

Liberal Pacification and the Phenomenology of Violence

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While international relations scholars make many claims about violence, they rarely define the concept. This article develops a typology of three distinct kinds of violence: direct, indirect, and pacification. Direct violence occurs when a person or agent inflicts harm on another. Indirect violence manifests through the structures of society. We propose a third understanding of violence: pacification. Using a phenomenological methodology, and drawing on anarchist and postcolonial thought, we show that the violence of pacification is diffuse, inconspicuous, intersubjective, and structured into the fabric of society. This understanding of violence matters for the study of international relations in general and research on the liberal peace in particular. We argue that the spread of liberal institutions does not necessarily decrease violence but instead transforms it. Our phenomenological analysis captures empirical trends in human domination and suffering that liberal peace theories cannot account for. It reveals how a decline in direct violence may coincide with the transformation of violence in ways that are concealed, monopolized, and structured into the liberal order. We call this process liberal pacification.

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“They plunder, they slaughter, and they steal: this they falsely name Empire, and where they make a wasteland, they call it peace.”

—Tacitus, *Agricola*, chap. XXX (1914)

Introduction

Canonical texts in international relations define peace as the absence of violence (Aron 1973, 21; Bull 2012, 18; Clausewitz 1976, 75; Waltz 1959, 1; 1979, 343). However, a glance at the philology of the word “peace” reveals a more complex relationship with violence. The Latin words for peace (*pax*, *pacis*, *paco*) trace their roots to the verb for a pact (*pacisci*), “which ended a war and led to submission, friendship, or alliance.” As Rome transitioned from republic to empire, *pax* changed its meaning from a pact among equals to submission to Rome, and “*pacare* began to refer to conquest” (Weinstock 1960, 45).¹

Two monuments built by Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, record this shift in the meaning of peace. The first, the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, a monument to the goddess of peace,

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¹ *Pacare* is a conjugation of *paco*, the Latin verb meaning to pacify or subdue.

commemorates Augustus's pacification of Gaul and Spain (Kleiner 2005, 212). The second, the funerary inscription *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, appeared on Augustus's tomb and celebrates his many accomplishments, including bringing peace to the sea, Gaul, Spain, and the Alps. Crucially, the term used to characterize this peace is *pacavi*, which means pacified. *Pacavi* is not the absence of violence but the use of violence to reorder the world into a Roman Empire. Thus, *Pax Romana* meant eliminating the threat of war—both civil and foreign—through the preponderance of Roman military might.

Romans understood peace to include both the absence of violence and the forceful creation and maintenance of a political order: pacification. Modern scholars in the field, however, understand violence and peace as antonyms. While some researchers question the meaning of peace (Martín 2005; Richmond 2008), the field almost never scrutinizes its concepts of violence.² In fact, scholars of international relations seldom even use the term (Thomas 2011, 1815–16).

Inspired by this anamnesis analysis of *pax*, we argue that violence functions as a structural feature of the world—even a seemingly peaceful world.³ Violence is not the absence of peace but, rather, as the Romans recognized, the ordering feature of the *pax*. Violence constitutes modern society. We argue for a phenomenological understanding of violence to reframe how we might theorize what violence is. Our approach does not contest the basic character of violence (harm, death, and so forth.). Rather, it identifies violence as a structuring feature of the world, one that conditions and enables political, social, and economic relations. We define this process as pacification: the process of rendering invisible what scholars in the field identify as direct and indirect violence.

This article proceeds in four parts. In part one, we identify a conceptual gap at the heart of much international relations scholarship about violence. We show that scholars generally conceptualize violence as either direct (the consequence of empirically identifiable behaviors) or indirect (behaviors that in the aggregate cause violence via the institutions of modern society). Across mainstream and critical literatures alike, scholars understand violence as a specific thing, the effects of which we can observe, count, measure, and potentially eliminate. In part two, we introduce a phenomenological methodology for theorizing violence. We show how violence operates even when it is unobservable. Observable violence can function as a rupture that reveals the hidden violence of pacification. In part three, we develop our account of violence as pacification, which we argue is central to the development of the liberal world order. Anarchist thought reveals the pacification in liberal capitalism. Postcolonial thought reveals the pacification in colonialism. In part four, we demonstrate the theoretical value of our tripartite classification of violence: direct, indirect, and pacification. Our understanding of pacification as violence allows us to account for both the empirical observation of the liberal peace as leading to a decline in direct violence and the claim that the *Pax Americana* represents an increase in violence overall.

Conventional and Critical Understandings of Violence in International Relations

Both mainstream and critical scholars of international relations understand violence as something done by an individual or a group to other individuals or groups. Violence is a tool or instrument deployed for particular purposes, such as deterrence or compellence. Direct violence occurs when one person or agent inflicts harm on another. Researchers often measure direct violence using battlefield deaths, homicide rates, or other forms of body counts.⁴ Indirect violence is mediated through the structures of society, such as poverty or famine, which produce higher than average death rates. In both understandings, violence involves a causal relationship between agents and targets or victims. As a consequence, strict empiricist researchers typically consider the effects of violence both visible and measurable.

The democratic and liberal peace literatures, perhaps the most prominent discussions of violence in international relations, serve as a case in point. Liberal scholars argue that the spread of liberal institutions—including democratic governance, international trade, and human rights norms—results in an overall decline of interstate violence (Doyle 1983; Rosecrance 1986; Mueller 1989; Oneal, Maoz, and Russett 1996; Oneal and Russett 1999; Goldstein 2012). Steven Pinker (2012) greatly expands the scope of this claim. Not only does Pinker document declining warfare between nations, he also points to reductions in other forms of violence, including homicide, terrorism, rape, child abuse, capital punishment, and cruelty to animals. Pinker contends that the decline of war and the success of the new liberal order has relegated violence to isolated acts of terrorism and local instances of civil and ethnic conflict. Most of this violence, he argues, takes place outside the writ of the liberal world order.

Liberal theorists' observations appear at odds with the violent turmoil of our time. Critical international relations scholars contest liberal accounts of expanding peace, pointing to refugee crises, ecological devastation, financial collapse, nuclear proliferation, drone warfare, widespread government repression, police violence, mass incarceration, a grotesque concentration of wealth on a planetary scale, the rise of the far right, and much more.⁵ Such critiques introduce the concept of indirect violence to capture the ways that institutions and structures inflict harm. Yet, as we will show, neither of these understandings of violence—direct or indirect—fully accounts for these pervasive experiences and structures of violence.

