50 years of peace research: An introduction to the Journal of Peace Research anniversary special issue

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Abstract

Established in 1964, the Journal of Peace Research (JPR) celebrates 50 years. This anniversary special issue of the journal offers broad reviews of research areas that have been central both to the journal and to the field of peace and conflict research generally. An opening article co-authored by long-time editor Nils Petter Gleditsch offers a historical view on peace research and tracks trends in the use of ‘peace’ and ‘violence’ in titles of JPR across the first 49 volumes of the journal. Opening the review article section, two contributions address key thematic areas for the journal. Few if any subjects have attracted more attention in the study of international relations during the second half of JPR’s first fifty years than the democratic peace, and in the extension of this subject, the broader debate about the liberal peace. Additional articles review the status and propose future developments in the study of war and its relationship with territory, ethnicity, ideology and natural resources. Another key historical topic associated with the journal concerns the economic cost of military conflict, while more recent research fields covered include terrorism and human rights, topics that have grown to become major JPR niches. Reflecting the methodological contributions by JPR, two articles focus on challenges of contemporary quantitative political analysis and progress in peace and conflict data collection. Finally, this special issue includes a review of research on international mediation in armed conflicts.

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INTRODUCTION

The Journal of Peace Research

This special issue marks the 50 years that have passed since the publication of the first issue of the Journal of Peace Research (JPR). From its inception in 1964, the journal was published and owned by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), then part of the Institute for Social Research, and still is.

JPR was established by Johan Galtung, the founder and first Director of PRIO. In the introduction to the first issue, Galtung laid out the visions for the new journal: it should be multidisciplinary and international, and it should encompass a broad conception of peace – visions that still are at the core of the journal. The first JPR editorial board reflected these aims, consisting of physicists, anthropologists, psychologists, mathematicians, sociologists and political scientists from a great variety of institutions and countries.

Galtung was the editor of JPR through its first twelve years, until 1975, although like PRIO, the journal was soon run as a collaborative project. Galtung's own contributions were crucial for the journal's rapid ascending to prominence. His articles on 'The structure of foreign news' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), 'Violence, peace and peace research' (Galtung, 1969) and 'A structural theory of imperialism' (Galtung, 1971) are among the most cited and downloaded JPR articles of all times.

A second formative phase in the life of the journal started with the editorship of Nils Petter Gleditsch. When Gleditsch took permanent charge of the Journal of Peace Research with the 1983 volume, JPR's reputation was strongly tied to Galtung's influential articles from the 1960s and the early 1970s. Over the 28 years that the editorship of Gleditsch lasted, 1976-77 and 1983-2010, the journal made its way to the core of international relations research. Over the past decade, JPR has regularly been ranked among the top ten most highly cited journals in international relations and political science.

JPR is explicitly multidisciplinary and committed to methodological pluralism. Still, two particular practices have contributed to profiling the journal as a leader in the quantitative analysis of peace and conflict. First, JPR regularly publishes key datasets under the banner Special Data Feature. Four of the ten most influential JPR articles as measured by citations are special data features, including the Polity III dataset (Jaggers & Gurr, 1995) and the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset 1946-2001 (Gleditsch et al., 2002). Second, JPR has been an important vehicle for developing norms for data sharing in international relations and political science. Since 1998, authors of JPR articles have been required to post online their replication data files. These datasets are available from JPR's replication web site (http://www.prio.no/Journals/Journal/?x=2&content=replicationData). In 2003, Nils Petter Gleditsch, with three other journal editors, issued a joint data replication statement which significantly contributed to moving the replication requirements in the field forward (see Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003).

