

Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, states have increasingly resorted to the establishment of informal alignments, with “strategic partnerships” at the forefront, whereas the number of formal military alliances has been stagnating. In spite of the rapid proliferation of these partnerships—next to other forms of informal cooperation—the extant International Relations literature has paid only limited attention to this phenomenon. In this dissertation, I introduce and analyze the first dataset of Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships (BISPs) established by G20 members between 1993 and 2020. Utilizing insights from international alignment and institutionalist literature, I aim to: (1) provide the first empirical account of the extent to which strategic partnerships have proliferated among the G20 and over time; (2) identify factors driving states to form strategic partnerships; and (3) determine whether these partnerships operate primarily as complements to the existing alliance structures, or exist in place of them as “low-cost” alternatives. Firstly, I found that G20 members alone established approximately 382 strategic partnerships by the end of 2020, surpassing previous estimations. Secondly, I found that the onset of strategic partnerships correlates with factors such as economic interests, rising power status, and regime similarity. Finally, I found that despite the prevalence of complementary strategic partnerships in sheer quantity, states exhibit a notably higher inclination to establish such partnerships in situations where common threats exist but formal alliance ties are absent. This finding lends credence to the idea of strategic partnerships as low-cost alternatives to formal alliances—at least in some cases. Beyond these main findings, I present the results of additional exploratory analyses utilizing the new dataset.