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Are There Cracks In The Democratic Peace?

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In 1989, the United States (US) had a civilian fishing vessel come under fire by the Canadian navy. This act of conflict, while a clearly not a peaceful act, never violated the democratic peace principle, as a war was never declared between the two states. Still, what accounts for conflict between two democratic states?

The democratic peace principle (or democratic peace) is a staple of International Relations (IR). The principle states that democratic states do not often go to war with other democratic states (Moaz and Russett 1993, p. 624). It is safe to say that the US has long held this belief to be true, as evidenced by the common rhetoric of “making the world safe for democracy,” a saying that originated with Woodrow Wilson (65th Congress, 1 Session, Document No. 5, 1917). Still, there are countless examples of two democratic states engaging in conflict behavior with one another.

Even if the democratic peace holds true with respect to war, how do we explain why democratic states often engage in other types of conflict behavior with one another? For instance, why do democracies engage in violations of state sovereignty by non-belligere methods, such as aggressive spying programs? What accounts for threats of force or minor displays of force that fall short of war but could escalate to more severe forms of conflict? Can the democratic peace explain such events?

The majority of the extant research on the democratic peace has focused on proving theoretically or empirically why the statistical phenomenon occurs. Instead, our focus will be investigating if there are different degrees of the democratic peace between democratic dyads. Recently, a new analysis of interstate relations, known as the *Steps to War* approach, has introduced a new methodology into the analysis process. The *Steps to War* approach states that there are several steps that a dyad, or pair, of states takes on the path to war that determine the escalation of conflict. Our research seeks to build on the contributions of the *Steps to War* approach in the area of the democratic peace by observing democratic dyadic interactions across differing levels of military power. Specifically, we seek to determine if the democratic peace principle will apply to lower-order conflicts, which could serve as a precursor to war, when there are differing levels of power between democracies.

Since most of the states that exist and are coming into existence in this age are democratic, at least in principle, it is worth investigating whether the democratic peace is striated. Moreover, it is important to investigate if any possible power divisions between democratic states are the origin of conflict between democracies. In this era of peace between Western democracies, we must determine if this is the democratic peace at work or if power is still the ultimate factor in international politics, however tempered by the democratic peace it may be.

What is the Democratic Peace?

Maoz and Russett’s (1993) research compares the validity of structural and normative causes for the democratic peace. It concludes that democratic governments have a statistically significant effect on reducing the likelihood of war between two states in a dyad (Maoz and Russett 1993). For the normative causes, the authors contend that the compromising and peacefully competitive nature of democracies lead to the creation of norms that tend to favor negotiation and mediation rather than zero-sum war. The structural model is based on the speed that public support is mobilized in democratic and non-democratic states. They state that a reason that two democracies do not often go to war is that it takes quite some time for the state to

prepare for war (Maoz and Russett 1993). The study reaches the conclusion that the normative reasons for the democratic peace may be a better explanation than the structural reasons.

Some authors, such as Bruce Russett (2006), have gone as far back as Ancient Greece to analyze the democratic peace. Russett looks at ancient Greek dyads and finds very little peace between the democracies there. He contends that the lack of institutional constraints that are found in modern democracies were a major issue that led to many inter-democratic wars in ancient Greece. Therefore, shared democratic institutions are an important predictor of peace.

Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson and Smith (1999) argue against some points of the findings of Moaz and Russett (1993) and instead seem to agree with the findings of Russett (2006). They hold issue with the normative explanation, arguing that the history of democracies engaging in imperialism caused problems with the normative approach (Bueno de Mesquita, et al. 1999). The authors find that the institutions of democratic states, not norms, play a role in the prevention of conflict, especially unwinnable conflict. These findings are attributed to the increased pressure on a democratic leader to win a war, as a failure will often result in the domestic removal of said leader. Therefore, the democratic leader is often more willing to devote more resources towards the war effort in order to survive politically (Bueno de Mesquita, et al. 1999).

