Alliances: What Are They And Why Form Them?

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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CLEMSON
U N I V E R S I T Y

Goal for Today

Define alliances, why states form them, and the drawbacks they have.

What is an Alliance?

Alliances are formal written agreements signed:

- by official representatives of
- at least two independent states, that
- include promises to aid a partner or remain neutral in case of conflict.

What is an Alliance?

Some features of alliances:

- Anticipatory
- Typically unconcerned with cases of civil war or coup threats
- Non-binding
- Either bilateral or multilateral

Typology of Alliances

We have a typology of alliances contingent on data source.

- Correlates of War [CoW] (Gibler, 2009)
- Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions [ATOP] (Leeds et al., 2002)

CoW Typology

- Defense
- Neutrality
- Nonaggression
- Entente

## Roughly Three-Quarters of the State System Has At Least One Active Alliance

The percentage of the state system membership with at least one alliance plummeted after World War I and spiked during World War II.

Percentage of the State System Having At Least One Alliance

Year
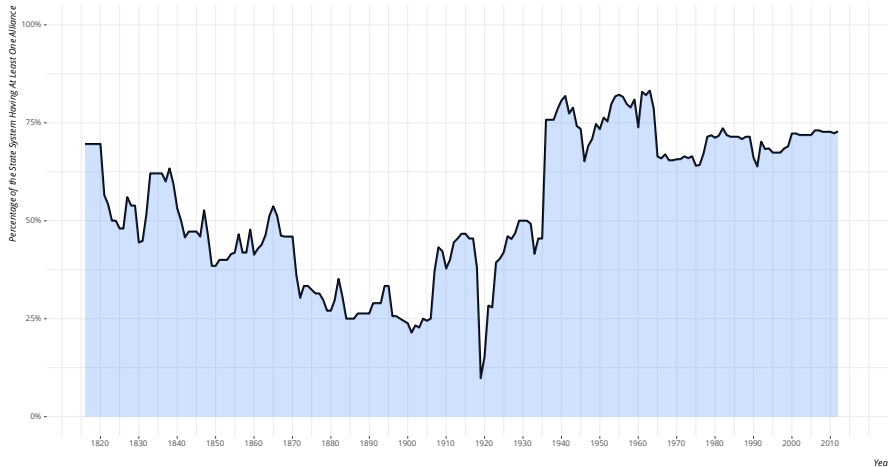
Data: Correlates of War Alliances Data (v 4.1)

## No Country Has Signed More Alliances in the Post-Napoleon History of the World Than Russia

Russia's 105 alliances equals the total of France and the United Kingdom combined.

Country
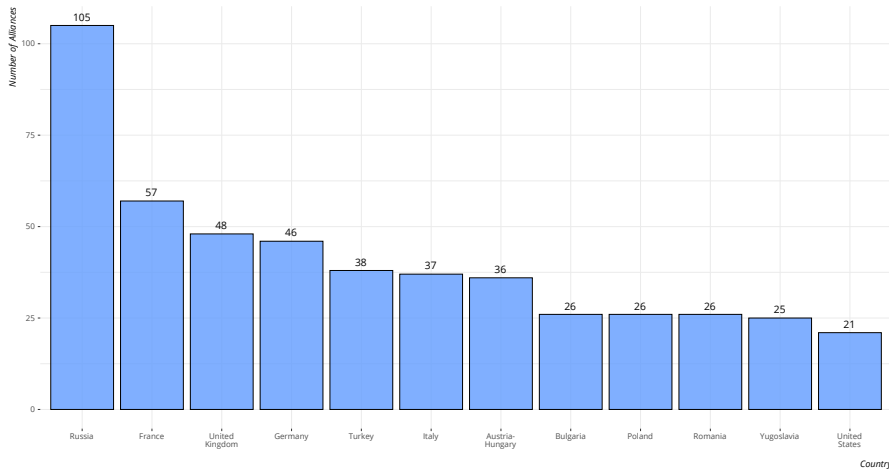
Data: Correlates of War Alliances Data (v. 4.1)

**The Number of Active Alliances for the U.S. and Russia, 1816–2012**

The U.S. foray into alliance-making starts with the Root–Takahira Agreement with Japan. They've been a common part of Russian foreign policy for much longer.

