POLI 142A: United States Foreign Policy
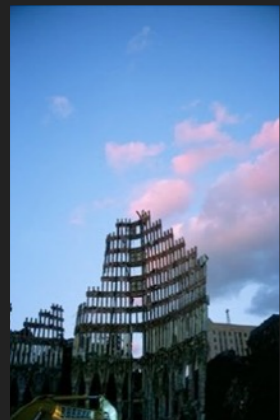
Democracy and Foreign Policy

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Empirical generalization

- Immanuel Kant 1795; Small and Singer 1976; Doyle 1983

- Strong form: No two "democracies" have ever fought a "war"

- Weak form: Wars between two democracies are very rare

- Democracies are not more peaceful when facing non-democracies

Statistical tests

- Democratic peace is among the most robust generalizations in political science

- Controls for

  – Contiguity

  – Power distribution

  – Alliances (and expected utility)

  – Wealth, trade, economic growth

Competing Explanations

- Norms and preferences

- Institutional constraints

- Trade

- Security/Geography

- Information

Norms and preferences

- Democratic legal culture creates habits and expectations of peaceful resolution of conflicts

- Democratic publics disapprove of war as an instrument of policy

- Democratic publics have common interests, so serious conflicts are unlikely to arise

Institutional constraints

- Democratic leaders are bound by rule of law

- Role of Congress, Parliament (Veto Points)

- Preferences of the median voter

- Voter control through retrospective voting

Median voter

left   right
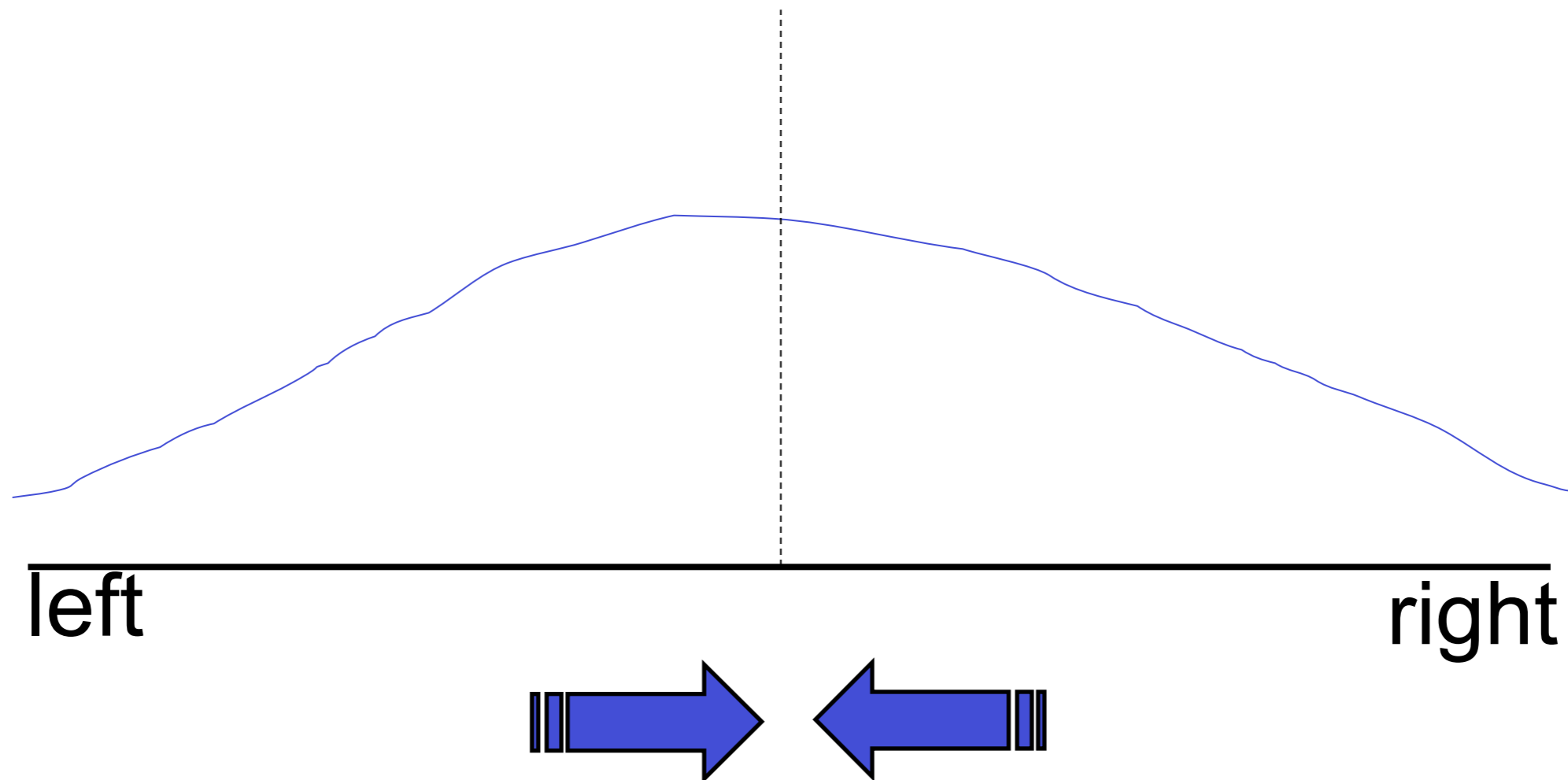
Elected officials have preferences close to the median voter