Crescenzi and Enterline's (1999) research finds that the relationship between policy and reductions in interstate violence is a simplification at best. They employ a systems-level approach and find a positive relation of democracy to war when system democracy is low at the global, European, and Middle Eastern systems. The authors also found that casual relationships between system democracy, democratization, and war are based on special and temporal elements (Crescenzi and Enterline 1999).

Erik Gartzke argues in "The Capitalist Peace" that the best explanation for peace across democratic states is capitalism, a trait which most democracies share. He argues that states still have the territorial or resource issues that cause most wars, but the development of a global market and the rise of capitalism have made acquiring the resources peacefully an easier option (Gartzke 2007). His research found no wars between capitalist dyads, which seems to complement and potentially challenge the findings of the democratic peace.

Mousseau, Hegre and Oneil (2003) reach the conclusion in their research that the democratic peace is indeed based on capitalist trading principles. However, they find a caveat in the development of both members of the dyad (Mousseau 2003). The authors conclude that the actual cause of conflict reduction is a result of the development of the dyad above a threshold GDP per capita of \$1400 (Mousseau, et al. 2003). However, they also note that by the end of 1992, no democratic dyad was underneath the development threshold for conflict. Here again, we see evidence that the democratic peace might be the result of shared factors aside from regime type.

In *The Steps to War* by Paul Domenic Senese and John A. Vasquez (2008), the authors outline their steps to war analysis of international relations. The two authors provide evidence that the majority of wars and conflicts begin with a territorial dispute. This dispute then sends a dyad down the road of power politics, which in turn creates a security dilemma (Senese and Vasquez 2008). This security dilemma can lead to create tension and insecurity between states, which can lead, in turn, to conflict of varying severity from war games to full scale attacks and wars. Therefore, this approach to conflict suggests that research should investigate the causes of peace and conflict at multiple stages prior to war, which is currently not addressed in mainstream democratic peace literature.

While there is an abundance of literature about the democratic peace and its causes, very little research has been done the effect of democracy on lower-level or non-belligose conflict. Existing research does show that war is an especially rare event in modern times, so research that stops at the point of explaining war only addresses one minor component of all potential conflictual behavior between states. Moreover, as the *Steps to War* approach demonstrates, wars are the culmination of a series of conflictual events between states. Therefore, our research aims to bring the democratic peace research into contact with the *Steps to War* approach to determine under what conditions we could see lower-order conflict between democratic states. For us, we believe that power differentials could explain why democratic states progress down the steps to war even under an era of the democratic peace.

Power and the Democratic Peace

The democratic peace principle is based upon the empirical finding that democracies rarely go to war, and this finding is supported by normative and institutional theoretical approaches. The majority of the extant research on the democratic peace seeks to prove theoretically or empirically why the statistical phenomenon occurs. Additionally, the majority of this research traditionally focuses on explaining wars, which are defined as a military conflict with over one thousand combat deaths. However, our research will depart from extant literature in two important ways.

First, we seek to investigate if the democratic peace applies to lower-order conflicts, or militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). MIDs are defined as conflict that includes a threat, display, or use of military force short of war between one state and another (Ghosen, Palmer, and Bremmer 2004). According to the *Steps to War* approach, it is important to consider if the democratic peace applies to MIDs in addition to wars, because we know that lower-order conflicts that continue down the steps to war could eventually result in wars.

Additionally, we seek to investigate if the democratic peace holds in cases where there are large power differentials between two states in the democratic dyad. Extant literature on the balance of power principle suggests that power differentials can be a cause of conflict and war between states, so we seek to determine if power still plays a role under the democratic peace principle (Morgenthau 1967, Waltz 1979, Walt 1987, Mearsheimer 2001). In a global system where most states are at least nominally democratic, discovering if there are specific types of democratic states that are drawn into conflict with other democratic states is a relevant and worthy topic.

