research highlights

POLITICAL SCIENCE

The ally of my ally

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States that form alliances around common security interests are unlikely to enter into conflict with one another, but does this also apply to the friends of friends in international alliance networks?

Weihua Li of Beihang University and colleagues from Ohio State University conducted a network analysis of treaties and conflicts active between 1965 and 2000 to examine whether the peacekeeping effects of alliances extend to the allies of allies and further. The analyses considered network distance between states, as well as geographical proximity, states' ability to project military power and other circumstantial factors that could mediate peace or conflict. The authors found a significantly decreased risk of conflict that was robust up to and including three degrees of separation from a formal alliance, beyond which the risk increases sharply. This decreased risk within three degrees is partially explained by higher-level international communities (for example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), but even beyond this community structure, having common allies seems to be an important mediator of conflict.

This work highlights the importance of visualizing international relations as an interdependent web of connections that extends beyond bilateral agreements.

John Carson