Voter control

- Median voter pays cost of war, but does not benefit

- Politicians want to be reelected

- Voters can control politicians by voting retrospectively

Effects of Constraints

- Democratic leaders have less freedom of action

- Are democracies bullied around by other states?

- But, veto points increase bargaining leverage! (two-level games)

Gambling for resurrection

- There is uncertainty about whether the incumbent is competent or not

- Voters punish leaders for bad policy outcome, but outcome depends on chance

Downs & Rocke 1994

Gambling for resurrection

- Competent leaders who face bad luck get unjustly punished

- Incompetent leaders are reluctant to end an unsuccessful war, to preserve office

- Democratic leaders are more likely to gamble for resurrection

Downs & Rocke 1994

How effective are constraints?

- Opponents of the Mexican-American War in Congress were six times more likely to retire

- Opponents of WWI were twice as likely

- Gulf War of 1991

- Second Gulf War

- Since 1789 the U.S. has used force over 200 times; it has declared war five times

Schultz 2001

Trade vs. Democracy

- Who is democratic (constraints), who trades (preferences)?

- Russett & Oneal: Both trade and democracy reduce probability of conflict

Security/Geography

- Cold War alliances are important and durable
  - Divide world along regime lines
  - Do not explain the democratic peace
- Democracy clusters
  - Neighbors are more likely to fight
  - This implies observed effect underestimates impact of democracy in inhibiting violence

Information

- Audience costs

- Transparency

- Impossibility of strategic surprise

- Cheap talk signaling

Audience costs

- War arises b/c of incomplete information

- Democratic leaders can signal resolve (if they have it) by making public commitments

- Voters punish them if they back down

- Democracies are less likely to be challenged when they are resolved

Fearon 1994

Audience costs

- So why are democracies unable to avoid conflicts with non-democracies?

- Why is it rational for voters to punish leaders who bluff, if the leaders are trying to protect the voters' interests?

Fearon 1994

Transparency

- War arises b/c of incomplete information
- The preferences of democracies are transparent

  - Democratic leaders find it hard to bluff

  - Foreign leaders rarely misinterpret signs of resolve

- So why are democracies unable to avoid

Impossibility of Surprise

- Free press & separation of powers make surprise attack very difficult

- Democratic leaders are less tempted to start surprise wars

- Potential opponents are less insecure

- The security dilemma is less binding

Cheap talk signaling

- War arises b/c of incomplete information

- Opposition parties can credibly signal that the incumbent is resolved

- Opposition has cross-cutting incentives to support and undermine the incumbent, so its claims are credible

- Resolved democracies signal, and voters rationally reward the opposition when it reveals the incumbent's weakness

Ramsay 2004

Capitalist Peace

- Long tradition of inquiry about the role of commerce in promoting peace (Montesquieu, Payne, Cobden, Angell, Rosecrance)

- Traditional argument: Opportunity Costs

  - Nations are loath to fight when fighting interferes with valuable commerce

  - Peace prevails when merchants gain influence over politics/foreign policy

Capitalist Peace II

- Norman Angell (mostly right)
  - Traditional inputs to production could be stolen through force
  - Financial capital is not easily coerced
  - Intellectual capital is also hard to capture
- Rationale also provides a common origin for both rise of democracy and interstate peace.

Capitalist Peace III

- Trade probably not that important

- Financial markets serve similar function to domestic audiences

- Development discourages territorial aggression

- Policy affinity affects interest in competition

Gartzke 2007

Tentative conclusions

- Important empirical generalization

  - Few "laws" in the study of foreign policy

- A plethora of competing explanations

  - All cannot be (equally) correct

- We learn most where the world gives us tractable riddles that require new thinking