Number of Active Alliances in a Year

Year

Country Russia United States of America
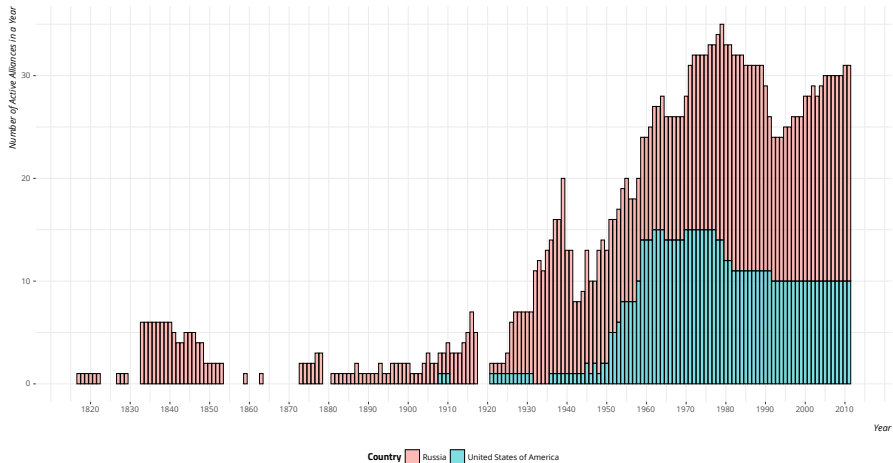
Data: Correlates of War Alliances Data (v. 4.1)

Almost Half (49.5%) of Alliances Are Primarily Defensive

An 1862-66 alliance among Hanover, Bavaria, Saxony, Wuerttemburg, Hesse Grand Ducal, and Austria-Hungary is the only primarily neutrality pact in the data.
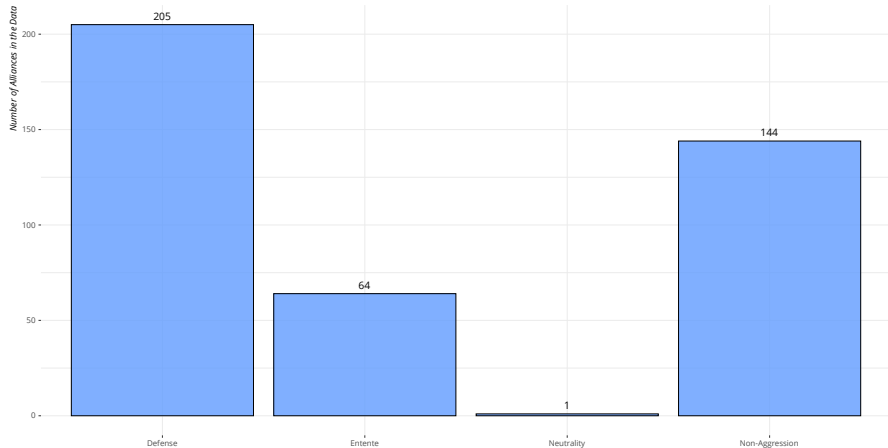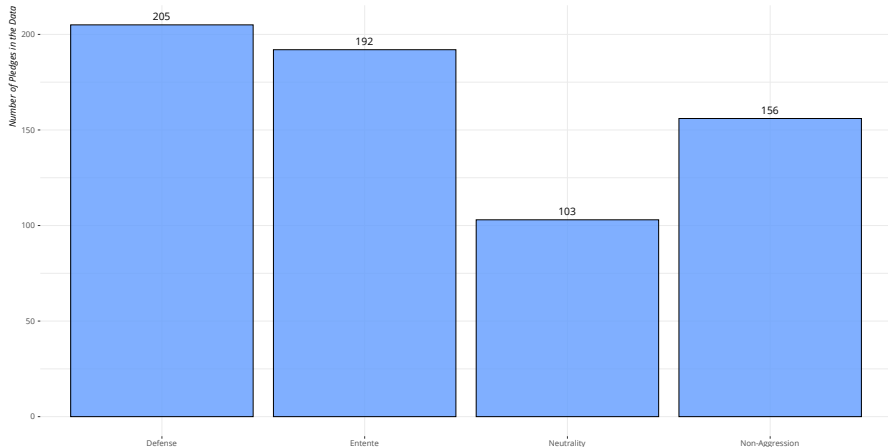
Type of Alliance (via Singer and Small, 1966)

