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DEMOCRACY

See Democratic Peace Theory

DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY

Democracies almost never go to war against each other. This simple observation has acquired the status of an empirical law in the social sciences. Yet while democracies tend to have peaceful relations with one another, this is not to claim that democracies are *generally* less war prone than other regime types. This entry explores the concept of the democratic peace and details the research surrounding the democratic peace theory, beginning with the debate to define the central concepts of democracy and peace, continuing with a discussion of Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" and theoretical explanations for democratic peace theory, and concluding with critiques of democratic peace and a look at emerging studies in democratic conflict outside of peace.

The Dual Finding of Democratic Peace

Many empirical studies find that the overall rate of war involvement does not differ substantially between democracies and nondemocracies. This dual finding constitutes the core of the democratic peace proposal, and it specifies the elements that any theory needs to explain in order to fully account for the observed phenomena: the peaceful relations between democracies on the one hand and the war involvement of democratic regimes on the other hand. Starting in the 1980s, the first generation of democratic peace research focused on proving the robustness of the observed pattern—*whether* the democratic peace could be substantiated in empirical terms. Not surprisingly, a debate emerged over the proper definition of the two central concepts: democracy and peace.

Most studies on the democratic peace apply minimalist definitions of these terms, referring to electoral democracy and the absence of interstate war, respectively, though democracies are sometimes further distinguished by their degree of consolidation. Given these criteria, studies have pointed to several "deviant cases" that could be considered wars between democracies. However, almost without exception, the observed countries either do not fit the criteria for democracy, which is true for many 19th-century "democracies" with less than universal suffrage and undemocratic elections, or their conflict did not escalate to full-scale hostilities. Hence, the consensus view is that the existing cases of alleged wars between democracies do not invalidate the democratic peace proposition.

The second generation of research concentrated on finding a convincing explanation for the empirical record—*why* the democratic peace existed. As many observers noted at the time, the robust empirical regularity of the democratic peace phenomenon still lacked a credible theoretical explanation that could account for both elements of the dual finding. Finally, the third generation of studies started to broaden the research program and to investigate alternative explanations. These works have introduced new methodological approaches and investigated substantive questions that had been overlooked in previous work, such as the war involvement of democracies—the flip side to the democratic peace—including the considerable variation in the conflict involvement of contemporary democracies.

When referring to theories of democratic peace, it has become customary to distinguish between *dyadic* and *monadic* variants. The dyadic approach

investigates pairs of states, so-called dyads, based on the theoretical premise that democracies rarely, if ever, engage in war against each other. Democratic dyads are thus expected to be less warlike than pairs of nondemocracies or mixed dyads. By contrast, the monadic perspective proposes that democracies are generally less war prone than other types of regimes. It thus compares the overall conflict involvement of democracies and nondemocracies, irrespective of the interaction of specific pairs of states. What most studies in democratic peace research have in common, however, is that they conduct second-level analyses, seeking causal factors primarily in the domestic realm of the state. Hence, these approaches remain firmly within the tradition of the liberal paradigm in the field of international relations.

From Kant's "Perpetual Peace" to Democratic Peace

Because of his influential essay "Perpetual Peace," published in 1795, Kant is widely regarded as an intellectual precursor to modern democratic peace theory. In his philosophical treatise, Kant proposes three mechanisms that foster peace among nations and societies: (1) the presence of a *republican constitution*, which, for Kant, entails the requirement of public approval before the government can decide on the use of military force; (2) the pacifying effects of close trade relations—what Kant termed *the spirit of commerce*; and (3) a *federation of states* to overcome the condition of lawlessness in international politics. While the third mechanism underlines the importance of international law, Kant's argument regarding the first two mechanisms essentially rests on utilitarian cost–benefit calculations. He assumes that citizens would decide against war if they had to bear the costs themselves. Hence, if citizens were given a say in decisions on war and peace, then this should foster peaceful interstate relations. Likewise, if countries had close trade relations with one another, then Kant presumes that it would be irrational for them to engage in armed conflict because that would threaten their mutual welfare.

Although "Perpetual Peace" is widely cited in democratic peace research, studies have focused primarily on the first of the three mechanisms suggested by Kant, equating republican constitutions with the concept of representative democracy.

Works in the rational choice tradition have read Kant's treatise as specifying the political costs that democratic governments have to confront when initiating war. These costs can be severe, regardless of the target, due to the likelihood of domestic opposition, public protest, legislative interference, and the loss of life and national wealth. Hence, because political leaders generally tend to avoid these risks, they are expected to be reluctant to use military force. Despite the focus on the effects of representative democracy in most works on democratic peace, some studies have sought to include all three mechanisms developed in "Perpetual Peace," conceiving of democratic institutions, economic interdependence, and membership in international organizations as mutually reinforcing factors that lead toward peaceful interstate relations.

