Hawks and doves. Democratic peace theory revisited

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Chapter 2 Individuals under Threat

2.1 At the roots of democratic peace theory

Democratic peace research usually starts with the question: why do democracies not go to war with each other? This question underlies a spectacular massive research project that has emerged since the beginning of the 1990s. This project aims at understanding why the so-called 'democratic peace' exists. This chapter sets out the core of current explanations and introduces the perception of threat as an overarching concept to study the mechanism of the democratic peace at the individual level of decision-makers.

The democratic peace is an empirical regularity (Babst, 1964; Doyle, 1997; Z. Maoz & Abdolali, 1989; Rummel, 1983) that shows that from the 95 interstate wars that have occurred between 1800 and 2010, none of these wars were between democratic states. Democracies did go to war, 41 times even, but these wars were waged only with non-democratic regimes (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Wars between 1800-2010*

Regimes	Wars		
	1800-1939	*1945-2010*	*Total*
Democracy – Democracy	0	0	0
Democracy – Non-democracy	20	21	41
Non-democracy – Non-democracy	34	20	54
Total	54	41	95

List of wars based the Correlates of War project (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010), Categorization of regime-type based on work of Doyle (1997) and Polity IV project for 1800-2012.

Although criticism has been raised about the statistical validity of this regularity (Beck, Katz, & Tucker, 1998; Farber & Gowa, 1995; Gartzke, 1998; Green, Kim, & Yoon, 2001; Spiro, 1994), and the pitfall of conceptualizing democracy and war in a specific way has been discussed (Farber & Gowa, 1997; Gowa, 1999; Kegley & Hermann, 1997; Kegley Jr & Hermann, 1995; Layne, 1994; Oren, 1995), political scientists generally accept the apparent existence of a peace between liberal democracies (Chernoff, 2004; Hayes, 2012; Ungerer, 2012). This dissertation follows that consensus: it does not challenge the democratic peace and assumes it to be an empirical regularity.

An empirical regularity, however, that still needs a convincing explanation. In contrast to the above, there is little scholarly consensus of an explanation why democracies tend not to fight with one another. The lack of a convincing explanation has to do with the nature of the observation. The democratic peace as an empirical regularity is an *ex-post* assessment. A possible explanation why this regularity can occur, however, is by definition *ex-ante*: explanations for the democratic peace aim to

find out what particularities have ultimately led to the outcome of the democratic peace.

A complication is that the field of research is heavily divided. On the one side, there are proponents of democratic peace theory (generally coming from the liberal or constructivist school of international relations) who believe that specific features of democracy offer the key explanation. On the other side, there are adversaries (generally coming from the realist school of international relations) who believe there is a different explanatory factor that is collinear with democracy. Due to ontological and epistemological differences, both camps are unable to offer the arguments or empirical results to convince the other side. The studies are often unrelated, if not in contradiction, and therefore do not build on or supplement each other. One of the main reasons is that scholars commonly depart from very different and opposing perspectives on international relations that offer, separately, sound explanations for the democratic peace but are at the same time characterized by underlying dynamics that are inherently normative. Each perspective is rooted in a specific set of beliefs about human kind and its surrounding world. The beliefs differ intrinsically. However, each perspective postulates their specific beliefs as truths by using these as assumptions that underpin their explanations.

The differing belief systems affect the research designs of several studies that empirically test explanations of the democratic peace, including the derived hypotheses, levels of analysis, case selection, and conceptualization and operationalization of independent variables. As a result, the differing research designs do not speak to each other. Thus, despite the efforts of last decades, our scientific knowledge about the possible causes for the democratic peace is still quite weak.

A way forward would be to test the different hypotheses, generated by differing perspectives, within the same research design. This dissertation argues that this is possible, by formulating a common denominator that can direct the necessary empirical tests. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter discusses the different perspectives on the empirical regularity of the democratic peace through the eyes of liberalism, constructivism, and realism, to formulate this common denominator.

