001 (0.016)	-0.004 (0.015)	-0.002 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.012)
Settled Borders				-0.058*** (0.012)
Observations	16,662	16,662	16,662	16,662

*Note: Average marginal effects of logistic regression models, with standard errors clustered on dyad in parentheses. The model encompasses 305 dyads and includes interactions between both countries' social respectively horizontal accountability variables. These are not visible in the table, as the results are reported as average marginal effects. *** p0.01, ** p0.05, * p 0.1*

The variation of the democracy variables' effects is shown in Figure 2. These graphs display point estimates for the probability of a MID onset for different levels of accountability in virtual dyads. The calculated likelihoods are based on model 3 without the border settlement control, and model 4 including border settlement. Panels a and b show the estimates with respect to the horizontal accountability in the states of the dyad. In both panels, the first prediction shows the probability for a MID onset if both countries have only few horizontal checks, corresponding to a horizontal accountability score of 0.1. The next two point estimates show the risk for the outbreak of a conflict when the accountability score is high (at 0.9) in one country while it is still low in the other state. Finally, the last prediction shows the situation when both countries have well-established horizontal checks and balances, corresponding to a score of 0.9. All other variables are either at their means or at their mode.

Panels a and b show a comparable picture: Starting with two countries with a low horizontal accountability figure, a unilateral democratization leads to an increased risk for conflict. The increase is especially pronounced when the stronger state’s horizontal accountability score rises. When both countries experience democratization, the risk drops and is approximately back on the level of a jointly autocratic dyad. However, the 95 percent confidence intervals are large for all point estimates and thus the difference between the predicted probabilities is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the differences between the estimates are small and thus less relevant than in the weak link models. The biggest difference between the estimates is approx. 4 percentage points. As mentioned above, the pattern is very similar in both panels. As the appeasing effect of stable borders is not considered in graph a, the conflict probabilities tend to be higher. Beyond that, the differences between the panels are not relevant. This indicates that border settlement and territorial threat is not a decisive influence for the effect of horizontal checks on peace.