Direct Violence

Direct violence is an instrument: “the use of physical force to inflict injury or to cause damage to a person or property” (Thomas 2011, 1817, 1828). This definition limits violence to observable instances and effects, usually killing and

⁴For example, Raleigh (2012). For a critique of how body counts are used to support claims of the decline in war, see Fazal (2014).

⁵Liberal observers often portray postcolonial societies as lawless and beset by criminal violence (see discussion in Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 6). The capitalist world economy treats large swaths of humanity as “superfluous” and unneeded (Mbembe 2017, 3; also, Mbembe 2001; Simone 2008). Liberal western democracies, for all their wealth and resources, appear unable or unwilling to adequately respond to humanitarian refugee crises in which 1 percent of the entire human population is now displaced from their homes (Connor and Krogstad 2016). Oxfam (2017) reports that eight men now own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world's population.

²An exception is Frazer and Hutchings (2007) who have sought to expand theoretical understandings of the concept. See also Calkivik (2016) and Rodríguez-Alcázar (2017).

³Anamnesis is “a critique based on the forgetting of past heritage” (Baron 2018, 30; compare Havercroft 2011, 24–28).

death. Liberal peace research rests on this definition. Notably, prominent quantitatively oriented scholars use battlefield deaths as a proxy for violence to empirically test their claims that the promotion of democracy, economic interdependence, and international institutions have led to a decline in violence.⁶

Few scholars scrutinize how liberal peace researchers understand violence. Instead, academic debates about the liberal peace focus on political issues and methodological questions, including definitions of “war” and “peace.” Some critics argue that “the scientific claim of peace among democracies . . . is not value free” because liberal peace scholars code regime types against a US-centric model of democracy (Oren 1995, 266; Scoble and Wiseberg 1981; Bollen 1993; Kegley and Hermann 1996; Lemke and Reed 1996). David Spiro and others interrogate how liberal peace researchers include and exclude conflicts from their studies through criteria such as conflict intensity and deaths tolls (Ray 1993; Layne 1994; Spiro 1994; Raknerud and Hegre 1997; Ray, Kegley, and Puchala 1998; Geis and Wagner 2011; Gowa 2011). Other critics point to liberal peace scholars’ narrow focus on interstate war, which ignores democratic civil wars and liberal democracies’ covert actions against other democratic regimes (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Cohen 1994; Kegley and Hermann 1996, 2001). In other words, critics argue that liberal theorists’ operationalization of their independent variable (what counts as a liberal democracy) and their narrow understandings of what counts as war determine their findings. Yet, for all this conceptual scrutiny, critical scholars have not closely examined what liberal peace theorists mean by violence.

Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2012) illustrates how liberal peace scholars fail to theorize violence. Contrary to what the book’s subtitle, “a history of violence and humanity,” suggests, the book does not offer any definition of violence. In response to the question “[h]ow do you define violence?” on the FAQ section of his personal website, Pinker (2017) offers the following answer:

I don’t. I use the term in its standard sense, more or less the one you’d find in a dictionary (such as *The American Heritage Dictionary Fifth Edition*: “Behavior or treatment in which physical force is exerted for the purpose of causing damage or injury.”) In particular, I focus on violence against sentient beings: homicide, assault, rape, robbery, and kidnapping, whether committed by individuals, groups, or institutions. Violence by institutions naturally includes war, geno-

cide, corporal and capital punishment, and deliberate famines.

After noting just one of the three possible definitions in that dictionary, Pinker narrows his focus to physical force.⁷ He explicitly discounts economic inequality as violence and criticizes other understandings of violence as metaphorical (Pinker 2017).

Realist, behaviorist, and rational choice researchers usually understand violence as death or lethal force. Many employ concepts such as deterrence and compellence to describe violence and view violence as a tool states wield to achieve desired ends (Petersen 1986; Lebow and Stein 1990; Schelling 1990; Stein 1992). The ethics of war literature treats violence as perpetrated by one actor or sets of actors against others, permitting a selective ascription of moral value (Walzer 2006; Doyle and Macedo 2011; Rengger 2013). Scholars of humanitarian intervention view violence as a form of statecraft (Lang 2001; Wheeler 2003; Finnemore 2005; Keohane 2010; Vincent 2015). Mark Neocleous and scholars working within a radical Marxist tradition develop a subtle but critical inflection of this argument (Neocleous 2010; Neocleous, Rigakos, and Wall 2013). Neocleous and collaborators unsettle the distinction between war and peace, focusing on the perpetuation of war in the securitizing of peace. They draw attention to the direct violence of policing and counterinsurgency and its role in sustaining *pax*. They also show how this type of violence entrenches what they call the “social war of capital” (Neocleous 2010, 9). These authors argue, as we do, that violence creates observable zones of pacification (compare Davenport 2004, 2007a, 2007b). However, unlike us (see footnote 10), Neocleous and collaborators view direct violence as the primary instrument of pacification.

These parsimonious accounts have significant drawbacks. Direct accounts of violence discount other kinds of harm in the world as not violent. In doing so, these understandings dismiss the possibility that invisible forms of violence produce harm. Scholarly accounts of direct violence may even conceal other forms of force, harm, and injury when researchers limit their understandings of violence to acts of physical harm that can be directly linked to agents. With this in mind, we now turn to scholars who adopt structural and indirect conceptions of violence.

