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Hawks and doves. Democratic peace theory revisited

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Not another research of the democratic peace?!

Many political scientists and Western political decision-makers believe that liberal democracies do not go to war with one another because liberal democracies are different from any other regime. This belief is often called the 'democratic peace'. Liberal democracies are, from the perspective of these scholars and politicians, different because they have a particular influence on the individuals within these regimes. The expectation is that this influence causes peace, either by democratic institutions or by socialization processes based on liberal norms. That peace would not occur if at least one of the states in conflict would be non-democratic. Thus, proponents of the democratic peace have high expectations of the effect liberal democracy has on its people: they expect that this particular regime-type reduces the probability that conflicts escalate into war. There might be just as many political scientists and policymakers who do not share that belief and claim it is all wrong. The skeptics believe that there is no relationship between regime-type and the degree of war and peace within a country, rather they think it is all about the power a country holds and whether or not a country has enough power to counter the threat of the other country they conflict with. The adversaries of the democratic peace do not expect that liberal democracy can influence its people to decide for an attack on the opposing country. It holds true for both groups that their beliefs are rooted in a particular perspective on international relations. Though the core assumptions of these perspectives involve humans and not states, both groups of scientists generally study the democratic peace from a state-level perspective and not from an individual (or sometimes called: micro) level perspective.

This research takes a road less traveled within the field of international relations and focuses on a more fundamental aspect of the democratic peace puzzle: it investigates the assumptions about individuals that democratic peace theory builds on. The core assumption that constitutes two of the most important explanations generated by democratic peace theory¹ is that living in a liberal democracy has an effect on individuals that influences their willingness to go to war with other democracies. Democratic peace theory is therefore relying on processes that occur within the black box of the state. States do not make decisions, individuals within the state do. Individual decision-makers are the ones who disagree, the ones who decide, and the ones who fight. Even if democratic peace theory is accurate in the assumption that structures, such as democratic institutions and liberal norms, are solely responsible for the direction a decision-making process takes, these structures would still only affect individuals. Consequently, to understand whether or not liberal

¹ This study focuses mainly on the so-called normative explanation and the so-called institutional explanation of the democratic peace. The overarching phrase 'democratic peace theory' used in this study refers to these two theoretical explanations.

democracy has this particular effect on individuals, this dissertation studies individual decision-makers² within states of different regime-types.

This research deepens the understanding of democratic peace theory by studying what lies at the heart of every decision of war and peace: the individuals behind the steering wheel of the state, decision-makers. The main theoretical concern of this dissertation is to test several microfoundations of democratic peace theory. It does so by asking the research question *What influences decision-makers to decide to attack another country when they are on the brink of war?* With this more abstract phrased research question, not only the micro-level assumptions on which democratic peace theory are built can be tested. This question also allows for a simultaneous test of the influence of other and also actor-specific factors on this decision-making process, including the influence of individually based hawkishness. In this way, this dissertation aims to contribute to the studies into the democratic peace from a more comprehensive perspective that also captures alternative hypotheses within the same theoretical framework.

1.2 War or no war? That is the question.

There is a small body of empirical work into the micro-level foundations of democratic peace theory (Bakker, 2017; Geva, DeRouen, & Mintz, 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Johns & Davies, 2012; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Rousseau, 2005; Tomz & Weeks, 2013). This research extends on this previous research innovatively.

Most of these studies (except Bakker (2017)) have focused on what happens within liberal democracies only. Within liberal democracies, they have studied whether or not there is a difference in the willingness of individuals to go to war when the opposing state has a different regime-type; democracy versus autocracy. However, these studies have not conducted similar empirical tests among individuals that live in non-democracies. Still, the explicit assumption of democratic peace theory is that living in a democracy significantly alters individuals' attitudes and behavior compared to individuals who live under other regimes. These studies have thus not tested whether the by democratic peace theory assumed variance in the behavior of individuals caused by the type of regime could find support empirically. This dissertation, therefore, studies not only decision-makers within liberal democracies but also decision-makers within different regime-types. A comparison between these individuals can show whether or not the assumed differences are indeed present.

According to democratic peace theory, one of the differences between liberal democracies and other regime-types is that only the individuals of liberal democracies have liberal norms. Norms that are subsequently assumed to be of influence on the willingness to go to war. However, to substantiate this claim, it is crucial to test if liberal norms indeed vary significantly between individuals of liberal democracies and individuals of other regimes types, and, moreover, whether or not these levels of liberal norms affect the willingness of individuals to go to war. In

² Decision-makers and individuals will be used interchangeably in this research.

previous studies there was a sole focus on liberal democracies, and the assumed absence of liberal norms in other types of regimes remained unverified.

Moreover, whether or not liberal norms indeed exist within liberal democracies was not measured. Most of these studies only assumed that liberal norms would be present among individuals in liberal democracies and subsequently be of influence, without empirically testing whether or not that would be true. This research measures the presence and variance of liberal norms within different regime-types and tests whether or not there is indeed a relationship between a certain level of liberal norms and the willingness to go to war.

