To the Editors:

Certain topics have currency. If one is to judge from scholarly publications and statements by foreign policy elites, the relationship between democracy and peace is one of those topics. There have been differences over definitions and debate about whether the relationship between democracy and peace is absolute. There is disagreement as to whether normative or institutional factors better explain the relationship. But there appears to be little doubt in the minds of most observers that the "joint democracy effect" is real and, for some, it approaches the status of an empirical law of international relations. Stated simply, while states characterized by democratic polities are as war-prone as any other states, democracies rarely (if ever) engage in war against one another. Extrapolating the logic, a world of democracies would be a peaceful world (although the path to this end might be strewn with conflict).

Any time scholars write about empirical laws and policy elites invoke such laws to justify policy behavior, one should be wary. Yet, in this case, the weight of evidence seems to support the claim. Nevertheless, there are dissenting views. The article "Polities and Peace" by Henry Farber and Joanne Gowa that appears in the Fall 1995 issue of International Security (and has since been reprinted in Debating the Democratic Peace) stands out as, perhaps, the most carefully crafted challenge to the democratic peace thesis. If Professors Farber and Gowa are correct, the democratic peace thesis is "without legs," and policies based on the thesis ill-advised.

"Polities and Peace" is an extremely appealing article. The exposition of substantive arguments and quantitative methodology is wonderfully lucid. The attention to detail, explanation of methodology, and discussion of findings provide a textbook example of how quantitative analysis should be presented. The issue addressed is important and policy relevant; the conclusion contrary to "conventional wisdom." There is, to my

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mind, only one major problem. I believe the authors have misread their results and the appropriate inference from their findings is opposite of what they conclude.

More precisely, Farber and Gowa report that the joint democracy effect underlying the democratic peace thesis is, first, largely a post–World War II phenomenon and, second, more convincingly explained by the existence of common interests than by the normative or institutional explanations proffered in the literature. I would suggest that Professors Farber and Gowa’s analysis indicates that the “joint democracy effect” was at work prior to 1946, and that the distinction drawn between normative and institutional explanations and interest-based explanations cannot be sustained.

THE DEMOCRATIC PEACE PRIOR TO 1946
The basis for Farber and Gowa’s conclusions is straightforward. They argue that if the democratic peace thesis is valid, it should apply to relations among democratic states regardless of the historical period. They examine the conflict behavior of states from 1816 through 1980, concentrating primarily on the years prior to World War I and following World War II. They find that while the behavior of democratic states is consistent with the thesis in the years after World War II (1946–80), it is not during the years prior to World War I (1816–1913). Consequently, they conclude that the democratic peace thesis is invalid and that some alternative explanation (i.e., the Western alliance system) accounts for the infrequency of conflict among democracies in the post–World War II period.

Is this conclusion warranted? I think not. To understand why not, we need to consider matters of methodology, analytic inference, and the relationship among norms, institutions, and interests.

Let us turn first to methodological (as well as definitional) considerations. A central issue in the debate surrounding the democratic peace thesis is how to define the concept of democracy and identify those states which are democracies and those war experiences that provide a valid test of the thesis. I have no wish to quibble with Professors Farber and Gowa regarding their operational procedures. I merely note that there is a debate, and how countries and war experiences are categorized will affect the results of empirical analysis.

Farber and Gowa identify two wars in which purported democracies fought on opposing sides during the 1816–1980 temporal domain covered by their study: the Spanish-American War of 1898 and World War II (in which Finland participated as a member of the Axis coalition from June 1941 until September 1944). The case for including the Spanish-American War rests on how Spain is categorized in 1898. Farber and Gowa base their decision on the Polity II data set generated by Ted Gurr and his associates, in which Spain in 1898 receives a score of seven on an eleven-point democracy scale. In an alternative data set employing dichotomous coding, Steve Chan identifies Spain as nondemocratic in 1898.4 The case with regard to Finland in World

4. Farber and Gowa categorize a country as democratic if it receives a score of six or higher on Gurr’s eleven-point “institutionalized democracy” scale. Spain receives a score of seven on the Polity II data set; in the revised Polity III data set, Spain’s democracy score for 1898 is reduced to
War II revolves around how to treat participants in multiparty wars. Should every state on one side of the conflict be paired with every state on the other side? Should only those states that actually fight one another be paired? Should joiners of an ongoing war be treated, for analytic purposes, the same way that original war participants are treated?