Data: Correlates of War Alliances Data (v 4.1)

Few Alliances Are Primarily Ententes or Neutrality Pacts, but Those Pledges Appear in Defense and Non-Aggression Pacts

Only one alliance was a neutrality pact but 102 alliances contain neutrality pledges.
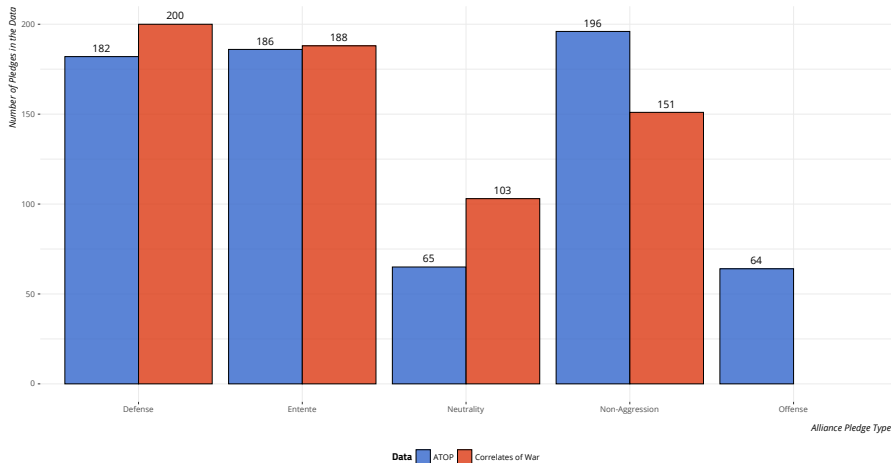

Pledge Type (via Singer and Small, 1966)

Data: Correlates of War Alliances Data (v 4.1)

ATOP Typology

- Offense
- Neutrality
- Nonaggression
- Defense
- Entente

ATOP and CoW Alliance Data Have Quite a Few Differences, Beyond the Category for Offense

ATOP observes more non-aggression pledges than CoW, but fewer neutrality pledges.

Number of Pledges in the Data

182 / 200	186 / 188	65 / 103	196 / 151	64

Defense Entente Neutrality Non-Aggression Offense

Alliance Pledge Type

Data ■ ATOP ■ Correlates of War

Data: ATOP (v 3.0) and CoW (v. 4.1). Note: temporal domains standardized from 1816-2003.

Why Form Alliances?

Traditional argument: states use alliances for security.

- Quick way of aggregating capabilities toward some adversary.

This led to the familiar balancing/bandwagoning debate.

- Balancing: join weaker side to stop domination
- Bandwagoning: join stronger side to join in spoils of domination

Why Form Alliances?

Walt's balance of threat theory offers small refinement here.

- States balance against perceived threat, not power.
- Power is instrumental to threat.

Sources of threat:

- Offensive power
- Proximity
- Aggregate capabilities
- Offensive intentions

Better View of Alliance Formation

States seek an optimal trade-off between security and autonomy.

- Weaker states seek security from stronger states against perceived threats
- Stronger states trade security commitments for policy gains elsewhere.
- The weaker state concedes some autonomy for security.