2.2 What you believe is what you see

The key controversy is between, roughly speaking, two groups of authors that have different views on the role of (liberal) democracy in explaining the democratic peace. One group builds its explanations on the postulate that there is something intrinsically different about liberal democracy and its citizens that causes peace between democratic states, but this group's perspective is opposed to the perspective of the other group that explicitly rejects that notion. Ontological and epistemological differences between the studies hamper possibilities for scholars to assess the explanatory value of these different explanations. Progress in democratic peace research requires not only empirical evidence for one explanation, but it also requires

empirical tests that differentiate between competing causal mechanisms within one coherent framework (Hayes, 2012, p. 783).

2.2.1 Liberal and Constructivist explanations

Liberal and constructivist scholars, in general, argue that the democratic peace exists; they believe that there is something special about liberal democracy that creates peace between states that are of this regime-type. There is, of course, an intrinsic difference between the liberal and constructivist perspective on international relations. Constructivists challenge the assumption made by liberal and realists that the international system is inherently anarchic and argue that if this anarchy exists, it is because states (and their agents) have constructed it by social practice. They argue that the nature of human kind or the state is not a given, but shaped by culture, identities, and interests of actors (Wendt, 1999). Constructivists argue that, if we want to understand empirical phenomena in the field of international relations, we will have to look at the influence of states' identities, cultures and interests (as formed by, e.g., discourse, language, rhetoric, and perceptions of leaders). In their perspective, these set norms for collectives, which subsequently shape the expectations of actors involved (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5). Constructivist studies are, therefore, not per se rooted within a fixed set of assumptions about human kind but in a set of assumptions on how social practice defines the behavior of states.

When it comes to democratic peace theory, constructivists agree that the liberal perspective has shaped international relations. The liberal school of international relations has given birth to the democratic peace program by arguing that liberal democracies do not fight with each other because they are liberal democratic. Constructivists claim that this dominant discourse has created a convincing liberal identity, which has shaped individuals in liberal democracies differently from individuals of other regime-types.

Constructivists offer thus a perspective on a more abstract level in which they argue that liberal ideology has shaped Western liberal democracies. In their view, states' identities are created based on a liberal democratic discourse rather than intrinsically being liberal democratic states. The constructivist argument is that liberal democracies tend to divide the world into 'us' and 'them', based on information about the domestic structure, and norms of other actors. A shared identity, for instance, based on liberal democratic norms, would reduce the perception of threat between democracies (Kahl, 1998; Risse-Kappen, 1995).

Theoretically, constructivism overarches the liberal ideas on a more abstract level. Practically this means that constructivists use the liberal framework for their research into the democratic peace. Not per se because they believe that liberal democracy indeed has a particular material effect on individuals, but basically because the liberal belief system is dominant in the Western world. In that sense, despite the ontological differences of these perspectives, the constructivist argument, then, aligns with the liberal argument when it comes to a particular expectation about the effect liberal democracy has on its citizens. Based on the assumption that

liberalism has shaped the identities of democratic nations, constructivism argues, in line with liberalism, that the peoples of those liberal democracies have created a separate liberal peace. Moreover, there are more liberal scholars than constructivist scholars who are studying the democratic peace. Therefore, the section below discusses liberal and constructivist explanations together.

Liberals claim that their theories are universal and applicable to all human beings. Just like realists, they see the international system as inherently anarchic with states that are in survival mode. They have, however, an optimistic view of human nature and the surrounding world. Liberals believe that cooperation is possible and even preferred over competition. They believe this is in particular applicable to the relationship between liberal democracies. In the liberal perspective, liberal democracies rely on the freedom of the individual (Doyle, 1986; 1997, pp. 206-207) which existence is expected to make liberal democracies intrinsically different from any other regime. The liberal beliefs originate from the work of Kant, whom democratic peace proponents refer to a lot (e.g. Doyle, 1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1997; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993; Mousseau, 1997; Rawls, 1999; Russett & Oneal, 2001, to name a few).