This research does more than only empirically test the micro-level assumptions of democratic peace theory. Other theories of international relations and political psychology have formulated relevant factors that might influence decision-makers in their decision-making process during severe interstate conflicts. Therefore, this research is not only focused on the effect of regime-type on the willingness to go to war. It also studies the effect of structural influences such as the nature of the conflict and the nature of the behavior of the opposing country, power politics, economic influence, and agent-based influences such as decision-makers' beliefs about conflict-resolution (hawkishness), gender, and the influence of the level of liberal norms.

Hereby, this study focuses beyond the concept of liberal democracy and investigates the assumed differences between individuals of different regime-types. Moreover, by examining the individual level, the research design allows for the testing of alternative hypotheses at the same time. Thereby, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of what influences decision-makers to decide for war in a more comprehensive way than democratic peace studies have done so far. In other words: this research does take democratic peace theory seriously, including its foundations. Additionally, it considers other theoretical perspectives that argue there might be more going on than an assumed effect of liberal democracy only.

1.3 How is this research conducted?

To come to a clear understanding of what influences decision-makers of different regime-types to decide for an attack on another country, we need to distinguish between different regime-types. Democratic peace theory uses a binary concept of regime-type: democracy versus non-democracy. The concept of democracy constitutes a full-fledged liberal democracy in the conceptual tradition of Dahl (1971, 2000), while the concept of non-democracy constitutes all other regimes that do not live up to all aspects of liberal democracy. Democratic peace theorists thereby ignore more refined conceptualizations of regime-types that we can find within the field of comparative politics. Different regime-types, ranging from new democracy (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Linz & Stepan, 1996) via hybrid regimes (Bogaards, 2009; Morlino, 2009) to authoritarian regimes (Linz, 2000; Schedler, 2006), are contained in one concept: non-democracy. This study chooses to refine that concept, at least for the assumed variance between decision-makers of different regime-types. It distinguishes between three different types of regime: liberal democracy, a mixed (or

hybrid) regime-type, and an autocracy. Chapter 3 will discuss these concepts in more detail.

The main aim of this study is to detect if there is a causal mechanism underlying the decision to attack another country when on the brink of war, and whether or not this mechanism differs between regime-types. It investigates whether or not regime-type, the nature of the conflict, the power used, and individual characteristics and beliefs of decision-makers matter in this decision. The core analytical instrument is a decision-making experiment. One reason for that choice is that earlier studies into the mechanism of democratic peace at the individual level also used experiments (Bakker, 2017; Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Rousseau, 2005; Tomz & Weeks, 2013). Moreover, an experimental setting allows for control over the relevant independent variables, so that a causal mechanism can be identified more clearly than with 'real-world' data (Druckman, Green, Kuklinski, & Lupia, 2011b, pp. 15-17; Iyengar, 2011, p. 75).

By using experiments as the core instrument, and then control for its results using other methodology (such as a comparison of the results with observational data), we can come to a higher understanding of cause and effect (Druckman, Green, Kuklinski, & Lupia, 2011a, p. 5). For this reason, this dissertation uses the increasingly used 'mixed-method' design (Lieberman, 2005; Tarrow, 2004, pp. 15-17) to connect the experimental data with 'real-world' data. Thus, the research strategy is at the core an experimental approach, supported by large-N observational data on the one hand, and a case study on the other hand.

The dissertation begins with a study of the liberal norms within three different regime-types: the United States of America (hereafter the US) as a full-fledged liberal democracy, the Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) as a hybrid regime, and the Peoples Republic of China (hereafter China) as a full-fledged autocracy. Observational large-N data of the World Values Survey is used to measure the level of liberal norms present in the representative samples of these three countries. The study then proceeds with a decision-making experiment conducted within the US, Russia, and China. The experiments use student samples as a proxy for decision-makers. Chapter 3 will explain in more detail why and how these student samples are used. A real-world case study triangulates the other two studies and uses the decision-making process of prime-minister Margaret Thatcher during the Falkland conflict as a real world illustration of the experimental results.

1.4 Scientific and societal relevance

Scientific

The literature on democratic peace theory has been 'stuck' for quite some time, and still is. The debate is a polarized one between realists on the one hand and liberals and constructivists on the other. At the heart of this normative debate lie opposing perspectives on human kind and the world that surrounds us. These opposing perspectives are grounded in particular assumptions, assumptions that have not yet been tested empirically. This theoretical debate compares apples and oranges, and

without some clarity on what the core foundations of theory are, the research into democratic peace will remain stuck (see also: Hayes, 2012; Ungerer, 2012). This research, in the first place, articulates and tests the core assumptions that underpin democratic peace theory, a necessary exercise that is long overdue. Moreover, this research brings together different (and sometimes opposing) hypotheses around the empirical regularity that is democratic peace, within one theoretical framework and one methodological design. It thereby contributes to a better understanding of the mechanisms that underlie several theoretical arguments, and it offers the possibility to assess their value in relation to each other. This assessment can lead to new theory building and a way forward in the democratic peace research. In that way, the results of this research contribute to democratic peace theory in particular, and to studies of war and peace in general.