Indirect Violence

Postpositivist, Marxist, post-structuralist, and feminist scholars offer many theoretical and methodological ways to understand indirect violence. Indirect violence refers to the aggregate actions of social groups and institutions that cause violence on other social groups. Indirect forms of violence still “kill,” but do so “slowly and undramatically from the point of view of direct violence” (Galtung and Høivik 1971, 73). Scholars measure indirect violence by examining “the number of avoidable deaths that occur,” rather than via the proxy of battlefield deaths (and the binary dead/alive) (Galtung and Høivik 1971, 73). For example, researchers might compare the life expectancy of someone in one country (say, Guinea) and someone in another country (say, Sweden), or someone within the

⁶Liberal peace researchers investigate the claim that liberal democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with each other (Doyle 1983; Russett, Antholis, Ember, et al. 1993; Oneal et al. 1996; Maoz and Russett 1993; Dixon 1994; Owen 1994; Hermann and Kegley 1995; Ellis, Mitchell, and Prins 2010; Mitchell 2002; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008; Kadera, Crescenzi, and Shannon 2003). Many researchers use battlefield deaths as a proxy for violence to empirically test this claim. Oneal and Russett offer the strongest version of this thesis, asserting that the interlocking of liberal institutions led to a global decline in violence (Oneal and Russett 2001). Some liberals explore the links between international trade and interstate peace (Gartzke 2007; McDonald 2009, 2010; Mousseau 2009; Weede 1995) and the role of international institutions such as the United Nations in preventing wars and keeping peace between states (Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom 2004; Dorussen and Ward 2008; Kinne 2013; Mack 2008, 85; Russett, Oneal, and Davis 1998; Wilson, Davis, and Murdie 2016). Scholars note the absence of violence since the end of the Cold War (Mack 2008; Pinker 2012, chap. 6) or defend the role of the liberal international legal order in reducing global armed conflict (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017; Hathaway and Shapiro 2018; Kumm, Havercroft, Dunoff, et al. 2017; Owen 1994; Rodrigues 2017; Sapiano 2017; Corradetti 2017; Sweet and Palmer 2017). For a recent critique see Geis (2018).

⁷*American Heritage Dictionary* offers other definitions of violence including the following: “a. Intense force or great power, as in natural phenomena: *the violence of a tornado*. b. Extreme or powerful emotion or expression: *the violence of their tirades*” and “Distortion of meaning or intent: *do violence to a text*.” See <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=violence>, accessed June 2016.

same country but hypothesized as living without structural violence (Köhler and Alcock 1976). Whereas scholars of direct violence assume one agent inflicts harm on another agent, researchers who study indirect violence examine how larger social groups, institutions, and processes inflict harm in the aggregate and often unintentionally.

Postpositivist scholars also expand our understandings of violence but rarely question the concept itself. Campbell and Dillon (1993, 2) note the ontological character of violence; they focus on the “reasoning subject.” R. B. J. Walker provides a list of multiple direct, metaphorical, and structural examples of violence. These “may be known under many names: oppression, injustice, inequality, crime, punishment” and may be described by such historically contingent terms as “alienation and commodification” and through the technological “homogenizing” of human subjectivities (Walker 1993, 139). Walker recounts the underlying narrative of violence as a means to work “for its eradication” (ibid.). Yet, when it comes to international relations (as opposed to capitalism), his commentary is limited: “In the context of the state system, by contrast, violence is more obviously violence” (Walker 1993, 139; compare Hirst 2013). Scholars working within postpositivist traditions shed light on the many multifaceted, insidious, and discursive forms of violence, but they still conceive violence as discrete and observable. In this way, critical understandings sit surprisingly close to liberal assumptions.

Feminist scholars offer complex and deeply social understandings of violence, including studies of the effects of patriarchy on social structures. Feminist approaches draw attention to gender-based violence (Enloe 2014; Walby, Towers, and Francis 2014; Bjørnholt and Hjemdal 2018), the ways perpetrators and victims are socially constituted, the relationship of violence to the body, and how social constructions of gender make and remake our social orders. However, feminist approaches to violence also focus on observable phenomena. Researchers draw attention to rape as a strategy of war, for example, and point to continuities between violence during times of war and peace (Enloe 2000; Hansen 2010; Kirby 2012; Inal 2013; Hirschauer 2014; Grove 2015; Meger 2016). Scholars scrutinize gendered assumptions that men are the agents of violence and “women and children” its objects (Enloe 2014, 25; Elshain 1987; Sjöberg and Gentry 2007; Kinsella 2011; Sjöberg 2013; Tickner 2013). These norms shape who is protected and who remains subject to “sexual violence, forced conscription, and sex-selective massacre” (Carpenter 2006a, 83; 2006b). In doing so, feminist scholars focus on how violence is distributed, authorized, located, and embodied and develop methodologies for studying these processes (Wibben 2016). Laura Shepherd argues that, whereas “violence is conventionally conceived of as a functional mechanism,” both violence and security can be understood by examining how “gendered violence . . . ‘marks and makes bodies’” (Shepherd 2007, 240). Similarly, Lauren Wilcox employs a gendered and structured understanding of violence to methodologically ground her analysis of violence as embodied. However, Wilcox’s study of embodied violence considers specific acts—torture, force-feeding, suicide-bombing, and targeted killing via drones—that are identifiable and observable (Wilcox 2015, 7; compare Scarry 1987; Richter-Montpetit 2007). Each functions causally rather than intersubjectively.⁸

Neither direct nor indirect theorizations of violence fully account for the pervasiveness of violence in the world. In

addition to direct and indirect violence, we propose a third type of violence: pacification. We now turn to phenomenology to uncover it.

Toward a Phenomenology of Violence

To illustrate the limits of direct and indirect accounts of violence, consider the following thought experiment. A man enters a home with a gun, points the gun at the family, and begins to make requests of the family. The family, intimidated by the implied threat of the gun, complies. Is this interaction violent? Most people would agree that, yes, it is. The implied threat of force terrorizes the family. Yet, neither direct nor indirect conceptions of violence adequately capture the violence of this scene. Any physical violence committed by the gunman is direct violence, and any causal, lasting, yet largely unseen effects (such as a heart attack induced later by the stress of attack) is indirect violence. While direct and indirect violence both focus on measured effects of violence, our point is more fundamental. We offer a third conception of violence to make sense of such scenes.

Acts of violence do not only inflict physical (and/or psychological) harm, they also restructure the social and political world. Imagine that the gunman in the thought experiment attacked a white South African family who live within a gated complex. The barbed wire crowning the compound walls, the bars on all the doors and windows, and the private security guard posted out front illustrate how this family lives in constant fear of armed intruders. The assailant might come from a family that suffered under apartheid’s racialized social order. He might not have benefited from society’s democratization and liberalization. If the gunman scaled these walls and inflicted wounds—physical or otherwise—everyone would agree violence had occurred. But what if the barbed wire, barred windows, and private security guard successfully kept the would-be assailant at bay? The family goes about its daily routine, but is the world any less violent? Though the presence of walls and barbed wire prevent observable violence in this scenario, we argue that this society remains—in its lived, material, and psychic forms—structured by violence. Violence constitutes the worldhood.

