Democratic Peace Theory

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Democratic peace research credits intellectual genesis to Kant's essay “Perpetual Peace”

- Abbe de Saint-Pierre, Rousseau, and Bentham provided similar arguments prior to Kant.

- In politics, early 20th century scholar-statesmen like Woodrow Wilson and Nicolas Murray Butler advanced the pacific effects of democracy in their writings, and to a lesser extent in practice.
DP - History, cont.

• WWI and WWII “killed” liberal peace theory
• Cold War was equally chilly for liberalism
• After a cold war, contemporary politicians like Bill Clinton and George W. Bush picked up the banner of liberal peace in era of US hegemony.
• Research Innovations: end cycle of optimism/pessimism – empirically grounded theory
“Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other” (Clinton 1994).

“Democracies don't go to war with each other.... I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace” (Bush 2004).
What do we know about DP?

- Early statistical work questioned the liberal conviction that democracies are generally less warlike (Wright:1942; Singer and Small:1976)
- Democracies are NOT generally less warlike in their foreign policies
- Just less likely to fight with EACH OTHER.
Know about DP?, cont.

• Babst (babst:1964,babst:1972) was the first to identify the special dyadic observation.

• At this point, even most proponents appear to acknowledge that democratic pacifism is at best a considerably weaker phenomenon (Benoit:1996; Chan:1984; Ray:2001; Rousseau et al. 1996; Rummel:1996; Weede:1984)
``The more freedom that individuals have in a state, the less the state engages in foreign violence'' (Rummel:1983, page 27).


Schumpeter (1950,1955) is atypical of the liberal economic peace tradition, selected because he ``saw the interaction of capitalism and democracy as the foundation of liberal pacifism'' (Doyle:1986, page 1152)
Know about DP?, cont. 3

- Levy (1988) calls the democratic peace one of few “lawlike” relationships in world politics.
- Waltz says “theories explain laws” (1979, page 6), suggesting a need in international relations for more laws or fewer theories.
- Part of the appeal of the democratic peace is that it is a relationship requiring explanation, anticipating the bulk of empirical research.
Controversies and Implications

• Several authors claim that democratic peace existed in the 19th century (Gochman 1997; Thompson and Tucker 1997a; Oneal and Russett 1999b).

• Others find evidence of liberal democratic peace in the Italian Renaissance (Sobek 2003),


• Russett and Anthololis 1992 identify a “fragile emergence” of democratic cooperation, though Bachteler (1997) rejects this.
Controversies, cont.

- Hewitt and Young (2001) date the origins of the democratic peace somewhere between 1924 (for wars) and 1930 (lesser disputes).
- Others see a decline after the cold war (Sobek et al. 2006).
Theories of Democratic Peace

- Democratic peace theories have proliferated
  - In no small part because of the difficulty in accounting for the special dyadic observation.
  - “growing consensus that democracies rarely if ever fight each other is not matched by any agreement as to how best to explain this ... empirical regularity” (Levy 2002, page 359).
  - “We know it works in practice. Now we have to see if it works in theory!” (Lipson 2005, page 1).
Theories of DP, cont.

- Initial accounts focused on linking domestic liberal norms or institutions to constraints on the use of force.
  
- Institutional explanations assert that elements of the apparatus of liberal government interfere with the exercise of military force (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Maoz and Russet 1993; Russett 1993).
  
- Kant saw constitutional constraints as inhibiting the sovereign's proclivity to war.
Theories of DP, cont. 2


- Force will not be used where modes of practice and appropriateness prevent it.
Additional Tests

• Old democratic dyads appear about as dispute prone as newer dyads (Enterline 1998; Ward and Gleditsch 1998).

• Constructivists argue that warfare is socially unacceptable (Cederman 2001a, 2001b; Cederman and Rao 2001; Mueller 1989; Risse-kappen 1995, 1997; Wendt 1999).

• Kaysen:1990 critiques Mueller's theory
Additional Tests, cont.