The question of how to deal with Finnish participation in World War II is largely moot as regards “Polities and Peace.” For both theoretical and operational reasons, Farber and Gowa focus their analysis on the years prior to World War I and after World War II. But whether Finland is included or excluded, or whether Spain is or is not a democracy in 1898, is in some ways besides the point. The point is that we are talking about “exceptions”; since 1816, wars between democracies have been extremely rare (and, perhaps, nonexistent).

Farber and Gowa argue correctly, however, that war itself is quite rare, at least in comparison to all possible instances in which war could occur. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether the absence or rarity of war between democracies is unusual. In the language of statisticians, is the relative absence of war between democracies statistically significant? To decide, one needs to identify an appropriate baseline for comparison. Farber and Gowa suggest (with some minor modifications) that, in any year, any state might engage in war with any other state. Thus, if there are n states, then in any year there are (approximately) \( n(n-1)/2 \) potential war dyads. Based upon this assumption, Farber and Gowa find, for the period 1816–1913, that the probability that two democracies will go to war against one another is approximately the same as the probability for any other pair of states (actually, any other combination of polities). On the other hand, during the period 1946–80, the probability of war between two democracies is significantly less than for other pairs of states.6


5. The authors posit that the causal dynamic underlying general wars (such as World Wars I and II) is likely to differ from that found in other inter-state wars and that this has important implications for studies, like theirs, that employ dyad-years as the unit of analysis. In particular, they are concerned that disaggregating war participants into constituent dyads will distort the relationship among the belligerent states in general wars and mask cross-dyad interdependence. Rather than simply drop the warring dyads from the analysis, which would introduce sample-selection bias, Farber and Gowa argue that one should exclude the entire time period encompassed by the World Wars.

6. We are talking here about statistical significance. For the period 1816–1913, the probability of war between democracies is .0007, while the probability of war between states with other types of polities is .0010. For the period 1946–80, the probabilities are .0000 and .0004. Thus, the probability
How should this be interpreted? Farber and Gowa conclude that, whatever the explanation for the post–World War II years, there is no joint democracy effect prior to World War I. I would suggest an alternative interpretation. During the periods 1816–1913 and 1946–80, the Spanish-American War of 1898 is the only instance of war between purported democracies. Even assuming the Spanish polity is correctly coded and there is no statistically significant difference between the probability of war for democratic dyads and other dyads during the 1816–1913 period, this does not mean the joint democracy effect is missing. What the data reveal is that war is rare—rare for democratic dyads, rare for any pair of states.

What is a war? War is a form of interaction between states, involving violent behavior at a particular (high) level of hostility. It is a specific phase in a dynamic process that begins with a conflict of interest. There may be several paths by which one may reach this level of hostility; that is, the factors that account for the occurrence of war may differ from one war to the next. This need not imply infinite variety, but it suggests that we think about causal explanation in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Thus, it may be that the condition of “joint democracy” is sufficient (or nearly sufficient) to prevent the escalation of conflict to war, but not necessary. If so, the (near) absence of war between democracies may reflect the joint democracy effect, while the infrequency of war for “non-jointly democratic” dyads is attributable to other factors.