Thematically JPR is broadly oriented. As stated on the cover 'The Journal encourages a wide conception of peace, but focuses on the causes of violence and conflict resolution. Without sacrificing the requirements for theoretical rigour and methodological sophistication, articles directed towards ways and means of peace are favoured.' Over the years the journal has developed a few thematic niches, most notably articles on the 'liberal peace' and on the relationship between environmental change and conflict, both areas
where Nils Petter Gleditsch himself has made important contributions, some of which were published in JPR (Gleditsch 1992; 1998). Other more specialized niches include the history of peace research, the economics of military spending, human rights, and nonviolence. The latter topic has recently experienced a remarkable renaissance, paving the way for a 2013 JPR special issue on nonviolence (Chenoweth & Cunningham, 2013). Special issues have been used to cover specific subfields more in-depth, and are now normally published once a year. Recent JPR special issues have been on the micro-level dynamics of violent conflict (Brück, Justino & Verwimp, 2009), state capacity and civil war (Sobek, 2010), terrorism (Sandler, 2011), and climate change and armed conflict (Gleditsch, 2012). A complete list of special issues and Editor’s Choice Collections is found at http://jpr.sagepub.com/cgi/collection.

The content of this issue

 Appropriately, this special issue begins with an article co-authored by Nils Petter Gleditsch and analyzing the development of peace research in the past 50 years (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle & Strand, 2014). The article discusses historical uses of the concept of peace, and provides a peek into the early history of peace research. Specifically, the article investigates how the use of the terms ‘peace’ and ‘violence’ in the titles, representing ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ peace respectively, wax and wane over time in articles published in JPR. The authors find that there is an increase in the share of JPR articles that include ‘violence’ and related terms over time, while the use of the term ‘peace’ has been fairly stable. They also note that the main attention has shifted from interstate to civil war in JPR as in the field generally. Finally, they find that articles containing the term ‘peace’ in the title receive on average fewer citations.

Few if any subjects have attracted more attention in the study of international relations during the second half of JPR’s first fifty years than the democratic peace. Scholars have addressed the theoretical and empirical relationships between democracy and armed conflict at the monadic, dyadic, and systemic levels, and they have explored these relationships both between states and within states. Hegre (2014) summarizes the primary empirical findings, the strength of the supporting evidence, and the leading theoretical explanations advanced to explain those findings. He then turns to two leading critiques of the democratic peace hypothesis: the argument that the causal arrow is reversed, and that peace creates the conditions in which democracy can flourish; and the argument that the relationship is spurious because other factors simultaneously lead to both democracy and peace. Hegre highlights the arguments that the democratic peace is really a ‘capitalist peace’ or a ‘territorial peace,’ and that certain social, economic, and institutional changes contribute both to democratization and to peace, both between states and within them.

The debate between proponents of the ‘democratic peace’ and the ‘capitalist peace’ is currently the leading division within the study of the liberal peace. It reflects the dramatic rise, broadening, and evolution of the research program on economic interdependence and peace since JPR’s publication of conflicting empirical studies by Oneal et al. (1996) and Barbieri (1996). In his article, Schneider (2014) distinguishes between two analytically distinct but interrelated arguments: (1) economic globalization leads to peace, which he traces to Norman Angell; and (2) capitalism leads to peace, which he traces to Joseph Schumpeter. Schneider notes that each of these ‘liberal twins’ is now applied to the domestic as well as international levels. He summarizes important variations of each line of argument, and emphasizes the theoretical and methodological challenges of these two
interrelated research programs. Schneider questions the opportunity cost hypothesis that is still central to interdependence and globalization arguments, and argues that globalization and capitalist peace theories each require a clearer specification of the micro-level mechanisms driving them. At the methodological level, Schneider argues that these dual theories of economic liberalism and peace should exploit the coming opportunities offered by ‘big data.’

Few if any international phenomena demonstrate as high an empirical correlation as democratic dyads and peace, though the correlation between overwhelming power preponderance and peace (Weede, 1976) comes close. Another strong set of empirical correlations is between territorial disputes and conflict, which is the basis of the ‘territorial peace’ hypothesis noted above. The evidence is now clear that a disproportionate number of wars involve territorial disputes. Toft (2014) examines this and other findings related to territoriality and war. She notes that the relationship, like those involving the democratic and capitalist peace, has been extended from the interstate to the intrastate level. She distinguishes among different dimensions of territoriality (shared borders, territorial disputes, etc), notes the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking these factors to conflict at the interstate and intrastate levels, and summarizes alternative theoretical interpretations for observed empirical relationships. Toft emphasizes that the relationship between territory and armed conflict involves the symbolic as well as physical dimensions of territory, including the ways in which peoples and societies as well as states relate to territory. She argues that bargaining over territory is often more difficult than bargaining over other issues in dispute. Toft also notes the strong quantitative shift in the study of territory and war, summarizes existing data bases, and suggests new possibilities for data created by the use of Geographic Information Systems.

