



Motivation

What We Know About Borders

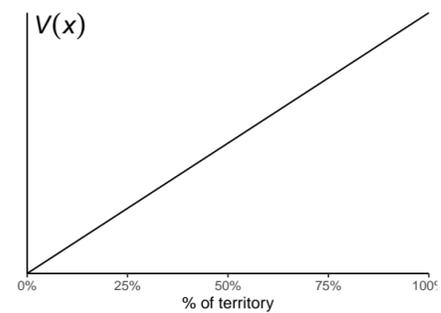
Territorial conflicts frequently follow internal administrative borders—even when those borders lack deep historical or symbolic significance. Borders influence conflict onset and peace stability (Carter and Goemans 2011), trade (Wolf et al. 2011), social capital (Abramson et al. 2022), and more.

The Gap: Where Is the Micro-Level?

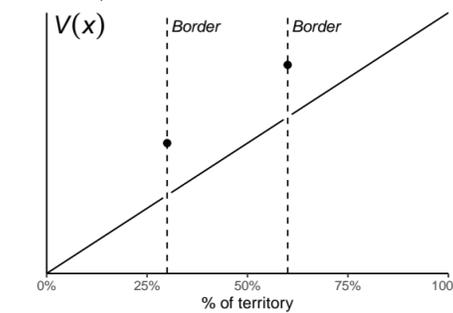
- Well-documented **macro-level correlations**
- Implicit assumption that actors prefer borders for their strategic value
- Lack of **micro-level evidence** on how individuals perceive administrative boundaries or incorporate them into cost-benefit calculations

Thinking About Preferences

Standard Conflict Bargaining: utility $V(x)$ is continuous, increasing, and depends on the amount of land taken from the enemy (Fearon 1995).



Conflict Bargaining with Borders: a peace settlement along a particular border generates a *discontinuous utility surplus*, i.e., a trade-off between territory and border control.



Research Design

- Survey experiment simulating a bargaining process
- Context: Russo-Ukrainian war
- Core idea: respondents assess peace settlements varying in Russian territorial gains and border alignment with administrative divisions
- 281 settlements ranging from 0.5% to 60% of Ukrainian territory ceded to Russia
- One map—the **Border Bargain**—is shown to all respondents; it is the only option that perfectly aligns with existing administrative boundaries of Ukrainian regions

Border Bargain

Sample Bargain



Data

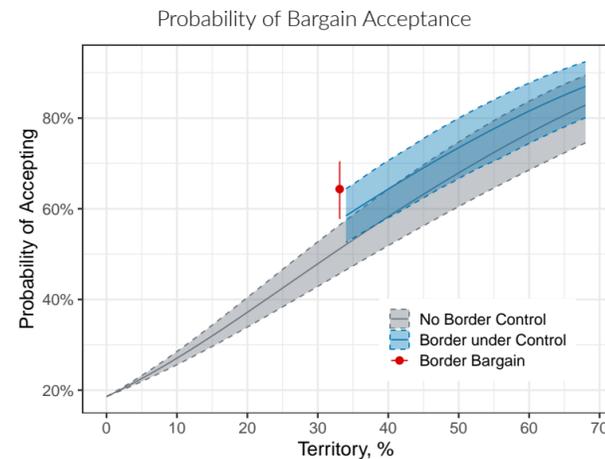
- Sample: 701 respondents residing in Russia (Dec 2024 – Jan 2025)
- Each respondent evaluated 5 maps and chose between continuing the conflict or accepting a peace settlement

Estimation

- Fixed-effects logit model
- Flexible utility specification permits a *removable discontinuity* at the border, as well as *jumps* and *varying slopes*.

$$P(\text{Accept}_{ib}) = \beta_1 \text{Terr}_{ib} + \beta_2 \text{Border}_{ib} + \beta_3 \text{Control}_{ib} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Terr}_{ib} \cdot \text{Control}_{ib} + \gamma_i$$

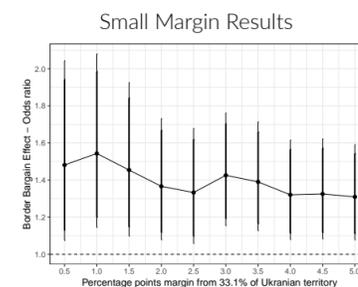
Main Results



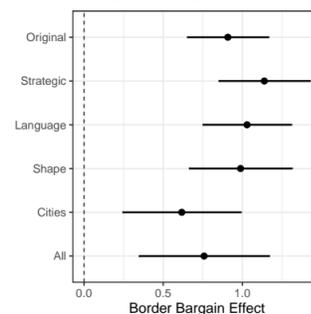
- Accepting the **Border Bargain** while rejecting more generous offers accounts for 46% of all monotonicity violations in the sample.

Robustness

- Sample restricted to bargains involving territorial concessions within a small margin of the amount gained in the **Border Bargain**.
- Effect remains highly significant even within a 0.5% margin: respondents prefer the **Border Bargain** over maps offering the same amount of territorial gain.



Controlling for Bargain Features



- Bargain-level features were included, such as control of strategic locations (like the Dnipro River), share of Russian-speaking population, geographical shape, and control over major cities.
- None of these factors account for the observed border effect.

Do Borders Produce Peace?

Theoretical Argument

Territorial transfers aligning with administrative borders are often seen as more legitimate and more consistent with international norms, thereby **reducing the risk of future wars**.

Empirical Evaluation

- Respondents estimated the time until a new war would occur if one of the proposed maps were adopted as a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine.
- Respondents indicated the actor most likely to break the peace agreement: Russia, Ukraine, or Ukraine's allies (US/NATO/EU).
- ⇒ Duration model with competing risks

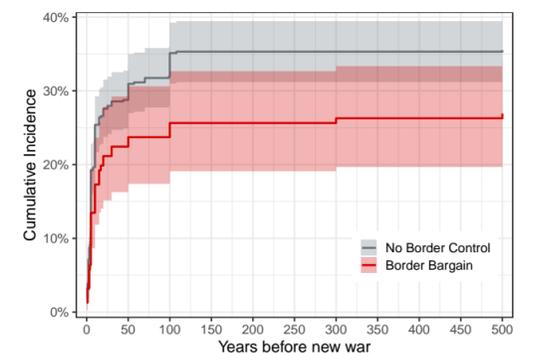
Results

| Effects of borders and territory on peace duration | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Russia | Ukraine | Allies |
| Territory, % | -0.034** (0.014) | -0.014** (0.007) | 0.003 (0.005) |
| Border Bargain | -0.048 (0.493) | 0.207 (0.219) | -0.364** (0.176) |
| Border under Control | 0.330 (0.580) | 0.034 (0.319) | -0.067 (0.202) |
| Num. obs. | 660 | | |

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

- Large territorial concessions ⇒ lower perceived risk of war initiation by Russia or Ukraine.
- Allies are less sensitive to Ukrainian territorial losses.
- Allies value border alignment: aligned borders ⇒ lower perceived risk of third-party involvement.

Perceived risk of future US/NATO/EU intervention



References

- Scott F. Abramson, David B. Carter, and Luwei Ying. Historical Border Changes, State Building, and Contemporary Trust in Europe. *American Political Science Review*, 116(3):875–895, 2022.
- David B. Carter and Hein E. Goemans. The Making of the Territorial Order: New Borders and the Emergence of Interstate Conflict. *International Organization*, 65(2):275–309, 2011.
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