

Study: Best road to peace begins with borders

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A new UT Dallas study finds that resolving border disputes gives rival nations the best hope for moving toward peace.

The study, recently published online in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, concludes that settling territorial conflicts had a greater impact on rival nations' relations than democratization or ending civil wars.

"We looked at how you move from a situation where states are rivals with each other and very hostile, ideally to where they're friends. Or, even if they're not friends, how do you get to the point where they're not enemies?" said one of the authors, Dr. Paul F. Diehl, Ashbel Smith Professor of Political Science.

Neighboring countries that settle their boundary conflicts have a 122 percent greater chance of transitioning from rivalry to what is called negative peace, or the absence of military conflict. Ending military hostilities also has a preventative effect, the study found. Nations in negative peace that have resolved border issues are 73 percent less likely than nations with unsettled border issues to transition back into contentious relationships, according to the findings.

Diehl and two co-authors used data on interstate relationships from 1946 to 2001 to study how the resolution of boundary issues improved the relations between rival nations. Overall, nations with settled boundaries were 30 percent more likely to be at negative peace, the study found.

The study used Bolivia and Paraguay as an example. Both nations

entered the Chaco War over control of a mutual border before they reached an agreement in 1938. Current border disputes exist between nations including India and Pakistan, and Israel and its neighbors.

Border disputes create a threat that prompts citizens to give their leaders greater autonomy in exchange for protection, Diehl said. That leads to a more aggressive foreign policy and militarization.

The research describes peace as a continuum, with negative peace being the middle stage between rivalry and more cooperative relations called positive peace, which exists in the European Union. Achieving negative peace opens up the road to positive peace.

"Most countries are not fighting a war, but there are ways to improve relations that don't get a lot of attention," Diehl said. "Avoiding war is good, but it shouldn't be the end point. We're looking at how you can move in a more peaceful direction.

"If you move away from being enemies, you open up some possibilities to ultimately being friends," he said.

Diehl, associate provost and director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, is an expert in the causes of war, peacekeeping and international law. He served as director of the Correlates of War Project, the largest data collection effort on international conflict. He is co-author, most recently, of [The Puzzle of Peace, The Evolution of Peace in the International System](#), published in 2016 by Oxford University Press.

More information: A. P. Owsiak et al. Border settlement and the movement toward and from negative peace, *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0738894216650420](https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216650420)

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