Theoretical Explanations for Democratic Peace

From the early stages of the democratic peace research program, theories were developed around two strands of explanations, emphasizing *norms* and *institutions*, respectively. An influential normative argument holds that democracies *externalize* their domestic norms of conflict resolution when interacting with other states in the international system. Proponents of this argument assume that states intuitively apply their domestic democratic norms of political competition and conflict resolution when dealing with other states. Thus, when democracies interact with one another, they abide by similar norms, emphasizing the peaceful resolution of conflict through negotiation and political compromise. Yet although democracies generally seek to transfer their own norms to the international sphere as much as possible, they acknowledge the anarchic and insecure nature of international relations. Hence, democracies externalize their domestic norms only when interacting with fellow democracies, where reciprocity can be expected. When engaging with nondemocracies, however, democracies adapt to the norms of the latter in order to avoid being exploited or threatened by predatory regimes.

At first glance, the externalization argument seems to offer an account for both the peaceful relations between democracies and the occurrence

of armed conflict between democracies and nondemocracies. However, if taken to its logical conclusion, then the externalization argument implies that democracies should generally be less war prone than other regimes and that democracies should become involved in armed conflict only when they are being attacked—neither of which seems to reflect the state of research on democracy and war involvement. Therefore, a variant of the normative argument turned the attention to the role of *mutual perceptions* and the social construction of in-groups and out-groups between democracies and nondemocracies. The argument suggests that democracies regard other states as legitimate when these states reflect values, institutions, and an ideology that is similar to their own. Specifically, countries are perceived as trustworthy and predictable when they are governed democratically. By contrast, nondemocracies with despotic rulers are perceived as possibly dangerous and unpredictable. Shared norms constitute the collective identity of democracies. This can lead to peaceful relations among them, but it also potentially fosters aggression vis-à-vis nondemocratic regimes because these states are regarded as oppressive and unjust toward their own population. Hence, emphasizing perceptions and collective identity, the variant of the normative argument is better able than the externalization argument to account for both parts of the dual finding of the democratic peace.

The second group of explanations revolves around political institutions. These explanations comprise an array of arguments derived from the division of powers inherent in democratic polities and the fact that decision makers are accountable to various social groups, including citizens, legislatures, and bureaucracies but also to private interest groups and the media. The *institutional constraints* argument suggests that risk-averse democratic leaders are restrained in their decision making by a requirement for public support, especially for decisions on war and peace, where the human and material consequences can be immense. Hence, proponents of this argument suggest that democratic leaders will not act against public opinion on such matters. Given that citizens are generally assumed to be reluctant to go to war, an assumption that is derived from the Kantian cost–benefit rationale, public opinion should pose a substantial check against the war involvement of democracies.

The *mobilization* argument refers to the complexity of the military mobilization process. It is argued that this effectively prevents democracies from any spontaneous military operations or surprise attacks, even if the political leadership intended such operations. To prepare the country for large-scale war, democratic leaders have to initiate a lengthy and often public institutional process, seeking approval from the legislature and various government agencies along the way. The duration of the mobilization process means that conflicts are given additional time for negotiations, political compromise, and other means of conflict resolution, which contribute to the peaceful settlement of conflicts between democracies.

Finally, the *transparency* argument holds that democratic institutions enable reliable signaling in times of crisis. A major cause of war in international politics is rooted in the security dilemma, which is fueled by uncertainty about the intentions of other actors. Democratic institutional procedures foster transparency, and they enable a clear communication of political goals. Hence, uncertainty is reduced, and misjudgment about a leader's intentions becomes less likely. Other countries can thus correctly gauge a democratic government's intent and domestic constraints. Hence, if two democracies are involved in a dispute, then this should lead to political compromise in the form of a negotiated settlement rather than a violent escalation.

Critiques of Democratic Peace Theory

Critiques of the democratic peace can be divided into four groups. An early strand of arguments scrutinized the evidence in support of the empirical claim. However, by the end of the 1990s, this debate had been mostly resolved in favor of the democratic peace. The second group of critiques takes issue with the causal logic of the explanatory approaches. The third set of arguments provides normative criticism, directed particularly against the policy implications that are being derived from the democratic peace. Finally, the fourth group of critics argues that alternative explanations are better able to account for the observed phenomenon.

Concerning the causal logic of the democratic peace, three important objections stand out. First, critics hold that the conventional distinction between dyadic and monadic variants is not justifiable. While the democratic peace appears to be a dyadic phenomenon, almost all established theories of it are based on monadic mechanisms that imply a general peace proneness of democracies, even though few proponents acknowledge this. Second, it has been criticized that conflicting tendencies can be derived from existing theories. The causal logic can go in both directions: toward peace but also toward belligerent behavior. For instance, liberal norms could just as likely provoke military intervention against nondemocratic regimes as they could foster peace between liberal democracies. And while institutional arguments often assume public war aversion, the public can also be misled, misinformed, or outright aggressive—any of which could lead toward democratic war involvement. Finally, some critics contend that reversed causality could be the case. Countries become democratic only if their external environment allows them to; while a hostile and conflict-ridden region seems to provide incentives to develop autocratic state structures, peaceful parts of the globe enable countries to shift their resources to trade and welfare and to democratize their political institutions.