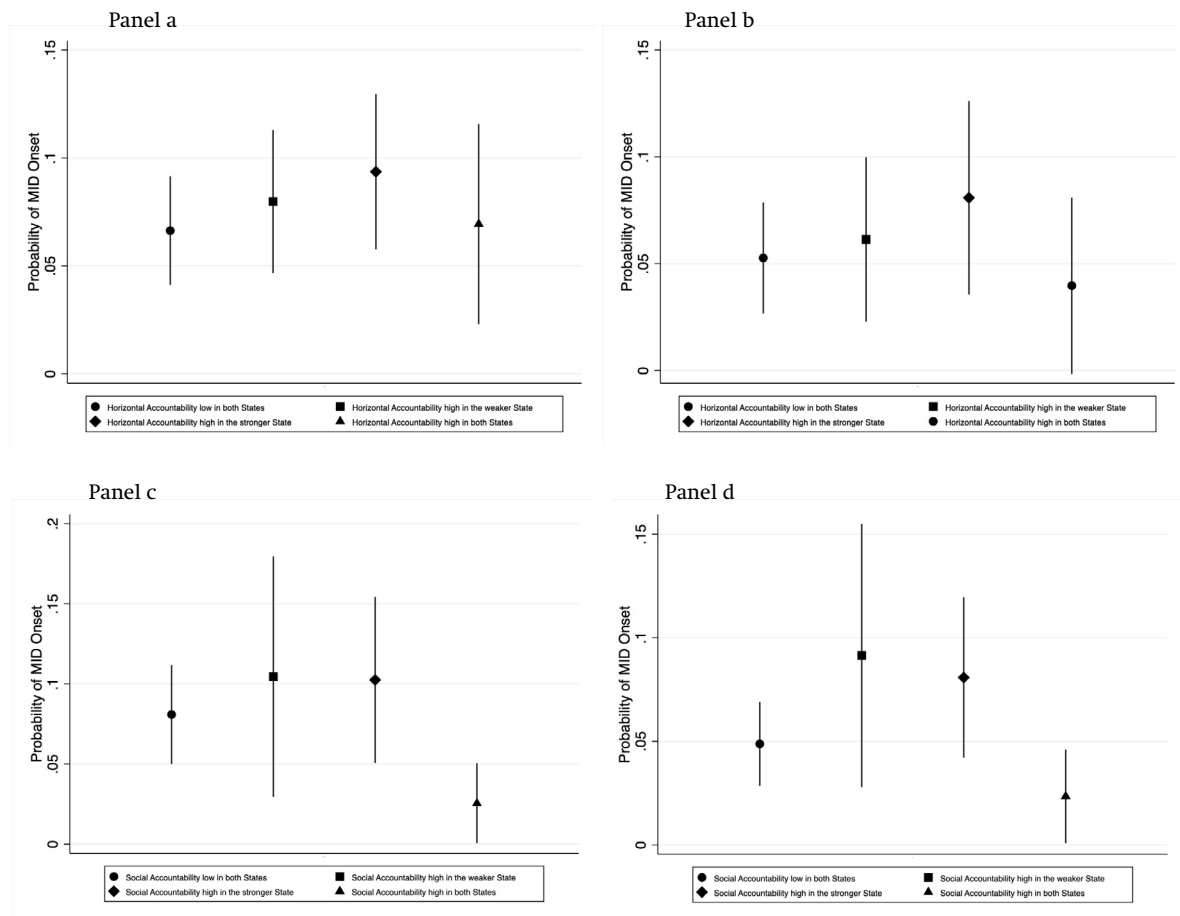


Figure 2: Predicted probabilities in relation to different levels of accountability (low: 0.1, high: 0.9) with 95 percent confidence intervals. The point estimates are based on Table 2, models 3 and 4, and are made for a dyad of non-major countries without a defense pact, settled borders, and average values for their capacity ratio and the respective other accountability score.

Panels c and d show similar estimates for low, unilaterally high and jointly high scores of the social accountability variables. Again, the first graph is based on model 3 that is estimated without the border settlement control. Panel d displays the results of the model, controlling for border settlement. Both reveal a comparable pattern to panels a and b: low social accountability in both countries leads to a rather low probability of dispute. A democratization of civil society in one country induces a higher risk of conflict. Active civilians in both countries, on the other hand, cause a sharp drop in the likelihood of a MID onset. Compared to panels a and b, the confidence intervals are small, especially for the jointly democratic or autocratic dyads. Furthermore, the differences between the estimates are notably bigger.

Even if the overall pattern does not change dramatically, regardless of whether the border settlement control is included or not, there are some differences between graphs c and d in Figure 2. Firstly, the overall risk of conflict is higher in panel c. This is driven by the pacifying effect of settled borders that comes into play in graph d. Furthermore, the risk of a conflict breaking out between two autocratic states is considerably higher in panel c. The border settlement control thus has a large influence on jointly autocratic dyads. As the likelihood changes less for the entirely democratic dyad, the effect of social accountability becomes somewhat smaller when the model controls for border settlement. In panel c, the difference between the first and the fourth estimate is statistically significant and relevant. The risk is lower by around 70 percent in the latter case. In panel d too, there is a notable difference between the jointly autocratic and the jointly democratic dyad. According to the test performed, this difference is not significant by a narrow margin. However, it is still of relevant size: The democratic dyad is less than half as likely to start a MID. The change from the mixed dyads to the democratic states is still significant and relevant in panel d.

Hence, an increase of the accountability figure in one country – no matter if horizontal or social – has different effects depending on the state of democracy in the other. This insight is obscured if only the average marginal effects are considered. When the different effects – sometimes negative, sometimes positive – are displayed, the presented results support democratic peace theory. However, Figure 2 clearly illustrates that democracy does not have a monadic appeasing effect. Democracies are not more peaceful when their potential opponent is autocratic. This is the case in both models – including and excluding border stability. Territorial peace theory also receives some support, as the effect of democracy is not significant when the border settlement control is included. Nevertheless, even when the model controls for border settlement, a jointly democratic dyad is still much more peaceful than an entirely autocratic one. This difference is not

significant by a narrow margin: The results strongly indicate that disputes often evolve between states with different systems.

The estimates also suggest that civil society has a major influence on the conflict behavior of a state. The effects of social accountability become smaller when the model controls for border stability. Nevertheless, they remain relevant and lead to significantly smaller risks of conflict across some dyads. Horizontal accountability, on the other hand, has a smaller effect and much bigger confidence intervals. Hence, it must be considered less important for the democratic peace. However, it seems that the effect is not influenced by the border settlement control, as there is little difference between the results in models 3 and 4.

The two models presented in Tables 1 and 2 as well as Figure 2 both support the main theoretical claim made in this work. Dyads comprising states with higher social accountability are less conflict-prone than states with lower values. This effect is not conditional on the stability of the dyad's border settlement, but it does reduce in size. The average marginal effects reported for the models including interaction terms suggest a zero effect at first glance. However, the discussion of the results has revealed that there are arguments for dyadic democratic peace theory. The relationship between democracy and peace is driven by social accountability. Given that civil society is often overlooked as a relevant building block of a well functioning democracy, its effects have not come into play in previous juxtapositions of democratic and territorial peace theory. This has led scholars to the exaggerated argument that border stability confounds the entire relationship between democracy and peace. As the effect of active civilians becomes smaller, the territorial peace also receives some support.

The claim of the second hypothesis is not fully supported by the data. Horizontal checks have an unambiguous negative effect on MID onset when they are assessed individually. In both specifications, their effect becomes disputable as soon as the social accountability variable is also included: The effect is not only mostly positive but also insignificant. The inclusion of the border stability control thereby plays a minor role. Hence, this provides only limited support for the claim that horizontal checks become less restrictive once a state faces a territorial threat.