We theorize that states, being self-interested actors, may engage in conflict behaviors when the conflicts are seen as winnable. Therefore, we should expect to see conflict between states of largely differing power levels. The stronger states will go into conflict with the weaker states, because those conflicts are winnable. There are many different kinds of conflict that do not have to do with war. As we saw in the interactions between Angela Merkel and Barack Obama over the US spying program, a leader can influence the decisions made in another country simply by using the power of the other state's electorate against the opposing leader (Smith-Spark 2013). Alternatively, as in the case of several presidents in the Americas, individuals can reach office by running on a platform of resisting foreign influence. However, this research will focus on conflict that involves military force. This force is more likely to be used in dyads where one state militarily dominates the other. Then, the weaker states would be forced into the conflict, even though it is not likely to result in a victory for them. If the power differential between states has a significant effect on the democratic peace, then investigating the

causes of striation between democratic states is important for predicting future conflicts and the best way to remedy current issues between democracies.

Here, we have chosen to define democracy more narrowly based on institutional characteristics, such as competitive political participation and characteristics of the executive branch. We acknowledge, however, that there are many different definitions of democracy. Robert Dahl, in his book *On Democracy*, has a more restrictive definition of democracy based on four specific criteria that a democratic association must meet. He argues that a democratic association must provide the opportunity for effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda and the inclusion of adults (Dahl 1998). He adds, however, that no state has ever lived up to the four criteria that are its definition of democracy, and he suspects no state ever will.

Conversely, Larry Diamond has a more expansive view of democracy based on Freedom House scores. His categories for regime types are Liberal Democracies, Electoral Democracies, Ambiguous Regimes, Competitive Authoritarian, Hegemonic Electoral Authoritarian and Politically Closed Authoritarian. Altogether, the Liberal Democracies and Electoral Democracies made up 104 of 192 states on his list in 2001 (Diamond 2002). Here, however, we have chosen to define democracy based primarily on institutional characteristics rather than normative characteristics.

Next, we chose to define power based primarily on military capabilities. Again, we acknowledge that there are many different definitions and forms of power. For instance, in John M. Rothgeb, Jr.'s book, *Defining Power*, Rothgeb's definition of power refers primarily to resources, foreign policy goals, and the available means to attain those goals (Rothgeb 1993). He goes on to say that power requires interdependence between two actors, specifically during conflict between the two actors. However, Rothgeb's statement about power existing only in conflict does not show the potential of power to deter conflict, a key part of this research.

Giulio M. Gallarotti introduces the idea of "Cosmopolitan Power" in his book, *Cosmopolitan Power in International Relations: A Synthesis of Realism, Neoliberalism, and Constructivism*. He defines cosmopolitan power as a theory that takes principles from the three main schools of international relations thought and combines them into a single, cohesive theory. His theory also combines aspects of soft and hard power. The three signature processes of Cosmopolitan power are soft empowerment, or raising a nation's influence through soft power, hard disempowerment, or avoiding overreliance on hard power, and the superiority of combining hard and soft power without over relying on either (Gallarotti 2010). However, we see influence, and by extension soft power, as a concept that is impossible to measure and perhaps outside the scope of this project. Therefore, we will focus on power as it describes a state's military power, which very closely approximates Rothgeb's definition of power. For the purpose of this research, the resource capabilities of a state are extremely important, as they are hard measurements of capability that other states can look at when considering conflict as an option to resolve disputes.

Hypothesis

We argue that all states come into conflict occasionally at the global level. Thus, how far the dyad progresses down the *Steps to War* is contingent not only on their shared regime type, but also on the balance of power between the dyad. Therefore, we should expect to see more conflict and violations of state sovereignty between states of differing power levels, even if those states are both democratic.

H1: Democratic dyads with different levels of power are more likely to experience conflict than democratic dyads with similar levels of power, ceteris paribus.