Data showing that direct violence is on the decline obscures the intensification of other forms of violence. Using the graph below as an example, rapid and historically unprecedented increases in economic inequality since 1970 have coincided with the pacification of militant political opposition such as rioting, guerrilla warfare, and political assassinations (see Figure 1).⁹ Rioting, guerrilla warfare, and assassinations throughout the first half of the twentieth century exposed increasing discontent with perceived systemic injustice, including capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy. Liberal society suppressed these forms of violent political resistance over the past fifty years (Murphy 2017). A restructuring of social relations displaced and co-opted violent protests against the perceived injustices of the world order. This restructuring represents a third type of violence called pacification.¹⁰

⁹The contentious event counts are from the Cross-National Data Archive (Banks and Wilson 2017), which is based on the *New York Times* reports. The inequality variable reflects the top decile income share (including capital gains) in the United States (Piketty 2014).

¹⁰Our account of pacification differs from those of Neocleous (2010, 2011) and Neocleous et al. (2013). We push beyond an account of violence and peace as material or institutional forms of violence and toward an account of violence that encompasses a richer phenomenology. In their account, pacification

⁸We follow Charles Taylor’s (1971) definition of intersubjectivity (see below).

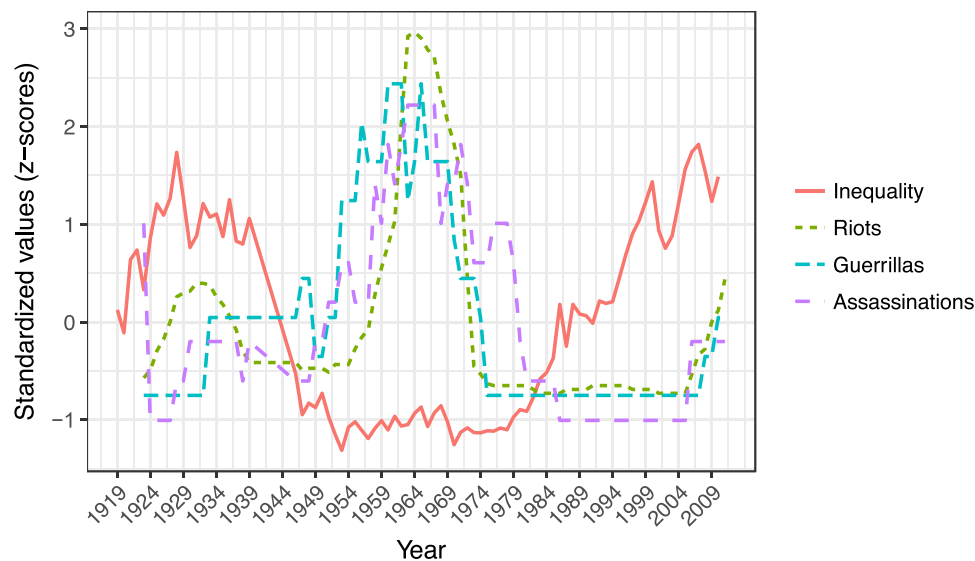


Figure 1 Inequality and the pacification of militant contention in the US.

Notes: For legibility, event counts from Banks and Wilson (2017) were transformed into ten-year moving averages. These and the inequality measure from Piketty (2014) were then scaled to ease comparison. Scaling was done by subtracting the mean from each variable and dividing by one standard deviation; the lines reflect standard deviations from historical means (0).

The hallmark of pacification is that the structures of domination ensure that resistance in the form of direct violence against this order is less frequent. There are numerous ways that implicit and explicit threats, global surveillance, imbalances in military power, displays of military might, occupations, blockades, nuclear deterrence, terrorism, and counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, sanctions, trade disputes, and embargoes, for example, restructure intersubjective relationships in global politics. A focus solely on discrete acts of physical harm and quantifiable events does not and cannot capture the restructuring consequences of these acts. Our account of violence hypothesizes that the restructuring of social and political worlds might lead to fewer acts of direct violence if the restructuring deters agents from engaging in direct violence. The restructuring might also lead to less quantifiable physical harm, direct or indirect. However, this decrease may be achieved through an intensification of pacification.

Our point is that pacification is the most difficult kind of violence to observe and, if operating effectively, will correlate with the absence of direct violence. Pacification is difficult to observe because it is diffuse and involves the coercive reordering of social relations. Phenomenology, with its focus on background practices, structures, and the constitution of social relations, provides a methodology for uncovering this form of violence.

The first step in this theoretical development is to recognize the intersubjective character of violence. The meaningful structures of our world do not exist independently of us. Our identities are in a coconstitutive relationship with our society's institutions, practices, shared meanings, and norms (Taylor 1971, 27). A phenomenological account of violence examines the ways that violence is not simply a thing. "The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a methodological conception," able to uncover not just things themselves, but phenomena that are hidden yet are fundamental

to our being (Heidegger 1962, 59). These phenomena include different types of beings or entities, including structures, and how our being makes sense of and functions in this world (Dreyfus 1991, 32).

Violence is one of the structures of our world and contributes to our understanding and ability to function in this world. There are, however, different worlds (Heidegger 1962, 93). Martin Heidegger offers a tripartite classification. The first (1) is the world of physical objects. The second (2) is a world of shared practices and shared beliefs. The third (3), what Heidegger calls "worldhood," is the ontological-existential sense of the world (1962, 93). Direct violence operates in the first world. Indirect violence operates in the second world. Pacification as violence exists in this third world (worldhood).