Also, the focus on decision-makers contributes to the understanding of the relationship between the individual level and the aggregated level of analysis. The research has an agent-based approach, and thereby follows the actor-centric studies of the field of foreign policy analysis. This field has made apparent that the individual level matters within foreign policy decision-making and how the individual level affects studies of international relations (Beasley, Kaarbo, Hermann, & Hermann, 2001; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012; Goldstein, 1993; Hudson, 2005). Within that tradition, this research contributes to the understanding of an actor-centric approach. It does, however, also incorporate the possible influence of structures on these agents, and the possible interactions between structures and actors. In that respect, this study contributes to the studies of foreign policy decision-making, in that it promotes a deeper understanding of what is the influence of contextual factors as well as personal beliefs and characteristics of individuals during the decision-making process of these individuals.

Last but not least, this research has allowed for a unique data collection conducted within non-Western and non-democratic regimes, something that is rarely done. This data offers new insights into the presence of individual's attitudes toward society and towards conflict resolution in international settings. It provides a better understanding of the micro foundations underpinning the willingness to go to war. Moreover, it also offers a better view on the dynamics between norms and the willingness to go to war within other regime-types. Lastly, most studies use individuals of Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies as participants and assign characteristics of human nature to the results based on these studies. However, at the same time, it is shown that these WEIRD participants are actually "among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about human behavior" (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010, p. 61). This research contributes to a better understanding of non-WEIRD individuals.

Societal relevance

The democratic peace is a well-ingrained belief among Western policy-makers. President Clinton voiced it most clearly in the State of the Union address of 1994: "Democracies do not attack each other". Historically, the democratic peace traces its

pedigree from Abbe de St-Pierre and Immanuel Kant through to President Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations. More recent influences are visible in successive National Security Strategies of the United States since the 1990s (Bush-Administration, 2002, pp. 3-4,6-7; Clinton-Administration, 1998, pp. 33-35, 36-56; Obama-Administration, 2010, pp. 5-7,10,17,35-39). Also, the authors of the European Security Strategy have taken this notion to heart: "The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, [...] and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order" (Europe, 2003, p. 10). The belief of Western policymakers in the democratic peace is closely related to the way proponents discuss their research, namely 'the closest thing political science has to an empirical law' (Levy, 1988, p. 662). Scholars are, however, aware that the results of scientific research are tentative and should be considered with care. This awareness is not always present amongst many Western policymakers. They use democratic peace theory as a prescription to promote democracy around the globe, with or without force, in an attempt to bring peace (Burgos, 2008, pp. 222-223; Geis, Brock, & Müller, 2007; Ish-Shalom, 2006; Walt, 1998, p. 39). Peacebuilding missions aim to create a liberal democratic political culture to foster domestic and international peace (Paris, 2010). Paradoxically, the democratic peace is also invoked as a rationale for war, such as for the Iraq war in 2003 (Avtalyon-Bakker, 2013; Burgos, 2008). Thus, Western policymakers and therefore their audiences believe that socializing people into liberal norms is what a democratizing country needs to transform into a peaceful society and a peaceful player in world politics (Ish-Shalom, 2006). However, within the current literature on the democratic peace, there is insufficient evidence to support that belief veritably. Considering the enormous influence democratic peace theory has on policy (Burgos, 2008, pp. 222-223; Ish-Shalom, 2006), the neglecting of evidence from other regime-types is a cause for concern. The results of this study will shed some light on how useful it is for policymakers to employ theories as a means to strengthen their argument.

1.5 The chapters that follow

To get to the empirical analyses, chapter 2 explains why this research focuses on the individual level of analysis and why that is relevant to democratic peace studies. It furthermore argues why the perception of threat is at the core of bringing different belief systems together, including the democratic peace assumptions, when studying the individual level. In chapter 3, the relevant theoretical literature on democratic peace, causes of war, and psychological aspects are brought together in one theoretical framework. Based on this framework, this chapter formulates the hypotheses that underlie the empirical tests. Moreover, the independent and dependent variables of this research are conceptualized. Chapter 4 conceptualizes and operationalizes liberal norms as postulated by democratic peace theorists in a more profound way than was ever done in previous work on the democratic peace. The chapter then proceeds to operationalize the independent variable of liberal

norms. This operationalization is used to measure the level of liberal norms within the US, Russia, and China, thereby using data from the World Value Survey, and the data collection among student populations of these countries. Chapter 5 operationalizes the other independent and dependent variables through a decision-making experiment that uses student-populations in the USA, China, and Russia. The used experimental data is an original data collection. In chapter 6, it is then tested within the same experimental setting whether the same factors have an influence on the decision for several different foreign policy options, short of war. In chapter 7, the focus lies on a case study; the decision-making process of premier Margaret Thatcher during the Falklands War. This case study illustrates the mechanism that is detected by the experiments. In the concluding chapter 8, all results are brought together to answer the research question. Moreover, this final chapter revisits the debate on the democratic peace, and discusses the relevance of the results of this study in the light of that debate. The dissertation ends with an exploration of these implications and suggests directions for new research.

