

POLS 318: Theories of IR  
Lecture 16 (10.13.2020):  
Democratic Peace Theory

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# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Democracies in IR
- 3 Political Institutions and war
- 4 Critics
- 5 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- International treaties - alliances.
- Types and importance of content.
- Alliance as information and signal for intention.
- Concessions for securing a strong ally.
- Arms control - NPT and risks for war.
- Economic treaties - FDI, WTO accession process.

Questions?? Email me!

# Democratic Peace

## Background

*An Empirical regularity in search of Theoretical Foundations*

- Why?
- Both democracies and non-democracies are war-prone.
- Yet, democratic/liberal states do not end in violent clashes.
- Is it the regime??

# Democratic Peace

## The Liberal view

### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- 1 Peaceful foreign policy towards other liberal states - US and Britain (19th century relations).
- 2 'Imprudent' behavior towards non-liberal states.
  - *Perpetual Peace (1795)* - Kant.
  - Ethical and liberal foundations.

# Democratic Peace

## The Liberal view

- Judicial freedom and separation of power.
- Individual must comply with the laws they set - no tyranny.
- Liberal states expand peaceful relations across the globe.
- Establish cosmopolitan law that promotes hospitality and cooperation.
- And war?
- Peace is an ethical duty, but driven by negative aspects of fear and force (French Revolution).
- Focus on individual rights and costs of conflict.

# Democratic Peace

## The Liberal view

- Application to other liberal states.
- Wars with non-liberal as an 'obligation'.
- Material aspect → commerce cannot flourish in conflict.
- A direct explanation → who pays the costs of wars in democracy?
- Democratic leaders have incentives to refrain from conflict.
  
- Problems?
- Weak empirical evidence (1816-1965).
- Ignore intangibles → prestige, reputation, status.

# Democratic Peace

## The Normative view

- Domestic norms shape institutions and global behavior.
- Compromise, stability as standards of life.
- Anarchy and survival of states → reciprocate to rivals' norms.
- Democracies - no conflicts.
- Non-democracies - conflict due to opposing norms.



# Democratic Peace

## The Structural view

- International disputes and the need for popular support.
- Mobilization challenge in democracies.
- Slow process of going into war.
- Why?
- Constitutional and legal constraints.

# Democratic Peace

## Seeking explanations

- Models may share predictions about outcomes.
- Potential differences:
  - ① Norms develop slow - older vs. new democracies.
  - ② Variation in democratic structures - presidential vs. coalition governments.

# Democratic Peace

## Testing theories (Maoz and Russett 1993)

- Data: dyads in conflict and crises (1946-1986).
- How do we measure theoretical concepts?
  - Institutional constraints on executive choices.
  - Democracy - Polity score. [▶ PolityData](#)
  - Domestic violence: political deaths, number of political executions.
  - Economy: change in gross GDP per year.
  - Norms: cooperative and conflict events index.
- Findings - support both models, stronger for democratic norms.

# Democratic Peace

## **An institutional approach (Bueno de Mosquita et al. 1999)**

- Model leaders' choices in foreign policy.
- Motivated by political survival.
- Not just democracies, any type of leader.

# Democratic Peace

## Problems of existing explanations

- Cannot explain all irregularities of the theory.
- **Normative**: ad-hoc, the causal direction?
- No norms when attacking weak states?
- **Structural**: should be valid for all wars.
- Weak empirical support.

# Democratic Peace

## An Institutional approach

### SELECTORATE THEORY

- How leaders survival prospects shape their behavior?
- Selectorate, winning coalition size.
- Regime type and coalition size.
  - Democracy.
  - Non-democracies.
- Secure support with goods - public and private.

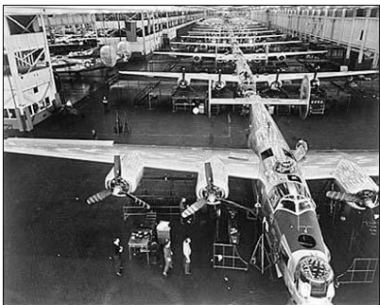
# Democratic Peace

## Selectorate theory and war

- How much effort to win the conflict?
- Resources are limited.
- Outcomes affect public support and retain leaders.
- Regimes and political institutions.

# Regimes and war

## Democracy and war effort





# Regimes and war

## Dictators and war effort



# Regimes and war

## A Democratic peace?

- Democracies in dispute → similar risks and effort.
- Rational decision - resolve dispute peacefully.
- No loss of resources
- Lower risk for their political survival (policy failure).

# Criticism

## Democratic peace - a theory?

- Why important? leaders apply the logic.

## Layne (1994)

- Assess the causal logic.
- Realism as a better predictor/explanation.
- Empirics - case studies analysis.

# Criticism

## Main challenge

*If public views are the main driver of conflict behavior for democracies - then they should be less war-prone against any regime, not just democracies.*

# Public opinion and democracies in war

- *The Trent Affair (1861)*
- US (the Union) - Britain tensions.



*USS San Jacinto*

# The Trent Affair - 1861

## Public opinion or BOP?

- British public → "war fever".
- Violation of international law.
- Government issues a threat and prepares for war. ▶ LordPalmerston
- American side - challenges of the civil war (1861).
- Public push to 'stand-up' against the Brits.
- US concedes, why?
- Two-front war, resources → a realist view.

# Public opinion and democracies in war

## The Ruhr crisis (1923)

- France - Weimar Germany tensions.
- German rejections of Versailles treaty, war reparations.
- French public and elites "Germanophobia".
- Pressure on government to act (1922).
- Annexation of Rhur region (1923).

# The Ruhr Crisis - 1923



## German Civil Resistance





# The Ruhr Crisis - 1923

## Public opinion or power?

- Limited violence, not real war.
- Limited civilian resistance against occupation.
- No large German military action. Why?
- German limited military and economic capabilities.
- France's pursuit of regional power and economic gains.
- Resources, power → a realist view.



## Recommended readings

More studies on democratic peace:

- 1 Altman, David, Federico Rojas-de-Galarreta, and Francisco Urdinez. (2020). "An interactive model of democratic peace." *Journal of Peace Research*, 1-15.
- 2 Farnham, Barbara. (2003). "The theory of democratic peace and threat perception." *International studies quarterly* 47, 3, 395-415.
- 3 Downes, Alexander B., and Mary Lauren Lilley. (2010). "Overt peace, covert war?: Covert intervention and the democratic peace." *Security Studies* 19, 2, 266-306.

# The Trent Affair 1861

## British PM - Lord Palmerston:

*"I don't know whether you are going to stand this, but I'll be damned if I do"*



# Polity Scores over time