Within world three the ontological character of violence is not that of an object, but is the structuring of the intersubjective relations of our being-in-the-world. Most of the time we are able to function in our surroundings because of our ability to cope with that which we encounter. We know how to act in certain situations and what specific purpose specific things serve. Sometimes, however, something breaks down or malfunctions. In such situations, the object, relation, or worldhood reveals itself (Heidegger 1962, 105). This revealing is when the inconspicuous becomes conspicuous. Violence functions as a moment of revealing.¹¹ Overt acts of violence (direct or indirect) reveal elements of our world that otherwise remain hidden. Violence brings out grievances and animosities that are otherwise dormant, perhaps simmering, waiting to be released; this is the case whether it is to do violence to a text or to erupt physical violence in a pub. Similarly, the violence of a riot is a visible expression

¹¹ While Heidegger's phenomenology in *Being and Time* does not address either politics or violence, Hannah Arendt's (1970) work illuminates the political implications of a phenomenological critique of violence. In her critique, violence takes on similar characteristics as any other technology that breaks. However, the type of breakdown that occurs through violence differs from Heidegger's because violence involves people's interactions with each other (and not primarily with other objects). Arendt's treatment of violence rests on this distinction.

operates through direct and indirect violence. In our account pacification is a third kind of violence that makes instances of the first two kinds of violence less likely.

of a worldhood characterized by unseen or ignored social relations.

Our typology of violence distinguishes between direct, indirect, and pacification (see [Figure 2](#)). The typology distinguishes six different characteristics across the three types of violence. Pacification operates through different modes of power other than direct and indirect violence. Drawing on [Michael Barnett's and Raymond Duvall \(2005, 48\)](#) typology of power, direct violence corresponds to compulsory power, indirect violence to institutional and structural power, and pacification to productive power and some elements of structural power. Pacification as violence is inconspicuous. It pertains to our worldhood in a constitutive fashion. It is intersubjective and it is diffuse. These characteristics, taken together, identify pacification in ontological-existential terms.

Researchers rarely, if ever, consider violence that falls under the ontological-existential category. From this category, what counts as violence within international relations scholarship is to be understood instead as brief moments when the largely invisible structuring of the world becomes visible: direct violence is epiphenomenal. To rephrase Heidegger, direct and indirect violence mark breakdowns that reveal part of the world, but violence remains a part of this world that it reveals.

Phenomenology, as we are using it, is not about lived experience. It is the philosophical tradition of revealing different types of beings and things that contain meaning in our world, the structures and/or contexts in which they exist, and how these structures and contexts are meaningful. Understood in this way, violence is one of these structures and/or contexts. A phenomenological perspective does not approach violence from a particular normative position, although it does not preclude normative critique. A phenomenological approach does not treat violence as a discrete thing that one agent does to another, although it does not preclude such acts being described as violent. Instead, a phenomenological perspective adds to our intellectual and methodological toolbox by identifying violence as a condition or context in which people function. Phenomenology allows us to identify violence occurring in ways and in places that we otherwise would not be able to recognize. It does not change the meaning of violence (as harm, for example). Instead, it treats violence ontologically, enabling us to reveal more accurately the extent to which violence exists in the world.

From a phenomenological perspective, violence is often inconspicuous. Violence can function as a naturalized or internalized regime of compulsion or domination. Pacification reveals both the pervasiveness of violence and forms of violence that may otherwise remain inconspicuous. The erasing of tradition and the enforcement of particular legal codes at the expense of indigenous cultural norms is one example of an inconspicuous form of violence that involves conspicuous and inconspicuous consequences ([Cocks 2014](#)). In understanding violence phenomenologically, as a structure of revealing across multiple worlds, we are better able to reveal the extent to which violence shapes our world and how we are then shaped by violence.

Pacavere

The Romans understood violence as a necessary condition for *pax*. The liberal imagination blinds itself to the ways that pacification functions as violence in our world order. International relations scholarship's strict distinction between peace and violence reinforces this obfuscation. Yet, the vio-

lence of (and in) pacification is central to the contemporary world. A phenomenological approach shows that moments of violent rupture are not aberrations of the world order. Violent outbreaks are breakdowns of pacification. It follows that multiple structures of the world order function as the violence of pacification, of *pacavere*.¹² These structures include liberal capitalism, colonialism and the postcolonial aftermath, and war. Each functions as a key site of pacification. Anarchist thought reveals the pacification in liberal capitalism. Postcolonial thought reveals the pacification of colonial projects. Both anarchist and postcolonial thought demonstrate how war is a breakdown of pacification, revealing the hidden violent structures of our worldhood.

Anarchist critiques of capitalism, unlike Marxist and liberal interpretations, take seriously the decisive role of state violence in structuring society and markets. Anarchists view the state as an institution that sustains elite appropriations of political and economic power ([Proudhon \[1861\] 1998](#); [Sorel 1999](#); [Prichard 2015](#)). Those at the bottom of the social hierarchy bear the costs of this enforced order. The state diffuses violence (pacification) throughout the entire society—often in ways that go unrecognized by its subjects ([Sorel 1999, 65](#)). The naturalization of violence consolidates arbitrary regimes of domination in society. While specific, countable incidents of violence may decline, the social order is largely premised on the threat of violence for contravening social norms making specific, countable incidents of violence relatively rare ([Kinna and Prichard, forthcoming](#)).

Anarchist thinkers view rising inequality in the context of declining riots, insurgencies, and assassinations (see [Figure 1](#)) as evidence of pacification. Incidents of proletarian violence, anticolonial violence, riots, and protests are all examples of resistance to the “regimes of domination” that shape contemporary society, regimes easily identifiable by those subject to them ([Gordon 2007, 33](#)). Drawing on these accounts, we interpret declining rates of riots as a sign of increased pacification, rather than evidence that the system is becoming less violent. Conversely, eruptions of antistate and anticapitalist direct violence are signs of a breakdown in pacification. Much like Heidegger's example of broken equipment (1962, 102–3, 412–13), which draws our attention to the background structures of our world, brief instances of direct violence reveal violently structured social relations.

Although the liberal imagination obscures the centrality of violence, violence has always been central to the liberal world order—to the liberal worldhood—particularly during the colonial and imperial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ([Bell 2007a, 2007b](#)). Colonial violence was diffused throughout the entire society, often in ways that went unrecognized by the colonized themselves. The violence of pacification structured the very existence of the colonized subject. This violence transformed the colonized subjects into a different “species” ([Fanon 1963, 35–40, 43](#)). Colonial pacification was more than direct and indirect violence; it was sufficiently diffuse to remake the psyche of the colonized, affecting their mental health and emotions ([Fanon 1963, 35–106](#)). [Fanon \(1963, 31\)](#) described it as “atmospheric violence,” a “violence rippling under the skin.” Unable to lash out against the colonizer, the colonized lived everyday within a world ordered by violence. In this world, the colonized could not respond to the colonizers for fear of directly violent reprisals and would turn to symbolic activities such as a dance circle to expose the violence

¹² *Pacavere* is a conjugation of *paco*.