Although hardly ever made explicit to which parts exactly they refer, most democratic peace theorists mention *Zum Ewigen Frieden* (Kant, 1795/2013a) (or Perpetual Peace in English) written by Kant in 1795. It is a –compared to his other works- surprisingly thin booklet written in accessible language. It cannot be read, however, without a basic understanding of Kant's philosophy. Kant was a system thinker, which means that his argumentation fits into a specific philosophical logic that can explain the world (Storig, 2010, p. 75; Wood, 1999, pp. 4-5). It goes beyond the scope of this study to even briefly discuss Kant's complete system of thinking, let alone in detail. It is important to understand the core of his philosophy, however, since it is the underpinning of Perpetual Peace.

Kant, based on his core arguments of how human kind can know his world and by defining the borders of human reason, argues that only human reason could provide the guidelines for ethical behavior, and, moreover, should be found internally, not externally (Storig, 2010, p. 67; Wood, 1999, pp. 20, 302-303, 305-306; 2008, pp. 3, 28-29, 251-252). As most liberal thinkers, he places the individual central. Kant argues that the a priori laws of nature would help individuals to determine, based on pure reason, what would be the best behavior, in particular concerning others (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 19-27; Wood, 1999, pp. 296-298). First of all, Kant's necessary condition would be freedom for all individuals so that they could think, feel, and act as they please. He believes that only when truly free, individuals could be rational, another necessary condition to Kant (Kant, 1797/2013b, p. 1; Wood, 1999, pp. 300, 319-320). Although Kant acknowledges that individuals have the free will to choose whatever behavior they like (even if it would harm others), he also expects that the same free will would (eventually) guide individuals to conclude that behaving morally would be best. If everybody would be free to do whatever they want, they would quickly experience that the freedom of others might interfere with their own, and vice versa. Thus, based on reason, individuals could not otherwise

than conclude that it would be in the interest of all, and themselves in particular, to behave in a way that would not harm others. Subsequently, also others would start to act like that. Kant thus expects that reason and experience would first create a maxim (personal law for behavior) that would more and more be shared by others and thereby lead to a categorical imperative (a general law for behavior) (Storig, 2010, pp. 66-72; Wood, 1999, pp. 302-303; 2008, pp. 58-59). By experience, he therefore believes, individuals would come to understand the difference between right and wrong and develop an 'inner moral law' (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 21-29). This inner moral law would establish a general rule of rational *and* moral behavior. The act of rational behavior guided by the wish to take others into account would, later on, be called reasonability by Kantian liberal John Rawls (e.g. 1999, p. 28).

In line with his philosophy, in Perpetual Peace Kant formulates a theory about international relations. This theory is based on Kant's premise that every individual is able to reason purely. Therefore, each individual will always act in the own interests. Kant acknowledges the violence and aggressiveness that looking out for your own interests might generate between individuals or groups of individuals (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 31-34; Wood, 1999, pp. 286-289). He, however, argues that those animosities could be changed by individual freedom. Every individual has the ability to use pure reason to come to an inner knowledge about what is right and wrong, the above-mentioned inner moral law. Kant therefore posited that, in order for individuals to act autonomously and rationally, they need to feel free. Free from the need to survive that might cloud their pure reason, and free from oppression by others. Kant argues that through pure reason, individuals will start to understand that it is in their own interest to not harm others, as long as they prefer others not to harm themselves. That way, an inner moral law would become a general rule of rational *and* moral behavior (Wood, 1999, pp. 171-172, 187-190). This act of rational behavior guided by the wish to take others into account would later on be called reasonability, by Kantian liberal John Rawls (e.g. 1999, p. 28).

In Perpetual Peace, Kant formulates a theory about international relations, which is in line with his philosophy. Kant's premise that free individuals can reason purely and thus will become – over time- morally more evolved, underpins the theory laid out in Perpetual Peace. Kant argues that for individuals to feel free from others and for them to feel like they can act autonomously, they would have to establish a republic based on these principles. The republic would then enable the freedom of all individuals so that they can act autonomously based on reasonability. Kant assumes that republican individuals would, over time, be socialized with the tolerant, free and equal practices of the republic and would thereby internalize the act of reciprocity. He sees it as a process of 'moral learning', a process enabling individuals to become 'better people' (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 41-45). The process of moral learning is the core expectation on which democratic peace theory builds (Doyle, 1983a, 1983b, 1986; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625; Rawls, 1999, p. 44).