Research Design and Methodology

To examine our hypothesis, we chose to focus on US relations with democracies in two important regions of the world—the Western Hemisphere and Europe. These two regions were selected for several reasons. First, they have a large number of democracies and thus are important to broad understandings of the democratic peace. Second, the range in military power between states in Europe and the Western Hemisphere provides a good example of how US relations differ with states of varying military strength. Finally, both regions are areas of particular interest of US foreign policy. In the Western Hemisphere, Latin America is key because of the Monroe Doctrine and Canada is important because of the abundance of trade. In the European theater, American influence is strong because of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the general promotion of democratic anti-communist states during the Cold War.

US dealings with the democratically elected states in the Global South, especially in Latin America, are a foreign policy issue of prime importance. The importance of the region as a sphere of influence of the United States is evident since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and reaffirmed by the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904. Although there were few, if any democracies in the region when the Doctrine was signed, in later years the United States has taken actions against democratically elected presidents and leaders of states in the Western Hemisphere that it deemed a threat. During and even after the Cold War, when any leader that was left-leaning was considered a threat in an area that America considered to be securely in its sphere of influence, the US has engaged in multiple disputes and conflicts in and with Latin American democracies (Bulmer-Thomas 1999). Examples, such as Venezuela in 2002 (Campbell 2002), Guatemala in 1954 (Cullather 1999) and Chile in 1970 (Kornbluh 2003) show that even if the US does not engage in open warfare with these democracies, instead it funds and equips groups dedicated to overthrowing the regimes that the US does not view favorably, even if they are democratically elected.

Although the US has reserved the right to intervene in the affairs of the Americas for almost two hundred years, since the early days of the Cold War it became at least partially responsible for the defense affairs of Western Europe with NATO. While this relationship does not necessarily carry the same weight as the Monroe Doctrine, during the Cold War both the Monroe Doctrine and NATO were used as tools to slow the advance of communism and communist ideology. However, leftist leaders in Europe, such as Clement Atlee of the United Kingdom or Guy Mollet of France, did not face the threat of a US-backed coup. Why would a democracy engage in conflict-like behavior with other democratic states, when the democratic peace suggests that democracies can resolve their differences using peaceful methods? Can this difference in the security of the political regimes in the different hemispheres be solely explained by the Monroe Doctrine and NATO or rather by the power differential of Latin American states versus those of Western Europe?

To examine our hypothesis within the context of these two important geographic regions, we started by creating a quantitative dataset of variables from the Correlates of War (COW) project using the EUGene software database. The COW project was originally produced by David J. Singer, Stuart Bremer and John Stuckey in 1972 and continues to be expanded thanks to

the work of many conflict scholars. EUGene software is a repository of several datasets that contain information on regime type and conflict. We selected this software and the COW project due to the comprehensive nature of the available data.

Using EUGene software, two data sets were created to test the hypothesis. First, a dataset for all US dyads in the Western Hemisphere from 1945-1994 was created. Next, we created a dataset for all US and European dyads also from 1945-1994.¹ For each state in the dyad-year, variables were selected to correspond with our primary theoretical concepts.

First, we selected all democratic dyads and removed all non-democratic dyads from our datasets. We operationalized our definition of democracy based on Polity III scores, as those scores provide the most comprehensive measurement of democracy that focuses on institutional characteristics rather than normative characteristics. The Polity data measures executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority and the competitiveness of the political landscape (Marshall 2012). Its scale provides what is needed in terms of measurability, and the EUGene software system provided an efficient system by which to sort the information. The Polity score measures *democracy* from 0 (authoritarian) to 10 (democratic). We measured states as democratic if that state had a Polity score of 5 or higher.²

Next, we constructed a measure of *relative power* by subtracting the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score of each state from the CINC score of the US. The CINC score comes from the COW project and shows the military assets and preparedness of each state on a scale of 0-1.0. The CINC score takes into account total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditures of states. For the purpose of this research, the measure of relative power in the dyad serves as our primary independent variable.

Finally, the highest level of hostility in the Correlates of War dataset shows if there was *conflict* between states and the severity of the conflict. In this variable, the severity of the conflict is measured on a scale where higher scores represent more severe conflict up to war. For the dyad, the highest action of the dyadic conflict was selected as our primary dependent variable.