Denny & Walter (2014) address the relationship between ethnicity and civil conflict, and issue related to that of territory. In addition to providing a balanced summary of the literature, the authors offer three arguments for why ethnic groups often have better opportunities and greater incentives to engage in violent conflict than do other social groups. Conflicts are organized along ethnic lines because national politics in heterogeneous societies often create grievances by favoring certain groups at the expense of others; because many ethnic groups are geographically concentrated, which facilitates identity awareness and mobilization; and because the fixed nature of ethnic allegiances creates commitment problems in bargaining with the state. In so doing, the article implicitly represents a powerful critique of instrumentalist thinking, and it also, again implicitly, dismisses the simplistic notion of ethnic conflict being a mere product of ancient hatreds.

Complementing this article, Gutiérrez Sanín & Wood (2014) move beyond inherent markers of identity and the role of ethnic grievances in motivating rebellion, to focus on ideologies of conflict. Ideology, according to the authors, influences the risk and nature of conflict in two ways. First, ideology can serve an instrumental purpose by facilitating socialization and coherence in divided societies. In this sense, the article demonstrates that ideology often can be considered complementary to ethnicity as the organizing principle of rebellion. This view represents a break with common tendencies in the literature to treat ideology and ethnicity as mutually exclusive features of civil war. Second, ideology can have important normative connotations, providing motivation and constraints that ensure coherent social actions that sometimes defy rational behavior. While these two interpretations of ideology can be seen as alternative approaches, and are to a large extent framed as such in the article,
the authors conclude by offering useful views on how they may be complementary in future research.

To what extent are natural resources contributing to contemporary armed conflicts? Koubi et al. (2014) take stock of dominant theories and recent empirical evidence on this important question. They conclude that, contrary to popular view, states tend to cooperate rather than fight over shared water resources. However, limitations in data quality and research designs imply that the existing weak support for the scarcity-breeds-violence thesis cannot be used to decisively reject the resource scarcity school. In some contrast, the authors find the proposed causal link between non-renewable resources and conflict much more plausible, especially the adverse effect of petroleum wealth on political instability and civil conflict. The article ends with an emphasis of the complex nature of the resource-conflict link and identifies several concrete priorities for future research. Chief among these is developing a better understanding of how natural resources, be it scarcity, wealth, or dependence, interact with political and socioeconomic factors in shaping conditions conducive to violent conflict, within states as well as among them.

A large body of research discusses how aspects of the national economy and economic development in particular affect conflict risk (see, e.g., Schneider in this issue). Smith (2014) takes the reverse perspective by considering the economic impact of armed conflict. Going beyond a state-of-the-art review, the article provides an analysis of the purpose and methodology underlying scientific attempts to quantify the costs of war. The purpose of such calculation is often part of a strategy to persuade the public to support or protest against military action, though it is also used ex post to demonstrate that the decision to go to war was mistaken. Providing reasonable estimates is not a trivial task, however, and Smith draws on anecdotal evidence to illustrate how it can be nearly impossible to measure the effects of conflict, compared to an unknown counterfactual. Instead of trying to come up with an aggregate figure of costs and benefits, the article suggests that careful quantification of individual elements can offer informative perspectives on the economic consequences of war.

Peace research is in constant evolution; some research agendas wane while others experience rapid increases in scientific attention over time. One of the most recent major topics to emerge is the analytical study of terrorism. As outlined by Sandler (2014), much of this research has occurred in the last decade or so, inspired by the 9/11 attacks on the US. A number of significant findings have emerged from this work. Terrorism comes in many shapes and involves very different types of actors, and while the rationale behind terror is always to instill fear in a population in order to enforce policy changes, the outcome varies widely. The conventional view that poverty breeds terrorism has been largely debunked, even if there may exist a robust correlation between lack of development and terrorism at the national level. Liberal factors, such as physical integrity rights, generally lower the probability of terrorism, whereas population size, military spending, and involvement in armed conflicts are key risk factors. Research to date also suggests that conventional counterterrorism policies are more effective in curbing strictly domestic terror than transnational terrorist networks. The article points to some promising avenues for future research, several of which are becoming increasingly feasible with the release of ever more detailed events data on terrorist activity.