Characteristics	Direct Violence	Indirect Violence	Pacification
Observability	Conspicuous	Conspicuous	Inconspicuous
Phenomenological structure	World of physical objects (world one)	World of shared-practices and shared-beliefs (world two)	Worldhood, ontological-existential (world three)
Causality	Agent to agent	Mediated through institutions and structures	Constitutive
Effects	Body counts, battlefield deaths, murders, counted instances of physical harm (direct)	Population-wide mortality rates, effects of inequality over time (indirect)	Diffuse. Indications of suffering that inversely correlate with instances of direct violence
Subjectivity	Atomistic / individualistic	Institutions and societal structures	Intersubjective
Type of power	Compulsory	Institutional and structural	Structural and productive

Figure 2. Typology of violence

experienced on a daily basis (Fanon 1963, 57). For the colonized, rituals such as the dance were a means of expressing existential frustrations with and resistance to the violence of colonial pacification through reenactments of direct violence. Ultimately, anticolonial struggles exposed the violence of colonialism by directing that violence back on its authors.

Practices of colonial rule were central to developing liberal norms of sovereignty, as well as to the domination and control of recalcitrant populations whether within Europe, such as the English domination of the Welsh, Irish, and Scots, or outside of Europe by settler colonialists against indigenous populations (Deloria Jr 1974; Anghie 2005; Miller 2006; Havercroft 2008; Shaw 2008; Barkawi and Stanski 2012; Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014; Lightfoot 2016; Rueda-Saiz 2017). This civilizing imagination functioned phenomenologically. It produced insiders as civilized and peaceful and outsiders as violent, external threats to civilization. In doing so, this imagination successfully obscured how the structures of liberalism produced colonial violence.¹³

¹³ Arguments about the foundational role of colonialism, primitive accumulation, and white supremacy in structuring the modern international system are particularly useful in thinking about phenomenological violence (Jones 2006; Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015; Du Bois 1915; Shaw 2008; Coulthard 2014; Deloria 1974; Lowe 2015; Hartman 1997). The legacy of these practices pervades contemporary liberal peace-building (Richmond 2014; Sabaratnam 2015; Bouka 2013; Autesserre 2009) and liberal global governance (Koomen 2014a, 2014b, 2013), while trade liberalization can facilitate mass violence (Kamola 2007; Smith 2016). Césaire argues that colonialism produced a “boomerang effect” within European societies; Nazism was the return of violence previously “applied only to non-European peoples” (Césaire 2000, 36). At independence, international law became a mechanism for reinforcing this international order upon the previously colonized world (Grovogui 1996).

The idea of war as an external practice of states, not tied to their internal workings and located according to specific normative projections of Western identity, followed from this colonial mentality. This mentality legitimized the exporting of violence to create a Western imperial *pax* and was so widespread that it shaped the development of modern warfare (Ellis 1986; Proudhon [1861] 1998). The colonial wars reproduced and reinforced ideologies of Western superiority, evidenced in part by the West’s superior military technology. A consequence of this racist hubris was the inability to foresee the destructive tendencies of Western warfare when unleashed against themselves (Ellis 1986).

The discipline of international relations, founded in response to the unexpectedly destructive character of the First World War, reproduced this understanding of war.¹⁴ This understanding disguises the possibility of increasing violence within the liberal world by presuming a historical narrative of progress and being shocked by its aberration. War, however, is not the absence of peace or an aberration of liberal progress, but is instead a phenomenological breaking of the liberal worldhood.¹⁵

Once a liberal order of democracy, free markets, and international institutions are spread throughout the world,

¹⁴ See Agathangelou and Ling (2004), Vitalis (2017), Nayak and Selbin (2013), and Koomen (2018). On different origin stories of international relations and their consequences, see Baron (2014, 226–28).

¹⁵ Our concept of liberal pacification is not the same as “positive peace.” Paul Diehl argues that rather than focusing on the negative peace—such as, “the absence of war”—scholars should also study “broader conceptions of peace,” namely those that include “considerations of justice, human rights, and other aspects of human security” (Diehl 2016, 9; Goertz, Diehl, and Balas 2016). Using the terms of our analysis, however, such arguments simply call upon scholars accustomed to studying peace as an absence of *direct violence* to expand their analyses to study how liberal institutions can find solutions to indirect violence as well. Phenomenological violence remains absent in these accounts.

liberal ideology imagines peace as the end state. Yet, states often deploy war under liberal guises.¹⁶ Wars under the aegis of humanitarian values and regime change are examples of the multifaceted character of liberal pacification. Liberal regimes emphasize the violence of those that they are invading, while minimizing the violence involved in these military undertakings and the violence necessary to sustain the liberal societies themselves. What Pierre-Joseph Proudhon called “the moral phenomenology of war” (Prichard 2015, 112–34; Proudhon [1861] 1998) becomes an integral part of the everyday workings of society that shape innumerable aspects of our daily language. The upshot is that, within liberal ideology, the violence committed by liberal states is justified, whereas the violence committed by illiberal states is not.

Postcolonial and anarchist scholarship focuses on the incorporation of violence in the production of liberal spaces (Barkawi and Laffey 1999). These same concerns can be directed onto the liberal order itself. Seen from the perspective of marginalized and oppressed populations, the structures of liberal pacification take on a distinctly violent aspect. The liberal world is not less violent. Rather, the liberal world involves a sophisticated phenomenological process of legitimating certain types of violence in order to render other types of violence invisible.

Liberal Pacification

What does it mean to apply this third type of violence to our understanding of international relations? Pacification reveals liberalism as a violent process as opposed to a system that is emblematic of the absence of direct violence. There are parallels between the *Pax Britannia*, *Pax Americana*, and the ancient peace of the *Pax Romana* (Neocleous 2010, 13). However, our account emphasizes the crucial role of pacification as a distinct kind of violence in maintaining these pacific orders. Our theory offers the novel insight that incorporating pacification into the analysis of the liberal peace reveals crucial aspects of this peace that conventional and critical accounts neglect.