For the Western Hemisphere dyad set, there were originally 54544 data points, and after narrowing the data sets down by selecting only US dyads with other democratic states, there were 482 data points that met the criteria. As for the European-US dataset, there were originally 65503 data points, of which 849 met the criteria. This does not come as a surprise as there are more long-term democratic states in Europe than Latin America.

Based on this dataset, we first looked at the raw numbers to examine our hypothesis. However, due to the small sample size and rarity of conflict within our datasets, we only report the descriptive statistics below. Therefore, we also employ a qualitative analysis of one of the cases within our dataset. The COW data fails to show exactly what happened during a conflict due to its highly quantitative nature. Thus, to fully explore the conflict, we examined newspaper articles to clarify the exact nature of the conflict and how important power was to starting and resolving the conflict.

¹ 1994 is the last year for Polity III data.

² We chose a Polity score of 5 because we felt it allowed room to measure many of the transitional democracies that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union in Europe and that are still common in Latin America.

Findings

The preliminary findings of the research in both our quantitative and qualitative analysis yielded some interesting results. Of the 849 democratic dyad-years in the European theatre that involved the United States, there were only five total dyad-years that saw any conflict between the democratic states. In fact, there were only three different European democracies that engaged in conflict with the US: Austria once in 1960, Switzerland in 1954 and again in 1959, and Greece twice in 1983 and 1984. These numbers and the average power difference in the dyad are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1: US-Europe Dyads

<i>Dyad Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Average Power Difference</i>
Conflict	5	0.195
Peace	844	0.179
Total	849	0.179

In the years of the conflict, the five democratic states involved in conflict against the United States have a larger difference in CINC scores than the other 844 cases. The difference between the CINC scores of the US and the conflict states in Europe is an average of 0.195, as compared to the average of 0.179 for peaceful dyad-years, and 0.179 for all the dyad-years. Therefore, these findings suggest that the power difference between states in a dyad is higher during years of conflict than in all other years. These findings suggest that our hypothesis predicting conflict during years of unequal power is confirmed in the European region.

In the Western Hemisphere dyad sets, where territorial conflict is far more likely to occur, there were eleven democratic dyad-years of conflict involving the US. Predictably, due to Canada's proximity to the US, most of the conflicts were within this dyad. In fact, five of the eleven conflict dyad-years occurred between these two states in 1974, 1975, 1979, 1989, and 1991. The other conflicts in the Western Hemisphere with the United States involved Chile once in 1957, Ecuador twice in 1980 and 1981, Peru twice in 1955 and 1962, and Haiti once in 1994. These numbers and the average power difference in the dyad are reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2: US-Western Hemisphere Dyads

<i>Dyad Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Average Power Difference</i>
Conflict	11	0.162
Peace	470	0.175
Total	481	0.175

In the Western Hemisphere, dyad-years with conflict happened between the US and democracies with stronger relative CINC scores, but these numbers are skewed due to the preponderance of conflict with the militarily powerful Canadian state.³ Therefore, these findings suggest that the power difference between states in a dyad is actually lower during years of conflict than in all other years. These findings suggest that our hypothesis predicting conflict

³ Canada's average CINC score during its conflicts with the US is 0.012, all other Western states in conflict with the US have an average CINC score of 0.002

during years of unequal power is not confirmed in the Western Hemisphere region. However, these findings are likely due to the presence of Canada in the region.

Case Study: US-Canadian Conflict 1989

Due to the small number of cases that met the criteria of the study, individual cases were examined to show the nature of many of the conflicts that were found in the research. Moreover, since Canada's influence on our results in the Western Hemisphere was so important, one case of conflict between the United States and Canada was chosen to more closely examine. The most severe conflicts between the United States and another democratic state in the Western Hemisphere actually occurred between the United States and Canada. To the casual observer, this may seem odd as the relationship between the two northernmost states in the Americas is regarded as one of the most peaceful in the world. For these reasons, we selected this case from our quantitative dataset to examine through qualitative analysis.