Is there evidence to support such an interpretation? I think so. Consider two important, but problematic, research design decisions made by Farber and Gowa. One is to extend their study to include what have come to be called militarized inter-state disputes (or MIDs). The logic of extending the democratic peace thesis to MIDs is debatable. This is because the theoretical argument associated with the thesis contends that normative or institutional factors serve to constrain the use of large-scale violence by one democracy against another. While Farber and Gowa are not the first to use these data in this way, the application may be inconsistent with, or at least strain, the theoretical logic. The democratic peace thesis does not assert that democracies avoid disputes with one another. It argues that there are constraints on the escalation of violence and, in particular, the use of large-scale violence to resolve these disputes. The MID data set that Farber and Gowa employ to extend their empirical test of the democratic peace thesis is comprised of inter-state dispute cases that span a range from mere threats to use force to war itself.

of war is very slim regardless of the type of political regime. However, given the large number of potential war dyads, one can use statistical tests to ascertain whether these distributions are likely to be the result of regime type or chance. For the period 1816–1913, one cannot rule out chance as the explanation. For the period 1946–80, it is far more likely that the difference in probabilities is associated with regime type.

7. For an excellent discussion of the logic of necessary and sufficient conditions, and the possibilities of “substitutability” in foreign policy behavior, see Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, Inquiry, Logic, and International Politics (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

8. Bruce Russett, among others, would disagree with the position I have taken on the appropriateness of employing MID data to test the democratic peace thesis. See Bruce Russett, “Correspondence: The Democratic Peace (‘And Yet It Moves’),” International Security, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring
The results of Farber and Gowa’s analysis of these data are quite suggestive. They find for the period prior to World War I that jointly democratic dyads have a significantly greater probability of engaging in MIDs than do non-jointly democratic dyads. In the period after World War II, the probability that jointly democratic dyads will engage in MIDs is significantly less than for non-jointly democratic dyads. They conclude that the findings from their analysis of the MID data confirm what they previously found when examining the inter-state war data (i.e., joint democracy does not mitigate military conflict prior to World War I). It seems to me that one could interpret the data quite differently. If the democratic peace thesis does not rule out the possibility of disputes among democratic countries (even disputes involving threats and displays of force), but rather asserts that these disputes should not escalate to war, then Farber and Gowa’s findings provide fodder for proponents of the democratic peace thesis. What they find is that, prior to World War I, democracies engage in a disproportionately large number of conflicts with one another, but at most one (and, perhaps, none) of these conflicts escalates to war. While we cannot be certain that it was the joint democracy effect that kept these disputes from escalating to war, the findings are consistent with the thesis and the statistical probabilities are quite striking.

The second problematic research design decision by Farber and Gowa is the baseline against which the conflict behavior of jointly democratic dyads is compared. Farber and Gowa assume that each state has an (approximately) equal probability of engaging in war or MID with every other state. This is unlikely to be true for lower-level MIDs; it is certainly not true for wars. Overwhelmingly, inter-state wars occur between states that are geographically proximate. Most exceptions to this involve conflicts pitting a major power or a (former) colonial power against another state. The reasons are quite simple: wars arise from conflicting interests and require that combatants possess the ability to project and sustain the use of substantial military force. Conflicts of interest are more likely to arise among states that have opportunities to interact than among states that rarely interact, and states (especially those that are not major or former colonial powers) interact far more frequently with neighboring than with distant states. More pointedly, very few states (other than major or former colonial powers) have the ability to project and sustain the use of substantial military force far from their borders. Hence, inter-state war is largely a neighborhood affair. The same is true, although to a lesser extent, for subwar conflicts, such as those captured by the MID data set. Even developments in technology and the globalization of politics and economics over the

1995), pp. 164–175. My point is not that all militarized disputes fall outside the democratic peace thesis; indeed, the thesis suggests that the joint democracy effect should damp escalation at the higher end of the hostility scale. It does not, at least in my mind, argue that low-level MIDs will necessarily be reduced. There may, however, be a temporal effect. If the normative explanation for the joint democracy effect is correct, it may be that the norm against violence has evolved over time to the point that, today, it constrains foreign policy behavior at a lower level of hostility than it may have in the past. For an introduction to, and a description of, the Correlates of War Project’s Militarized Interstate Dispute data set, see Charles S. Gochman and Zeev Maoz, “Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1976: Procedures, Patterns, and Insights,” Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 28, No. 4 (December 1984), pp. 585–616.
past two centuries have not dramatically altered this pattern. Benin, Bhutan, Belarus, and Bolivia are far more likely to engage in militarized disputes or wars against their neighbors than against one another; indeed, the probability that they would fight one another is quite minute.