A focus on pacification provides three critical insights. First, it recovers the crucial role of pacification in the historical founding of the liberal order. Second, by distinguishing between three kinds of violence (Figure 2), we account for the empirical observations of the liberal peace as leading to a decline in direct violence and an increase in violence overall as part of the pacification of the *Pax Americana*. Conversely, the liberal version of the *Pax Americana* cannot account for key anomalies. Third, our approach draws attention to the violent ordering of social relations. This dimension of violence is neglected even in Marxist, postcolonial, neo-Gramscian, and post-structuralist critiques of the liberal peace, which primarily focus on the role of direct and indirect violence in maintaining the *Pax Americana*.

Contemporary liberal international relations theory emphasizes the nonviolent role of the liberal triad (democracy, free markets, and institutions) in causing the liberal peace. Yet, a quick review of the history of liberalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that key figures in liberalism, from John Stuart Mill, to Joseph Gallieni, to American foreign policy elites, understood pacification as a necessary step in establishing and maintaining the liberal order.

Mill, one of the philosophical founders of liberalism, conceptualized and deployed liberalism as a domination strategy. Mill argued that it is appropriate to impose despotism or slavery on “savages” who incline to “fighting and rapine,” but the government should use force as little as possible:

What they require is not a government of force, but one of guidance. Being, however, in too low a state to yield to the guidance of any but those to whom they look up as the possessors of force, the sort of government fittest for them is one [that] possesses force, but seldom uses it. (Mill 1998, 232–33)

In terms of our conceptual distinction, Mill argued that liberalism as pacification was a more effective instrument of violence than the direct modes of violence that governments usually deploy.

The history of European colonialism is replete with this line of reasoning. “[L]iberal improvement” was a regular plank of colonial strategy by France and Britain in the nineteenth century (Owens 2015, 154). Consider one example from the French colonial tradition. Gallieni, a military commander and administrator, consciously deployed liberalism as a domination strategy in the pacification of Tonkin during the 1890s. Gallieni’s strategy involved slowly spreading military outposts and deploying civil administrators to create markets, schools, and amenities. The rationale was that locals would gain a personal interest in the continuation of French control and would help to quell Chinese brigandage. “Piracy,” said Gallieni, “is the result of an economic condition. It can be fought by prosperity” (quoted in Owens 2015, 157). Gallieni devised a “theory of pacification” in which “the correct combination of force and politics can socialize, pacify, and domesticate a population into regulating itself” (quoted in Owens 2015, 157). What Mill proposed in theory, Gallieni enacted in practice; pacification—the violent reordering of social relations in a colony—was a more effective means of maintaining liberal rule than the deployment of direct violence.

While less explicit, the relationship between liberalism and imperialism remained present in the twentieth-century development of the *Pax Americana*. During this era, US policy makers sought to construct a zone of peace distinct from the zones of war associated with authoritarian regimes. The US State Department first recognized the concept of “hegemonic pacification” in the Euro-Atlantic conference diplomacy of the 1920s (Cohrs 2008, 619). The United States’ “strategic restraint” in the aftermath of World War Two was motivated by this concept of liberal, hegemonic pacification (Ikenberry 2009; Ikenberry 2011, 173). US defense officials Stimson, Patterson, McCloy, and Assistant Secretary Howard C. Peterson agreed that it was a matter of the security interests of the United States to maintain “open markets, unhindered access to raw materials, and the rehabilitation of much—if not all—of Eurasia along liberal capitalist lines” (Leffler 1984, 349–56; Barkawi and Laffey 1999). Liberalism as a domination and pacifying strategy continued throughout (and long after) the Cold War (Laffey 2003; Stokes 2003), as evident in one of the founding documents of the post-World War Two liberal order, NSC-68 (Ikenberry 2011, 168). While the enforcement of a *Pax Americana* eventually yielded a decline in direct violence, it produced an increase in other types of violence. The first insight of our theory is that pacification has always been part of the liberal project and that the violence in the liberal project never went away.

The second insight is that by reinterpreting the liberal peace as liberal pacification we are able to grant the empirical findings of liberal peace theorists while

¹⁶ See Abu-Lughod (2015), Coker (1998, 2010, 2007), Dillon and Reid (2009), Evans (2011), Howard (2008), and Neocleous (2010, 2013, 2011).

maintaining that the *Pax Americana* represents an intensification of violence overall. In the language of positivist social science, our theory is observationally equivalent to that of liberal peace theory. We expect that the quantity of direct violence inversely associates with the degree of pacification in a society. Therefore, our interpretation challenges research that identifies liberal institutions as the cause of declining violence. Liberal institutions, as apparatuses of liberal pacification, ensure that direct violence is increasingly rare while leaving the structures of violence and domination in place. The observational equivalence on particular dependent variables (in our case, all forms of direct violence) produces a theoretical change requiring the generation of novel observable implications (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 30).

Furthermore, increased suffering in liberal societies provides evidence contradicting the main claims of liberal peace theories, while remaining consistent with liberal pacification. At its core, liberalism is a project that tries to maximize the utility of its subjects (in other words, minimize suffering while maximizing happiness). As such, a state of liberal peace should lead to a decrease in markers of suffering. However, there is more slavery in the world today than ever before, with conservative estimates of between 12.3 and 27 million people in debt bondage, chattel, or contract slavery (Gordon 2012).¹⁷ Moreover, there is ample evidence of rising psychological disorders in liberal societies. A preponderance of evidence from the United States suggests that depression, anxiety, alienation, opioid dependency, stress, other related psychological disorders, increased social isolation, and the decline of community have increased throughout the twentieth century (Twenge, Zhang, and Im 2004, 320; Adler, Boyce, Chesney, et al. 1994; Twenge 2000; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, et al. 2008; Twenge, Gentile, DeWall, et al. 2010; Cohen and Janicki-Deverts 2012; American Society of Addiction Medicine 2016). Changes to human life associated with modernity have caused psychological stress to increase (Jackson 2014). Mortality rates have increased for some white, non-Hispanics aged 45–54 in the United States between 1999 and 2013 (Case and Deaton 2015). Modern technological advances from television to the Internet may contribute to increasing separation and alienation of the social human animal into individualized bodies connected by increasingly weak and empty bonds (Putnam 2000; Gray 2011; Turkle 2011). At minimum, new information communication technology such as Facebook can increase the stress and anxiety of its users (Lee-Won, Herzog, and Park 2015). The violent structuring of liberalism enables increases in social alienation, anxiety, stress, and human bondage through repression, economic control, and social isolation.