One of the most severe conflicts between the two states occurred in 1989, when a Canadian destroyer actually fired upon a US fishing vessel. The vessel *Concordia* was found 2.5 miles inside Canadian waters and was intercepted by the Canadian destroyer *Saguenay*, which attempted to hail the ship by all means possible according to Canadian officials (Hays 1989). When the vessel refused to yield, the captain of the destroyer rammed the boat three times, damaging both the destroyer and the fishing vessel. After ramming yielded no results, warning shots were fired from both a small machine gun and one of the 3-inch guns. The *Concordia* eventually yielded to the destroyer, but not after suffering \$20,000 worth of damage from the ramming (Hays 1989).

This conflict was brought about by a variety of issues, including a strike by civilian employees of the Canadian navy, the absence of the Canadian scalloping fleet due to quota restrictions, and an increase of incursions by American fishermen into Canadian waters. American fishermen were already upset about a ruling by the International Court of Justice that gave the most fertile fishing areas in the Gulf of Maine to the Canadians (US Fishing Vessels Test Canada's Patience 1989). This combination of events led to unusually high tensions between American civilian fishermen and the Canadian navy in charge of maintaining the maritime border.

While there was tension between the two states over the use of the Gulf of Maine, this conflict was in reality an isolated incident that was an infrequent occurrence. Most US fishing vessels were not fired upon if they wandered into Canadian waters, and most US boats did not refuse to yield to Canadian authorities if a mistake was made. While both the Canadian and American ambassadors to the other country may have had a rough day in the office, there was no lingering damage to US-Canadian relations. However, if the two states wanted to use the incident to incite more severe conflict or even war, the possibility did exist.

This case does not confirm our hypothesis of weaker states being more susceptible to acts of conflict from the stronger states since Canada's CINC score was actually lower than the US during this conflict. In fact, Canada is credited with starting the conflict due to the state destroyer firing at the US vessel. What this case does demonstrate, however, is that conflict is possible between two democracies when they follow down the *Steps to War* path, regardless of regime type or relative power.

Conclusion

We proposed that conflict would be more common between democratic states with highly differing power levels. To investigate our theory, we examined the world's most powerful democracy, the United States, and European and Western democracies. Our empirical investigation found that conflict is more common between democratic states than war, but is still relatively infrequent. With less than twenty incidents between US and other Western democracies between 1945 and 1994, we can conclude that conflict is not regular behavior for these dyads.

Still, these conflicts are more frequent than the democratic peace principle might otherwise suggest. If the principle proved true for all levels of conflict, our numbers should have shown no conflict between democratic dyads. Thus, we can conclude that there are factors that contribute to conflict even if shared democracy suppresses most conflict and war.

Unfortunately, the study of power levels was inconclusive in determining how far conflict progressed. Our findings did indicate support our hypothesis predicting conflict during years of unequal power in the European region but not in the Western Hemisphere. Instead, through our qualitative analysis, we discovered that territorial issues regardless of power levels, as demonstrated in the *Steps to War approach*, are an important cause of conflict between democracies.

Future research could extend our study to include a greater number of dyad-years and regions by looking at all democratic dyads, not just those involving the US and Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Such an approach would allow for more conflict data to be analyzed and provide a greater sample size to employ additional quantitative tests. However, the data that would be the most useful for future research into this subject is yet to be compiled. A dataset of covert actions taken by states against one another would be extremely useful to complement the COW data that tracks overt conflict. The very nature of covert conflict makes it difficult to record, especially when the records of many activities are kept sealed for decades. Nonetheless, it would be a great benefit to the field for that information to be compiled.

We believe this research is significant, because it combines two of the newer and more exciting theories in the field of International Relations by using the *Steps to War* to analyze the democratic peace. Additionally, we have investigated the role of power under the conditions of the democratic peace. Finally, we believe that predicting future conflicts is a way of preventing future conflict, so determining when conflict can occur between democratic states is paramount, especially in this era of worldwide democratization.

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