Precisely what implication this has for Farber and Gowa’s analysis cannot be known without determining the proportion of democratic states that were major powers, former colonial powers, or geographically proximate to one another and comparing this to similar information for all possible pairs of states. A cursory review of history suggests that excluding from Farber and Gowa’s analysis those dyads that have little or no likelihood of engaging in militarized conflict (because they do not contain a major or former colonial power or are not geographically proximate) may alter their findings with respect to war and modify the findings regarding MIDs.

A hint of this can be gleaned from Table 1 (Table 4 of Farber and Gowa’s “Polities and Peace”). The table presents the results of logistic regressions for analyses of MIDs in the periods 1816–1913 and 1946–80. Coefficients are reported for analyses in which “polity type” alone is used to predict whether a militarized dispute will occur and for analyses in which geographic proximity and major power status are also considered. Of interest to us is what happens to the coefficient for polity type, once indicators of proximity and major power status are introduced. For the 1816–1913 period, the coefficient for polity type declines substantially (as does its statistical significance); for the 1946–80 period, the coefficient for polity type doubles in size (as does its statistical significance). In both periods, the coefficients for geographic proximity and major power status are strong and positively associated with participation in MIDs.

What does this mean? First, it suggests that geographic proximity and major power participation significantly increase the probability that a conflict of interest will lead to the threat or use of military force. Second, it suggests that Farber and Gowa’s initial finding of a strong positive relationship in the 1816–1913 period between joint democracy and MIDs may well be spurious. The fact that the relationship largely (although not entirely) disappears when indicators of geographic proximity and major power participation are introduced suggests that many of the jointly democratic dyads are proximate and involve major powers and that it is these latter characteristics, not the

joint democracy, that lead to MIDs.\textsuperscript{10} This is the important point. Geographic proximity and major power participation are positively associated with the occurrence of militarized inter-state disputes; they are also strongly and positively associated with the escalation of such disputes to war. Yet, despite the fact that it appears that many of the MIDs among democracies prior to World War I are characterized by the very conditions that enhance escalation, at most one of these MIDs—perhaps none—results in war. War-prone situations among democracies are not escalating (to war). This hardly seems like evidence that undermines the democratic peace thesis. Indeed, it suggests that in the years prior to World War I the joint democracy effect may be quite robust.

\textbf{EXPLAINING THE JOINT DEMOCRACY EFFECT}

If, as I have suggested, the joint democracy effect was “alive and well” in the pre–World War I period, the main thrust of Farber and Gowa’s argument for seeking an alternative explanation for the relatively peaceful relations among democracies in the post–World War II period is undercut. This does not mean that the democratic peace thesis is correct. It simply means that the thesis has not been refuted by the empirical evidence.

\textsuperscript{10} This observation is consistent with Farber and Gowa’s comment (footnote 72 in their \textit{International Security} article) that what is perhaps their most striking finding (i.e., the greater probability of MIDs among democratic dyads than among other types of dyads in the 1816–1913 period) is entirely attributable to a higher probability of disputes among contiguous democratic dyads.
The literature on the democratic peace thesis provides two primary lines of argument to account for why democracies are unlikely to go to war against one another. The normative argument asserts that democratic societies develop nonviolent means for resolving domestic disputes and, over time, norms of behavior evolve that delegitimize violence as an acceptable mechanism of conflict resolution. Citizens in democratic societies expect fellow citizens to abide by these norms. The normative argument contends that this domestic norm is internationalized because citizens of democracies expect other democratic societies to behave in a manner consistent with the nonviolent resolution of disputes and because political leaders of democratic societies have internalized these norms.\(^{11}\)

