

# Contiguous States, Stable Borders and the Peace between Democracies

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## Abstract

Park and Colaresi argue that they could not replicate the results of my 2007 *ISQ* article, “Bordering on Peace”. I therefore provide my own replication of the original results here, using freely-available data and analyses that mirror the research design of the original article. I focus the replication on contiguous dyads to be consistent with the broader *Territorial Peace* argument that developed from the original article. This focus on contiguous dyads obviates the Park and Colaresi claims that border variables should be interacted with contiguity. In short, my original results hold and do so in a way that makes the Park and Colaresi critique irrelevant for the debate on whether stable borders or democracy predict peace in these dyads. I use the remainder of the article to discuss the many findings already associated with the *Territorial Peace* argument and their implications for the Democratic Peace.

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My 2007 *ISQ* article, “Bordering on Peace” (BoP), argued that the two most consistent, most robust findings in international relations are, in fact, related. Territorial issues are almost always conflict prone, and pairs of democracies are almost always peaceful. The absence of territorial issues among democracies confirms this connectedness, and my results demonstrated that, once controls were added for the likelihood of territorial issues between states, the peace found between democracies became statistically insignificant. I argued that this finding suggested the democratic peace was actually a subset of a larger peace between states with stable, settled borders, and this relationship has been confirmed empirically in several studies since the original article.

Park and Colaresi now claim that they were unable to replicate my original analyses, but it is unclear why. They also focus their critique on the original article while ignoring the growing empirical evidence of a *Territorial Peace* that followed. I therefore use this brief response to first demonstrate a replication of the original article. I find once again that the lowest level of democracy has no effect on the likelihood of a militarized dispute among contiguous states once controls for border salients are added to the analysis. I then discuss the many studies that have followed the original argument, each of which has confirmed that the peace between democracies seems likely to be a product of stable borders.<sup>1</sup>

I do make one important change here from the original article. I focus my replication on contiguous dyads because the original BoP article has been the only piece in which I suggested that border relations may affect the level of conflict between non-contiguous states. Every single piece I have written in this research program since then has noted how border relations influence only those contiguous states actually involved with that border. This passage from my book, *The Territorial Peace*, states the theory well:

I focus on contiguous dyads because my argument is about borders. Those states that have a high level of territorial threat directed against their homeland are likely to be centralized and, of course, conflict prone. Removing that threat from their agenda makes the states more likely to be democratic and peaceful *with their neighbors*. The removal of territorial threat does not necessarily imply peace with non-contiguous states, however. States may have settled their borders but still have the ability and desire to project their power across the globe, as the United States has done since the Cold War. Further, a state at territorial peace may even find an interest in targeting another state at territorial peace, in a different part of the world. (Gibler 2012, 124).

The focus on contiguous dyads is also important for responding to Park and Colaresi’s critique of my original research design. Their entire critique is predicated on the fact that I should not have treated contiguous dyads the same as non-contiguous dyads. They offer the corrective of interacting every variable in the analyses with contiguity. However, this corrective becomes irrelevant when we recognize that the *Territorial Peace* argument only applies to contiguous states.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Park and Colaresi refused requests from *ISQ* staff to release their data prior to publication, so I could not assess any differences between their replication and my research design in the original article.

<sup>2</sup>*ISQ* asked for my comments during the review process of the Park and Colaresi paper, and I made this point to the authors, outlining in detail how empirical tests since the original article have focused only on the relationship between contiguous states. They chose to ignore these studies and instead focused on the original piece.

## Replication, Replication

The replication of my earlier argument was quite straightforward. I created a dataset of all contiguous dyads from 1946 to 2001 in EUGene (Bennett and Stam 2000), which also provided the variables for the combined autocracy/democracy Polity IV score, the capability score of each country, the duration of the dyad, Correlates of War MID onset, and peace years since last dispute onset. I used the minimum Polity IV score in the dyad as the low democracy score, dropping from the analyses any of the dyads that include interregnum Polity scores that fall below -10. For the capability ratio, I divided the lower capability score by the higher capability score. The dyadic duration, MID onset, and peace years variables are already dyadic measures and remained unaltered.

Then I downloaded the original Fearon and Laitin (2003) replication dataset<sup>3</sup> and merged the civil war, GDP, and percentage of mountainous terrain data to each country code of the dyad in my sample. If either state in the dyad experienced a civil war, I coded a dummy variable as positive for the presence of civil war. I used the lowest per capita GDP in either state to create a dyadic measure, just as I did with the Polity score. Finally, Park and Colaresi make a good point regarding ratios and natural logarithms, so I therefore calculated the absolute difference between the more mountainous state in the dyad and the less mountainous state in the dyad.

I then compiled the kindred border data using Minorities at Risk, just as I did in the original article. If one country in the dyad had an ethnic group that believed an imagined homeland included territories in the other state of the dyad, then I coded a dummy variable as positive for a kindred border. All other borders are coded as zero. Finally, I used CIA Factbook to determine the colonial origins of each country in the sample. If both countries had colonial origins, and both territories were controlled by different colonial masters, then a dummy variable for that border was coded positively for different colonial masters.<sup>4</sup>

I control for temporal dependence by including the peace years variable in the analysis along with its square and cube. This specification is more easily interpretable and perhaps better for binary dependent variables (Carter and Signorino 2010). Nevertheless, I also estimated the models with cubic splines of the peace year variable and found substantively similar results. These additional analyses and all replication data are available on my Dataverse page.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 presents the results of the replication of my original article (Gibler 2007, Table 3).