¹⁷ Much of the research we cite here is based on data from the United States, mirroring the US-centric liberal peace literature. As a paradigmatic liberal market economy, the United States should be a most-likely case for the expectation of generally decreasing violence. John Owen, for example, argues that it is not coincidental that the “discourse and practice” of the democratic peace thesis was developed in the United States, given that American social scientists are greatly informed by the country’s “strong liberal tradition” (2011, 162). For an overview of the Eurocentric assumptions embedded within critiques of the liberal peace, see Sabaratnam (2013). Anomalous observations from the United States should raise doubts about other countries around the world. There is evidence that such trends likely generalize across liberal societies. For example, Ferrari, Charlson, Norman, et al. (2013) have calculated that depression is a significant and growing cause of shortened lifespans and death around the world, including within many liberal societies. With respect to the pacification of violence, we note that rioting has decreased as a share of street-protest activity (relative to peaceful demonstrations) since the 1970s in most continents around the world (Murphy 2017). These data suggest that these dynamics are unlikely to be peculiar to the United States.

These are not isolated instances of suffering. They are fundamental structural features of our liberal world. If liberalism is a process of pacification rather than simply peace, then this rise in individual suffering in liberal spaces may be evidence of a similar process that Fanon equated with the psychic life of the colonist. Just as Fanon’s colonial subjects, unable to lash out at the settler through direct violence, internalized their suffering, modern liberal subjects, unable to resist liberal pacification, internalize their suffering (1982, chap. 6; cf. Sorel 1999, 118). Liberal peace should bring about a rise in happiness; that it has instead led to rising suffering is evidence of liberal pacification.

Third, in addition to offering an alternative interpretation of the liberal peace, our theory of liberal pacification supplements key insights from critical approaches to peace. Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey’s work on imperial processes and liberal spaces makes a similar point to ours, that the celebrated zone of liberal peace rests on practices of violence (Barkawi and Laffey 1999, 2002; cf. Neocleous et al. 2013). Their account, however, focuses on practices of direct violence, such as humanitarian interventions against authoritarian regimes or corporations hiring local militias to make work sites in the global south safe for economic extraction (Barkawi and Laffey 1999, 422). Our point is that these moments of direct violence lead to pacification wherein social relations have been so violently reordered as to make direct violence no longer necessary. Once direct violence has established liberal space, pacification functions as a structure of violence that sustains the space. Direct violence only manifests itself when pacification weakens.

Pacification, however, does not merely operate through manipulating the conscience of its subjects. While Marxist and Gramscian concepts of ideology and hegemony are consistent with our theory of pacification (Pecený 1997, 418), they do not address how the constructed political order sustains itself through a violent reordering of social relations. A Gramscian-inspired critique of the democratic peace can yield a bird’s-eye view of the ways in which liberal peace theory is itself deployed as an ideological tool (Ish-Shalom 2006, 569–75). However, Gramscian-inspired approaches do not account for the ways that everyday practices of violence (for example, surveillance technologies, implied threats from weapons, security barriers, etc.) sustain liberal pacification. While ideational factors are important in pacification, these factors rest upon practices and structures that are of an ontological-existential character.

To review, our reinterpretation of the liberal peace as liberal pacification offers three novel insights. First, liberal scholars and others associate the development of the liberal order with peace and a decline in violence by ignoring how pacification is part of the liberal project. Second, the empirically observed decline in violence equated with the liberal peace is not necessarily a sign of human progress but could be a sign of intensified repression or increases in other forms of suffering across the liberal world order. Third, our concept of pacification reveals violence that is neither direct nor indirect but is phenomenologically structured into the world order. Understanding liberalism as pacification produces a paradigm shift. Liberal pacification is violent in the sense that it coerces a specific type of liberal docility, while also preventing types of resistance that might be understood as violent, including riots, insurrections, civil wars, and interstate wars. Pacification reveals the ongoing violence at the heart of a political project that imagines itself to be against violence.

Conclusion

Our account of pacification recovers a crucial aspect of *pax*, one originally etched into Roman monuments. The heading of the *Res Gestae* (the funeral monument to Emperor Augustus) reads, “[t]his is how he [Augustus] made the world subject to the power of the people of Rome” (Beard 2016, 364). This monument does not celebrate peace as the absence of violence; it celebrates pacification. *Pax* takes the form of a process that violently reorders the world so that imperial subjects are rendered incapable of using violence to resist Roman rule. The absence of overt acts of violence depends upon the maximization of pacification.

The practice of pacification includes threats, coercion, intimidation, and surveillance to restructure and sustain social and political relations. When this type of violence operates effectively, it appears as the absence of violence; pacification’s violence resides in the structuring of the prevailing order. While such an outcome may appear peaceful, it entails, at best, a negative peace that operates through a violent and coercive reordering of society.

Liberal peace advocates measure direct violence and equate the decline in that kind of violence with peace. However, our claim is that the spread of liberal institutions does not necessarily decrease violence but transforms it. Our phenomenological analysis captures empirical trends in human domination and suffering that liberal peace theories fail to account for, including increased inequality, slavery, anxiety, addiction, and anomie. Our analysis also highlights how a decline in direct violence may actually coincide with the transformation of violence in ways that are concealed, monopolized, and structured into the fabric of modern liberal society. If our theory is correct, we will find increases in markers of suffering as society liberalizes. While we cannot say whether these indicators are unique to pacified liberal societies, it is significant that they are rarely, if ever, discussed in terms of violence and the liberal peace.

Liberal pacification is observationally equivalent to liberal peace. This is not a semantic argument. Liberal peace advocates claim that processes that promote individual freedom and autonomy (that is, democracy, free markets, and global institutions) cause peace. While the restructuring of the global order—pacification—reduces direct violence, it also restructures social relations in ways that are violent. Declines in directly observable violence render other forms of violence invisible as violence; in fact, insidious, coercive, and violent systems of military deterrence and compellence, nuclear terror, surveillance, and intimidation constitute the worldhood of the liberal order.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at bit.ly/Baron-et-al-ISQ-data and at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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