The institutional argument for democratic peace asserts that popular constraints on political elites, institutional checks and balances, and (in some versions) elite resistance to emotion-driven popular pressures moderate extreme political behavior. This is particularly the case where threats to the national interest are difficult to demonstrate. Because other democratic societies—constrained in the same manner—pose significantly less overt threat to the national interest than do countries with nondemocratic polities, disputes among democratic states are unlikely to escalate to the large-scale use of military force.

As Farber and Gowa note, if the normative or institutional explanation for democratic peace is correct, it should be as applicable to the 1816–1913 period as to 1946–80. Since they contend that the joint democracy effect is missing in the earlier period, they seek an alternative explanation for the later period. The explanation they proffer is alliance-based: most democracies in the 1946–80 period participate in the U.S.-dominated, post-war alliance system. It is in the U.S. interest, as well as the interest of other alliance members, to prevent the outbreak of war—and, where possible, even the outbreak of lower-level disputes—within the alliance. Thus, they argue, the democratic peace in the 1946–80 period is not the consequence of norms or domestic institutional structures, but the result of interest-based considerations that would not be replicated in the absence of a comparable alliance system. Hence, peace is not the result of democratic norms or institutions, but national interests.

As I have attempted to show, Farber and Gowa’s rejection of the democratic peace thesis is not consistent with the evidence they present. The joint democracy effect appears robust both in the 1946–80 period and in the years 1816–1913. It should not be rejected. The notion that the post–World War II alliance system also contributes to the absence of wars between democracies from 1946 through 1980 is logical as well. National interests reinforce the peacefulness associated with joint democracy.

\(^{11}\) There is an obvious perceptual component to this argument. Expectations concerning the nonviolent settlement of disputes apply to situations in which democratic societies are interacting with other societies that are perceived to be democratic. Thus, to the extent that the political leaders or citizens of democratic societies fail to accurately perceive another state’s polity type, patterns of conflict resolution might deviate from what would be expected on the basis of accurate perceptions. Hence, based on the logic of the normative argument, democracies may engage in violent conflict resolution with one another due to a failure to recognize or accept that an adversary’s regime is democratic. See John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 87–125.
Indeed, the distinction Farber and Gowa draw between interest-based behavior and normative or institutional-based behavior seems difficult to sustain. Norms, institutions, and interests are not elements that float freely in space; they are intimately related to one another. Norms arise from custom or agreement and reflect the interests of the parties that establish them. Institutions are mechanisms and procedures that regularize and “concretize” norms and interests. In turn, institutions generate interests and institutional practices generate norms. In short, neither norms, interests, nor institutions are fixed; they evolve over time, reflecting and affecting the perceptions, calculations, and capacities of actors on whom they impinge.

To suggest that an interest-based alliance system rather than democratic norms or institutions accounts for the absence of war and the minimization of militarized disputes among democracies in the post–World War II years obscures the relationship among these factors. Certainly it was in the interest of the United States and its allies (if I may be permitted, for the sake of simplicity, to employ the notion of a collective national interest) to minimize intra-alliance conflict in the face of a perceived extra-alliance threat. It was also in the interest of the United States to support established democratic states throughout the world, both because these regimes were perceived as bulwarks against communist expansion and because these states were perceived as posing no physical threat to U.S. security. U.S. leaders have long professed a desire to promote democratic regimes worldwide, and this has been defended, at least in part, on the grounds of U.S. national interest. If the norms and institutions of democratic societies reduce violence among democracies, it is in the interest of these societies to foster and sustain such norms and institutions.