As in the original article, I again split the sample across time periods to help analyze the effects of the Cold War. Model 1 includes the base relationship between lowest democracy score and disputes and is statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ , as before. Again, however, the addition of controls for border strength eliminates this statistically significant relationship in each of the eras. During the Cold War, the standard error is actually larger than the coefficient. For the GDP

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<sup>3</sup>Available at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/publicdata/publicdata.html>; downloaded on May 3, 2013.

<sup>4</sup>My original article used a proxy of same colonial master, so this is one variable that has a different operationalization than the original piece. I change this because more recent evidence suggests prior treaties provide strong salients for states (Carter and Goemans 2011), and a different-colonial-master variable is more likely to capture that argument. The substantive results for joint democracy and the other border variables do not change if I use the original specification, but same colonial master is not statistically significant ( $p < 0.20$ ).

<sup>5</sup>See <http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/dmgibler>. I should also note that all replication data for each substantive chapter of my book is also on the Dataverse page as are data for all other empirical examinations related to the *Territorial Peace* research program.

measure, the relationship between smallest economy and conflict is now only statistically significant in the Cold War era, while before the relationship was robust to splitting the sample across time periods.

Comparing border salient variables to my earlier results, I once again find that borders that separate kindred groups increase the likelihood of conflict. I now find that the Cold War effect of differences in colonial masters is now statistically significant, with, as expected, decreased conflict among contiguous states of different colonial empires. Finally, contrary to my earlier findings, the difference in mountainous terrain is now a statistically significant, positive predictor of disputes. I explored this finding a bit more and found that the relationship is curvilinear. Differences in mountainous terrain are peaceful among contiguous states, when the differences are quite large.

Among the border strength variables, civil wars in either state also predict international conflict, though the relationship is now confined to the post-Cold War era. Still, that post-Cold War relationship is strong enough to generate a positive relationship in the entire sample which adds almost four times as many cases. I found that the duration of the dyad increased the chance of conflict in all eras. This is contrary to both my expectations and my earlier finding of a statistically insignificant relationship, so I explored whether there was also a curvilinear effect for border age. There is, and it is substantively strong. Borders remain conflict prone for their first 20 years before becoming peaceful (or, settled).

Table 1: The Effect of Borders on Joint Democracy and Conflict, 1945 to 2001

	1946-2001	1946-1989	1990-2001	1946-2001
Lowest Democracy Score in Dyad	-0.035*** (0.006)	0.002 (0.010)	-0.021 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.008)
Smallest GDP of dyad (logged)		-0.077** (0.029)	-0.002 (0.030)	-0.066** (0.020)
<b>Controls</b>				
Capability ratio within dyad (weaker over stronger)		0.239 (0.157)	-0.121 (0.307)	0.199 (0.138)
Years since last MID outbreak		-0.260*** (0.016)	-0.227*** (0.042)	-0.244*** (0.015)
Years since last MID outbreak squared		0.006*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.000)
Years since last MID outbreak cubed		-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
<b>Border Strength Variables</b>				
Civil war onset in at least one state of dyad		0.214 (0.136)	0.670* (0.283)	0.284* (0.122)
Duration of dyad		0.022*** (0.004)	0.032*** (0.007)	0.023*** (0.004)
Duration of dyad squared		-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
<b>Border Salient Variables</b>				
Different colonial master before independence		-0.329* (0.130)	0.151 (0.221)	-0.221* (0.110)
Ethnic border (border separates ethnic group from its brethren across the border)		0.131 (0.094)	0.428* (0.174)	0.170* (0.081)
Terrain differences (absolute difference % mountainous more versus less mountainous state)		0.005* (0.002)	0.009* (0.004)	0.006** (0.002)
Constant	-2.715*** (0.048)	-1.651*** (0.145)	-2.857*** (0.294)	-1.907*** (0.125)
<i>N</i>	11,268	8,302	2,861	11,163

Logit Regression models with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is Correlates of War MID onset, and samples include contiguous dyads only.  
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Finally, my temporal control variables are all statistically significant with conflict decreasing over

time in the dyad, with substantively mild curvilinear effects. This is generally consistent with most analyses of dispute onset. What is inconsistent with most other analyses, however, is the lack of a relationship between capabilities and dispute onset. In none of the eras is there a relationship between parity and conflict. This provides some indication that territorial issues are more important than capabilities for determining the likelihood of conflict among contiguous states. The geographic sorting of states and territorial issues is not random, and I believe these constrain leaders much more than traditional arguments would suggest.

### **Other Replications of the Original Argument**

I have also included Table 7.1 from my book and the discussion of its results in a Web Appendix to this response.<sup>6</sup> These additional analyses demonstrate that joint democracy has no pacifying effect on contiguous dyads using a completely different set of proxies for the likelihood of territorial issues in the dyad. The new specification varies substantially over time, covers a longer temporal range (1816 to 2001), and provides a better set of proxies for states at territorial peace.

