

Critiquing the Democratic Peace

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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Goal for Today

Critique the core findings and intuition behind “the democratic peace.”

Confrontation of the Day: The Turkish Invasion of Cyprus (MIC#1293)















What We Know About the Democratic Peace

The core findings:

- Jointly democratic dyads rarely fight each other, and (effectively) never in war.
- Democracies are still as conflict-prone at the unit-level.

i.e. the “democratic peace” is dyadic, not monadic.

Other Findings and Arguments

The democratic peace research program clusters into two categories.

1. Democratic war avoidance
2. Democratic war behavior

Democratic War Avoidance

1. Democracies don't fight wars against each other. (core)
2. *Democratizing* states are war-prone (e.g. Serbia). Mature democracies are the peaceful ones.
3. Democracies conclude what disputes they do have with negotiation and compromise.
4. Democracies as major powers are more constrained than democratic minor powers.

Democratic War Behavior

1. Democracies are essentially as war-prone as non-democracies. (core)
2. Democracies win the wars they fight.
3. Democracies fight shorter wars.
4. Democracies are as likely as non-democracies to target weak rivals.
5. Democracies are more likely to initiate wars against autocracies (not the other way around).
6. Democracies incur fewer battle deaths in the wars they initiate.

Democratic Peace Explanations

Institutional explanations

- Constraining effects (e.g. Morgan and Campbell, 1991)
- Informing effects (e.g. Schultz, 1999)
- Selection effects (e.g. BDM et al., 1999)

Normative explanations

- “Norm of bounded competition” (Dixon, 1994)
- Contingent consent (Schmitter and Karl, 1991)
- “Principle of cosmopolitanism” (Kant, 1795)

What's Wrong With Normative Explanations

- Perceptions assumed, but never explicated.
- Begging the question

What's Wrong With Institutional Explanations

- Perceptions assumed, but never explicated.
- It is a *stretch* to say democratic major powers are more constrained.

What's Wrong With Both?

Both assume a monadic component.

- Democracies should be “kinder, gentler” in general, but they're not.
- Democracies should be more constrained/cautious in general, but they're not.

This is an uncomfortable tension that follows putting the cart before the horse.

- Everything is correlational, and fits the fact (after the fact).

A Spurious Peace

The biggest challenges to democratic peace wonder whether democracy has anything to do with “the democratic peace.”

- Common interests peace
- Market-oriented/contractualist peace
- Territorial peace

Common Regimes or Common Interests?

The first challenge tried to shoehorn the democratic peace into more realist thinking.

- i.e. democracies have more common interests in light of the Cold War.

The proxy here of interest: shared alliances.

- However, the effect of joint democracy typically still lingers.

No matter, these critiques are pointing to another problem in the democratic peace.

Table 1: The Pre-WW1 Democracies

State	Num. Years	Min. Year	Max. Year
Belgium	61	1853	1913
Colombia	19	1867	1885
Denmark	3	1911	1913
France	41	1848	1913
Greece	50	1864	1913
Norway	9	1905	1913
Portugal	3	1911	1913
Spain	14	1900	1913
Switzerland	66	1848	1913
United Kingdom	34	1880	1913
United States of America	98	1816	1913

Table 2: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict, 1816-1913

	Conf. Onset	Min. Fatalities	Max. Fatalities
Territorial Rivalry	1.599*** (0.154)	-1.502* (0.705)	-1.782* (0.757)
Land Contiguity	0.234 (0.148)	0.259 (0.345)	0.429 (0.371)
Other Contiguity	-0.308 (0.289)	-0.630 (0.710)	-0.714 (0.762)
CINC Proportion	0.241 (0.246)	1.554** (0.576)	1.560* (0.618)
Both Major Powers	0.037 (0.195)	-0.676 (0.473)	-0.750 (0.508)
Major-Minor	0.083 (0.154)	-0.106 (0.345)	-0.142 (0.371)
Defense Pact	-0.419+ (0.216)	0.934+ (0.561)	1.042+ (0.602)
Joint Democracy	0.244 (0.323)	-0.756 (0.797)	-0.539 (0.855)
Min. GDP per Capita in Dyad	-0.005 (0.028)	-0.101 (0.067)	-0.138+ (0.072)
Num.Obs.	22863	415	415

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

The Market Peace

“Market peace” arguments contend market-oriented development explains both democracy and peace (e.g. Gartzke, 2007; Mousseau, 2013).

- Historically, market activity led to major democratic reforms.
- Market activity imposes large opportunity cost on disruption, and another avenue for “competition.”

Some issues:

- Data are temporally limited
- Definitions (e.g. “contractualism”) are unclear
- Itself ignores a feedback loop
- Results very sensitive to research design

The Territorial Peace

Gibler (2007, 2012) argues the democratic peace is a territorial peace. Argument:

- Threatened territory leads to centralization/autocracy at home to defend territory.
- Territory is sufficiently important to defend with violence.
- With a few obvious exceptions (e.g. Israel, India), democracies are unlikely to emerge under conditions of territorial threat.

Findings:

- Border settlement precedes democratization (e.g. Gibler and Owsiak, 2018)
- Auxiliary DPT findings are omitted variable bias (e.g. Miller and Gibler, 2011; Gibler and Miller, 2013)
- Democracies don't have signaling advantages (Gibler and Hutchison, 2013)

Takeaways/Things to Think About

The democratic peace is a set of facts that we know and do not know why.

- Still no convincing reason to think democracy *causes* peace.
- Major conceptual problems about what is a democracy.
- “Irrelevant” dyads do a lot of heavy lifting.
- A major Cold War collider.

Takeaways/Things to Think About

My worry: the democratic peace is a backward-looking phenomenon.

- Easily “bushwhacked” (pun intended)
- No promise for a future of resource scarcity and climate change.

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