So long as all democratic states are also allied to one another, it is not possible to separate the joint democracy effect from the alliance effect. However, this has not always been, nor will it always be, the case. Thus, in principle, we should be able to ascertain the “independent” effect of each variable, and also the possible interactive effect of the two. The discussion above suggests that a proper test of the joint democracy effect would need to incorporate controls for geographic proximity and major power status and explore the potentially confounding effects of shared alliance membership and historical eras.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The democratic peace thesis has attained the status of lore in many academic and policymaking circles. Professors Farber and Gowa provide a useful challenge to that lore. Ultimately, I think, that challenge proves unsuccessful, but it is important that we

12. The United States also supported nondemocratic, anti-communist regimes during the Cold War. At times, the United States undermined regimes which came into power as the result of popular elections. Whether the polity of these states was perceived to be democratic by political leaders in Washington or by the American public is a different issue.

continue to probe the validity and the limits of the thesis. As we move into the twenty-first century, we can expect an increasing number of countries to adopt the institutions and rhetoric of democracy. Many of these countries will have had no prior experience with democracy; many will lack the economic infrastructure normally associated with stable societies. We can hope that these newly formed democracies will behave toward one another (and toward more established democracies) in a manner consistent with the democratic peace thesis. Hope, however, is not a good basis for prediction or policy. Prudence suggests we develop a more nuanced understanding of why and how norms, institutions, and interests interact to damp conflict behavior so that we are better prepared to deal with the future.

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The Authors Reply:

We are pleased to be able to respond to the important issues that Professor Gochman raises. Professor Gochman contends that the relative incidence of disputes of democratic and nondemocratic dyads is not central to the democratic-peace debate. He believes that the most important issue at stake in this debate involves relative escalation rates. He also argues that contiguity and major-power status render the relationship we found between democracies and disputes (i.e., lower-level MIDs) before 1914 spurious. We address these two issues in turn.

Professor Gochman asserts that two findings in our paper, taken together, show that dispute escalation is less likely between democracies than between other states: 1) before 1914, the MID rate of democratic dyads is higher than that of other dyads; and 2) in this same period, the war rates of democracies and of other country pairs do not differ. Thus, Professor Gochman concludes, the evidence supports his interpretation of the democratic-peace hypothesis: disputes between democracies are less likely to escalate to war than are disputes between other states.

To address this question more precisely, we returned to the pre-1914 set of 472 dyads involved in MIDs that we had studied for other reasons in our paper. We use the maximum level of hostility coded for each side to determine whether a MID escalated into war. If both sides are coded as having maximum hostility levels of war, we code that dispute as an escalation to war.

In general, few MIDs escalate to war. In the pre-1914 sample, there are 472 MIDs but only 54 wars. Among nondemocratic dyads, 53 of 445 MIDs (11.9 percent) escalated to war; 1 of 27 MIDs (i.e., 3.7 percent) involving members of democratic dyads did so. However, the p-value based on a Pearson $\chi^2$ test of independence of polity type and the probability of dispute escalation is 0.193. Thus, we cannot reject the hypothesis of independence of polity type and escalation probability.

1. Two of the nonescalations are potentially miscoded due to missing data on the level of hostility. However, neither of these are listed in the COW wars data set, so that it is unlikely that these MIDs escalated.

2. A probit analysis, controlling for major-power status and contiguity, yields the same results.
We agree with Professor Gochman that contiguity and major-power status play major roles in explaining MIDs. This is precisely the reason we included them as control variables in our original analysis. As reported in Table 1 (our Table 4, p. 144 of our International Security article), estimates showed that major-power status and contiguity do play more important roles than polity type.

Professor Gochman concludes that it is these “characteristics, not the joint democracy, that lead to MIDs.” We never argued that joint democracy, *per se*, lead to MIDs. We presented evidence that no consistent relationship over time exists between polity type and dispute rates, and we concluded that this calls into question the empirical support for the democratic-peace hypothesis.

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—Joanne Gowa
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