Would square well with patterns we observe:

- U.S.-Kuwait/Saudi Arabia.
- Marshall Plan in NATO

Better View of Alliance Formation

States A and B generally form an alliance to signal to State C.

- Assume: B and C have some divisive issue, for which A supports B.
- And: alliances are costly to form (i.e. transaction, opportunity) and costly to break (i.e. reputation, audience).

Therefore: A and B form a costly alliance when:

- A and wants to better empower B/deter C.
- Alliances are relatively inexpensive to form.
- Alliances are costly to break.

Figure 1: Marriage of John I, King of Portugal and Philippa of Lancaster

Who Forms Alliances?

Empirical analysis for today: what do we know about who forms alliances more generally?

Lai and Reiter's (2000) Data

The first step is to know what the variables used are supposed to capture.

- Dependent variable: states are allied (Y/N)
  - CoW alliances and ATOP alliances

Analysis is from older data.

- CoW domain (1816-1992)
- ATOP domain (1816-1944)

Lai and Reiter's (2000) Data

Lai and Reiter have three hunches about what explains alliance formation.

1. Regime similarity
   - Joint democracy
   - Polity difference (i.e. testing for "cats and dogs" effect)

2. Cultural similarity/homophily
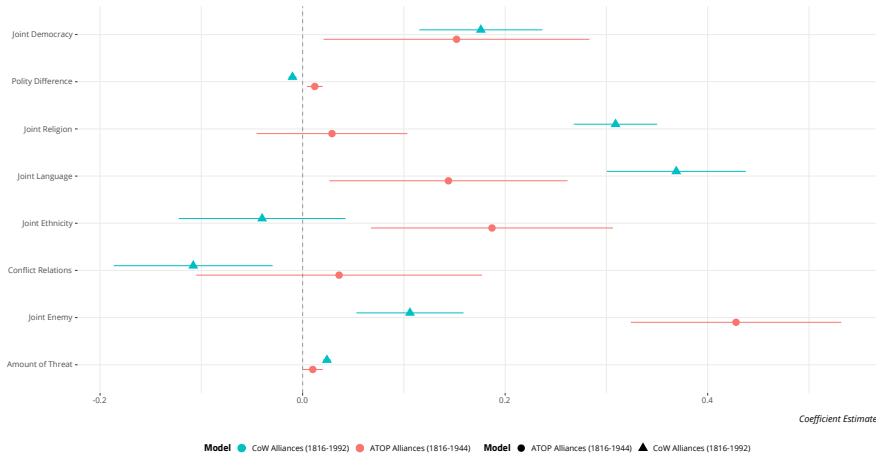   - Joint religion/ethnicity/language

3. Shared threat
   - Conflict relations (i.e. severity of recent MIDs)
   - General threat level (i.e. number of MIDs in past 10 years)
   - Common enemy (i.e. if both sides fought against same state)

Additional notes:

- More controls: distance, major power, learning (i.e. regarding past alliances)
- Unit of analysis: dyad-year.

Probit Results of Dyadic Alliance Formation

Generally, alliances form from shared regime type, homophily, and mutual threats.

Coefficient Estimate

Model ● CoW Alliances (1816-1992) ● ATOP Alliances (1816-1944) **Model** ● ATOP Alliances (1816-1944) ▲ CoW Alliances (1816-1992)

Reproduction of Table II in Gibler and Sarkees (2004).
Note: Controls for distance, major power, learning, and ally lags excluded for presentation.

Careful Interpretation of Significance

Some conclusions about who forms alliances:

- Democracies form alliances with each other.
- Culturally similar states form alliances with each other.
- More threatened states form alliances; enemies don't.

Conclusion

- Classifiable into offense/defense, non-aggression, neutrality, entente.
- Alliances constitute a security-autonomy trade-off.
- Homophily (in institutions/culture) and shared sense of threat are important correlates of alliance formation.

Table of Contents