• Some see the evolution of common identity (Deutsch: 1978; Flynn and Farrell 1999).
  • Argument potentially applies to autocratic regimes as well (Peceny et al. 2002).
• Others claim that mature democracies do not war with states they see as democratic (Weart 1994, 1998).
• Problem: who decides who is democratic?
  • Liberal leaders can also intentionally downplay “democraticness” of another regimes (Oren 1995).
  • US/British reaction to Putin, Chavez
  • “Simply because it won the votes of a desperate people is no reason to grant even the slightest scrap of legitimacy ... to Hamas” (Zukerman “U.S. News and World Report” 02/13/2006, page 63).
Constraint Theories

• Democracies may be prevented from acting with force by their political systems, or the electorate.

• Constraint theories have been criticized as *ad hoc* and logically flawed (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Gates et al. 1996; Rosato 2003).

• Note that the statement "democracies behave differently toward each other than toward non-democracies" characterizes, in broad strokes, both the observation and many of the theories designed to explain the observation.
Constraint Theories, cont.

• Mousseau (2000) and Hegre (2000) show that the democratic peace applies only among advanced industrialized economies.

• It is not obvious from existing explanations why democratic norms, institutions, or other factors would inhibit conflict among rich democracies but fail in poor democracies.

• Mousseau (2003) argues that capitalism creates a culture of contracts
  • Which then conditions democratic peace.
Institutional Theories

• Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003):
  • Leaders seek to retain office
  • Must obtain support of “winning coalition”
    • Subset of politically-relevant citizens (the selectorate).
  • Leaders in societies with small winning coalitions (autocracies):
    • Target private benefits to key supporters
Institutional Theories, cont.

• Leaders in societies with large winning coalitions (democracies):
  • Are better off providing public goods to stay in power.
  • Democracies fight harder because
    • Leaders with large winning coalitions are more likely to be replaced if the country is defeated in a war.
Institutional Theories, cont. 2

• Turns Kant's original intuition on its head.
  • Kant: War is good for ruler, bad for people
  • BdM, et al.: Victory is good for people, war is bad for leaders
  • “By trying harder, B's leader reduces the amount of resources available to reward her supporters through private goods”
Informational Theories

- Democracies may be more transparent (Small 1996; van Belle 1997; Mitchell 1998)
  - The absence of secrets allows diplomacy
  - Finel and Lord (1999) argue that liberal politics can lead to greater confusion.
- Others argue that opposition groups or “audience costs” allow democracies better to signal resolve (Fearon 1994; Schultz 1998).
- Credibility can prevent war by informing competitors about acceptable bargains
Informational Theories, cont.

- Properly understood, these explanations anticipate monadic democratic pacifism, not the dyadic DP relationship.
- Contests should be less likely in all dyads possessing at least one democratic state
  - Regardless of the regime type of partners.
- Actors with common priors, and the same information, should have identical beliefs (Myerson 1991, pages 67-83).
Informational Theories, cont. 2

- As Schultz acknowledges, domestic signaling arguments ``... are fundamentally claims about democratic states, rather than democratic dyads'' (Schultz 1999, page 243).

- Domestic opposition groups can reveal information, or pool, confusing observers, depending on electoral conditions (Ramsay 2003; Trager 2004).

- Increased credibility also provides new incentives to bluff (Nalebuff 1991).
Constructivist Theories

- The Security Dilemma is not inevitable
  - Change preferences of states by changing the interaction of community (Wendt 1999).
  - Democracies cooperate more because of democratic community (Risse-Kappen 1997).
  - Socialization of states in state-system can make world more peaceful (Harrison 2006)
Conclusion

• DP theories come in three basic forms
  • Constrain
  • Inform
  • Transform
Conclusion, cont.

- Constrain
  - Institutions: structure prevents conflict
  - Norms: tradition/modes of behavior prevent conflict
Conclusion, cont. 2

• Inform
  • War is caused by ignorance (uncertainty)
  • Knowing other actors’ preferences or capabilities allows states to avoid war
  • Democracy informs world about prefs.
• Transform
  • States can have compatible preferences
  • Socialization or other processes that change preferences can lead to peace