Alex Braithwaite and I also replicate the argument with yet another specification of border instability (Gibler and Braithwaite 2013). We assume that non-random spatial clusters of territorial disputes within a region during the recent past signal that nearby borders are less likely to be stable. Inclusion of these territorial “hot spots” in models of conflict actually eliminates the effect of joint democracy on the likelihood of states experiencing a dispute that involves fatalities from 1960 on. We do find an effect for joint democracy in territorially stable regions, using an interaction term, but even in these regions the effect is incredibly small. This again confirms the primary importance of stable borders for peace while also leveraging differences in the level of analysis to lessen the confounding effects of endogeneity.

### **Replications of the Territorial Threat-to-Democracy Argument**

I do not have space here to revisit the empirical association between territorial issues and centralization and non-democracy. Besides, the analyses in the original article focused on spuriousness rather than a cohesive model of democratic development. As such, the original analyses are not as well-developed as the substantial number of studies that have emerged since my initial argument, all of which connect territorial threats to different aspects of state development.

For example, I have found strong associations between the presence of territorial issues and centralization of both public opinion and political power within institutions. In work with Marc Hutchison, we find that individuals in states under territorial threat are much less likely to be tolerant of minority groups (Hutchison and Gibler 2007). This is important because political tolerance has often been considered the basis for democratic government (Dahl 1971), and, previously, democracy was the only consistent cross-national predictor of variation in political tolerance. Adding territorial threat to analyses of tolerance eliminates the statistically significant effect of democracy on individual responses.

In work with Hutchison and Steve Miller, we look at a different aspect of political behavior—the likelihood that individuals under threat will become nationalistic and self-identify as members of their country rather than their tribe, village, or other group (Gibler, Hutchison and Miller 2012).

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<sup>6</sup>See Gibler (2012) and <http://dmgibler.people.ua.edu/research.html>.

Our findings demonstrate that nationalism is much more likely among those individuals in territorially-threatened countries. We also show that territorial issues are different from other types of issues because only these change the nature of individual self-identifications. Territorial issues are strongly salient for individual citizens.

This salience of territory is important for my argument of territorial state development because, I argue, leaders take advantage of the political opportunities afforded them by publics that are fearful, nationalistic, and intolerant of dissent. As I show in Gibler (2010), this centralization of public opinion forces opposition parties to support the leader during times of threat, and leaders move to institutionalize this favorable environment by eliminating veto players that hamper their ability to institute policies. The number of veto players is one of the best representations of the centralization of power within the state and is strongly correlated with democracy.

My work with Jaroslav Tir demonstrates well how these democratization processes work together. Using peaceful territorial transfers as a means of identifying accepted, stable borders, we find that states at territorial peace with each other decrease their militarization, are the targets of fewer territorial disputes, and are more likely to democratize (Gibler and Tir 2010). Importantly, we also show that democracy does not predict the stability of borders in the form of territorial transfers. Andy Owsiak (2013) offers similar findings; states that have settled all of their borders with treaty agreements are much more likely to democratize.

A focus on settled borders also explains another democratization relationship previously thought related to democratic peace theory—the clustering of democracies geographically over time. In a separate article, Tir and I find that high levels of territorial threat in the region inhibit state transitions to democracy; absent this threat, democratization follows. Because borders affect at least two states, the clustering phenomenon becomes a byproduct of border stabilization in the region over time (Gibler and Tir 2013).

## Issue Selection and Conflict Behavior

Rarely are disputes between democracies over issues of much consequence; and rarely, if ever, do these disputes target their homeland territories. Mitchell and Prins (1999) established this some time ago, and this selection of less-dangerous issues for joint democracies affects many relationships previously thought to be products of regime type. For example, I have shown that democracies are not more likely to win their conflicts or fight shorter disputes once issue type is included in the model (Gibler and Miller 2013). Democracies are also not more likely to negotiate their disputes (Miller and Gibler 2011) or experience disputes that will provoke high levels of audience costs domestically (Gibler and Hutchison 2013). These all demonstrate that what we often think of as the Democratic Peace can also just as easily be explained by issue selection.

These arguments still leave open the possibility that regime type affects issue selection in some consistent way, but very few Democratic Peace theories have good arguments for why democratic leaders consistently face less consequential issues. Further, the bulk of my research, confirmed here and developed elsewhere, provides strong evidence that democracy is a product rather than a cause of the distribution of territorial issues facing the state.

## Conclusion

Park and Colaresi find that the border stability does not apply to non-contiguous states. This confirms, again, the arguments of the many articles that have followed my original BoP piece. Here I have presented a replication of my original argument, as it applies to contiguous states, and I find strong support for my contention that the democratic peace can better be understood as a stable border peace. I have also discussed several different replications of the original argument using different proxies for stable borders. Each confirms that joint democracy is not a statistically significant predictor of conflict once stable borders are also included in the model. More than this, multiple studies now demonstrate how territorial threat shapes the development of the state and the likelihood of establishing democratic regimes.

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