What are the main determinants of politically motivated human rights abuse, and what can be done to prevent it? In an explicitly applied article, Hafner-Burton (2014) guides the
reader through various explanations and evaluates the empirical merit of different political means implemented to prevent systematic abuse. Despite being a relatively new field of research, it has made substantial progress in answering these two questions. The article identifies two main drivers of abuse: Top-down initiatives of repression by powerful authoritarian actors, and bottom-up actions in politically fragile and anarchic societies. These two forms, in turn, require very different approaches to intervention and norms promotion. Accordingly, there is no single and simple recipe that works in every situation of human rights violations. Thinking forward, Hafner-Burton prescribes an increase in interdisciplinary work, joining scholars from psychology, law, anthropology, political science, and related disciplines. Second, an expansion of methodological approaches beyond strictly empirical analyses to offer more insight into causal mechanisms is warranted.

One of the distinctive contributions of JPR over the years is its publication of a number of articles on methodological issues in peace and conflict research. This special issue includes two articles that continue this tradition. In his assessment of a number of methodological issues confronting the quantitative analysis peace and conflict at both the interstate and intrastate levels, Schrodt (2014) offers a ‘deliberately polemical’ critique of the ways in which statistical methods are currently used in the field. Among the ‘seven deadly sins’ he identifies in contemporary quantitative analyses are the use of ‘kitchen sink’ models that incorporate large numbers of variables and ignore the effects of collinearity; the dismissal of predictive power as a criterion for assessing the validity of a model; the repeated re-analysis of a small number of data sets; the use of complex methods without an acknowledgment of their underlying assumptions and the potential implications of a mismatch between method and data; the improper use and interpretation of frequentist statistics and significance tests, and the advantages of Bayesian approaches; the excessive reliance on linear models and neglect of alternative methods; and the confusion between statistical controls and experimental controls. Schrodt ends with suggestions for a variety of changes in current practices that might ‘bring quantitative IR methods into the methodological mainstream.’

In the second methodologically focused article, Gleditsch, Metternich & Ruggeri (2014) take a closer look at the development of prominent datasets on armed conflict and their influence on knowledge production and theory development. The review is structured around central dimensions of disaggregation with respect to the resolution, agency, and strategies of conflict. For example, early quantitative research was highly aggregated, with statistics of war involvement among states and system-level analyses of conflict trends. More recently, data collection efforts have facilitated more nuanced analyses, replacing countries and conflicts with actor- or location-specific units of observation at higher levels of resolution coupled with data on patterns and events in conflict. A simultaneous shift from the study of interstate wars and international processes towards intrastate conflict and subnational violence is notable. The article also reflects on the recent expansion of research into collective non-violent action. In conclusion, the authors highlight opportunities and challenges for future data collection efforts.

Another subfield of conflict analysis that has grown substantially in the two decades since the end of the Cold War is international mediation. In their survey of the expanding literature on mediation, Wallensteen & Svensson (2014) argue that empirical studies have demonstrated that international mediation in armed conflicts has been reasonably successful, though researchers continue to debate both the meaning of success and the conditions under which mediation is most effective in achieving its desired outcomes.
Wallensteen & Svensson note the increase in quantitative studies of mediation and survey the various data sets available to researchers. They examine research on the questions of the conditions under which parties accept mediation by third parties and why third parties agree to serve as mediators. They also survey the literature on the relative effectiveness of different strategies of mediation, including ‘mediation with muscle,’ and whether the effectiveness of different strategies varies over different phases of armed conflicts. They take a close look at studies of the costs and benefits of ‘biased mediation,’ and of the problems of coordination among multiple mediators. Wallensteen & Svensson end with a discussion of a variety of challenges to international mediation research, and emphasize the need for greater interaction between researchers and practitioners.
References


Anniversary Special Issue
Guest Editors: Halvard Buhaug & Jack S Levy

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