Conclusion

This work provides the peace research literature with novel insights into the role of different layers of democracy. The results suggest that the relationship of social accountability and peace is not spurious. As civil society engagement is an indispensable component of democracy, this supports democratic peace theory. The impact is especially pronounced in the models using the traditional weak link specification. The effect of social accountability becomes smaller when the estimation includes the border settlement control, but the impact remains significant and relevant. The models applying Hegre, Bernhard and Teorell's specification have more ambiguous results. Jointly democratic dyads are less conflict-prone than any other country combination. The risk of a MID onset is 50% lower than in an entirely autocratic dyad, even if the model controls for settled borders. However, this difference between jointly democratic and jointly autocratic dyads is not significant. Furthermore, it has been shown that horizontal accountability plays a minor role in the democratic peace mechanism.

For future peace research, the presented results clearly indicate that the effect of civil society activity on the conflict behavior of states must not be ignored and deserves further study. A qualitative, longitudinal assessment of individual dyads that became more or less conflict-prone due to changes in the activity of their civil society would yield major insights into the mechanisms at work.

The foreign policy engagement of the global North should focus on the further development of civil society. Promoting civic engagement is difficult, but has the potential for major improvements. In addition, the stability of borders should also be promoted.

References

- Bahador, Babak, Jeremy Moses, and William Lafi Youmans. "Rhetoric and Recollection: Recounting the George W. Bush Administration's Case for War in Iraq." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2017): 4–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12412>.
- Baker, William D., and John R. Oneal. "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the 'Rally 'Round the Flag' Effect." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 5 (October 2001): 661–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045005006>.
- Beck, Nathaniel, Jonathan N. Katz, and Richard Tucker. "Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable." *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (1998): 1260–88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2991857>.
- Bremer, Stuart A. "Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816–1965." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no. 2 (June 1992): 309–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002792036002005>.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and David Lalman. *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Clinton, William. "1994 State of the Union Address." Washington DC, January 25, 1994. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/docs/sou94.htm>.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Juraj Medzihorsky, et al. "V-Dem Methodology V12" Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, 2022.
- Dixon, William J. "Democracy and the Management of International Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37, no. 1 (March 1993): 42–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002793037001002>.
- Gibler, Douglas M. "Bordering on Peace: Democracy, Territorial Issues, and Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2007): 509–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00462.x>.
- . "Outside-In: The Effects of External Threat on State Centralization." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 4 (August 2010): 519–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002710370135>.
- Gibler, Douglas M., and Marc L. Hutchison. "Territorial Issues, Audience Costs, and the Democratic Peace: The Importance of Issue Salience." *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 4 (October 2013): 879–93. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000923>.
- Hanmer, Michael J., and Kerem Ozan Kalkan. "Behind the Curve: Clarifying the Best Approach to Calculating Predicted Probabilities and Marginal Effects from Limited Dependent Variable Models." *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 263–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00602.x>.
- Hegre, Håvard, Michael Bernhard, and Jan Teorell. "Civil Society and the Democratic Peace." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 1 (January 2020): 32–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719850620>.

- Jones, Daniel M., Stuart A. Bremer, and J. David Singer. " Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15, no. 2 (September 1996): 163–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073889429601500203>.
- Kersting, Wolfgang. "5 Die Bürgerliche Verfassung in Jedem Staate Soll Republikanisch Sein" In *Immanuel Kant: Zum ewigen Frieden* edited by Otfried Höffe, 63–78. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110782462-007>.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley. "Alliances and the Expansion and Escalation of Militarized Interstate Disputes." In *New Directions for International Relations: Confronting the Method-of-Analysis Problem*, edited by Alex Mintz and Bruce Russett. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005.
- Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 3 (March 2019): 811–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718784158>.
- Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938740>.
- Marshall, Monty G. "Polity5: Users' Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2018." Center for Systemic Peace, 2020. www.systemicpeace.org.
- Mousseau, Michael. "The Social Market Roots of Democratic Peace." *International Security* 33, no. 4 (April 2009): 52–86. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2009.33.4.52>.
- Owsiak, Andrew P. "Foundations for Integrating the Democratic and Territorial Peace Arguments." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36, no. 1 (January 2019): 63–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216650635>.
- Owsiak, Andrew P, Allison K Cuttner, and Brent Buck. "The International Border Agreements Dataset." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 5 (2018): 559–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216646978>.
- Reed, William. "A Unified Statistical Model of Conflict Onset and Escalation." *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000): 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669294>.
- Russett, Bruce M., and John R. Oneal. *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. The Norton Series in World Politics. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
- Sample, Susan G. "The Outcomes of Military Buildups: Minor States Vs. Major Powers." *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 6 (2002): 669–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343302039006002>.