Regarding normative critiques, two points stand out. First, due to its appeal to policy makers, democratic peace theory has, on several occasions, been used to justify a policy of external democratization by military force. This has sparked intense criticism from those who regard the democratic peace as a cover for widespread forms of structural violence of Western industrialized states against less developed countries in the southern hemisphere. But proponents of the democratic peace themselves have also protested against the political abuse of their theory for policy purposes, specifically arguing that the theory never advocated forcible democratization from the outside. Second, commentators bemoan the ahistorical treatment of democracy in many studies. These critics hold that the democratic peace proposition is value laden, being less about democracy than about countries that apply to the Western model of liberal democracy.

Finally, in terms of alternative explanations of the democratic peace phenomenon, two lines of argument have been particularly influential. First, critics from the realist school of international relations contend that the system-wide allocation of material power remains the predominant factor that influences war and peace, rather than domestic political institutions, as supporters of the democratic peace propose. Realists further question the stability of the ideational structures suggested by the democratic peace. For them, there is no guarantee that states that are, at present, democratic will not, under certain systemic pressures, slide back to authoritarianism at some point or another. Second, a liberal argument contends that capitalism rather than democracy could be the driving force behind the peaceful relations of democracies. Specifically, it is suggested that factors such as economic development, financial integration, and a convergence of state interests can shift preferences toward trade and peaceful interstate relations.

A Democratic Turn in Security Studies

Although a voluminous amount of work has been compiled on the peaceful relations among democracies, scholars have only begun to conduct systematic analyses of democratic conflict behavior outside the democratic zone of peace. Likewise, few attempts have been made to connect theoretical explanations of democratic conflict behavior to existing theories of the democratic peace. Moreover, due to a prevalence of statistical approaches in the subfield of conflict studies, few scholars have conducted comparative case studies on a wider range of democracies and contemporary conflicts. However, recent years have seen what some describe as a *democratic turn* in security studies. This shift has widened the research program on the democratic peace, placing due attention on the phenomenon of democratic war as the natural complement to democratic peace and analyzing the conditions under which democracies engage in armed conflict, liberalism's inherent ambiguities, and the substantial variation among democratic states regarding their domestic institutions, political culture, partisan politics, and constitutional structure.

Patrick A. Mello

See also Norms; Peace Theories; Peaceful Societies

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DEMOGRAPHY

Population issues are central to all facets of national security, including the ability of the state to defend itself from external threats, avoid collapse, or provide for the basic needs of its citizens. All demographic trends are driven by a combination of changes in only three variables: fertility, mortality, and migration. These three underlying variables shape a society's age structure, ethnic composition, and overall size. Such population characteristics are underlying sources of security and insecurity, but they often receive less attention in war studies than more proximate catalysts. Between demographic trends on one side of the equation and conflict on the other, multiple intermediate variables amplify or dilute demographic effects. For example, environmental issues exacerbate many demographic problems, particularly for the world's weakest states, where drought may lower agricultural yield at the same time that population growth increases fresh water and food demands. On the other end of the spectrum, technology, for example, can compensate for demographic decline by reducing the need for a large labor force.

Contemporary societies have more diverse demographics than any before because they have greater diversity of fertility and mortality trends. During the latter half of the 20th century, population trends among developed and less developed states increasingly diverged, as fertility and mortality fell in wealthier states and remained stubbornly high in many of the world's least developed ones. Along with migration, these changes in fertility and mortality, called the demographic transition, are connected to issues of peace and conflict. Research in demography and war has focused on three major areas: population as a source of power; the relationship between youthful age structures and conflict; and the demographic consequences of war, particularly for migration.

Population and Power

Population is a fundamental element of power, as war scholars have long understood, dating back even to Thucydides (460–404 BCE). Because a state's population provides the foundation for the economy and a pool of potential soldiers, both the quantity of a population matters, as well as the "quality," that is, education or skill levels and health. At a basic level, states with mature age structures—median ages over 35 years—have fewer potential military recruits than those with younger age structures. The former can draw on other sources of military power, including alliances, technology, and sophisticated weapons. However, both economic ability and political will for military funding are necessary in all states.

Some war scholars have argued that the need to expand beyond state borders to secure resources for a growing population and the desire to unite ethnic kin displaced in territories outside the homeland can cause war. One oft-cited example is Nazi expansion leading up to World War II. In the aftermath of World War I and the devastating economic effects of the Treaty of Versailles, Europe experienced a major population shift due to the allocation of German territories to the victors. Millions of German citizens became disconnected from the German homeland. Founded in the late 19th century, the Pan German League, a far right and extremely nationalist political organization, united around the need for *Lebensraum* and the "moral rebirth" of the German nation (Baranowski, 2011, p. 27). The league set the stage for Hitler's own interpretation of Lebensraum, demanding cultural homogenization, imperialist expansion, and "war as an historical necessity" to place Germany in a strong international position

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