Kant transposes his ideas about individuals to states in the international system, in Perpetual Peace. He suggests an institutional setting that discusses how states should behave with the aim to decrease the chance of war enormously. One

could easily read the behavioral rules of this institutional setting as a top-down institutional framework to bring republics to perpetual peace, as is often done by scholars and policy makers (Cederman, 2001; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993; Paris, 2010; Siverson, 1995). By doing so, however, it is easy to miss out on what Kant believes about individuals who live under these republics. For Kant these institutions were not so much a top-down exercise, but rather an ideal-type possible output of a bottom-up process, created by free feeling and autonomously acting individuals (Kant, 1797/2013b, pp. 22-27; Wood, 1999, pp. 319-320). Kant's institutional setting expresses the by him expected results of more and more individuals following their inner moral law and thereby creating a categorical imperative. It should, therefore, be understood as a guideline for that process rather than as a rigid prescription.

Kant's institutional setting prescribes six behavioral rules for states to diminish the rational incentives to want to go to war. First, peace agreements should be eternal, with no secret plans to ever attack again. Second, territories could never be acquired in an exchange, as a gift or even as a purchase. Third, standing armies should be abolished and replaced by volunteer armies consisting entirely of citizens. This way, Kant believes, citizens would be responsible themselves for the material and physical costs of war. Subsequently, they would refrain from war, since it is easier to pay others to fight than take that fighting upon yourself. Fourth, no state would be allowed to borrow money for foreign affairs. Fifth, states should never interfere with the governments of other states, and last, no acts of hostility should be allowed (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 2-11).

After articulating these basic ground rules, Kant gives body to the formal institutions in what he calls definite articles. In the first article, he specifies that states should be republics[3] that protect and guarantee the freedom and equality for all citizens. The same citizens would have to formulate the conditions that would create freedom and equality. The institutions are therefore built bottom-up, as a product of reasonable thinking. He proposes a republic in which the executive and legislative powers are separated. Kant is convinced that the separation of powers is a better way to ensure the equality and freedom of all citizens, while in the democracy as Rousseau defines it, popular vote could overturn the rights of one individual and could thereby become despotic. In this first definite article, Kant builds the republic on the notion of free and autonomous individuals who set rules to ensure that all citizens will be treated according to these jointly formulated rules (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 11-17). The building blocks of these Kantian republics are, therefore, not the institutions but the individuals that create these institutions based on reasonability, something that resonates with his ethical thought (Wood, 1999, pp. 319-320).

Kant suggests in his second definite article (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 17-24) that states will create a *foedus pacificum* together, a league of nations that together will protect and guarantee the freedom of every state. Kant thereby transposes his ideas

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[3] As a republic Kant did not conceptualize democracy in the same way as Rousseau. Kant wanted a republic to be based on a constitution that separated between executive and legislative powers, governed by representatives of the people. Generally this is understood by other liberals as closely related to contemporary liberal-democracies.

about the individual reasonability to the aggregate level of the state. He assumes that if most individuals would be reasonable, it would lead to states that would also behave reasonably. Subsequently, the reasonability that would be present among citizens of a republic could also exist among these republics. Also here, the initial building blocks of every republic start with the individuals within the states.

Lastly, in the third definite article (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 24-27), Kant articulates that a cosmopolitan law would have to apply to all republics, and should respect all other peoples and their autonomy. Stated differently: tolerance and reciprocity should be universal. Also in this article, Kant transposes the notion of an individual moral law to an assumed moral republican law within every republic that has been built by these moral law abiding individuals. As individuals become tolerant and trusting towards others through the use of pure reason, so would these republics, as externalized by their political republican leaders.

In the latter part of the booklet, Kant constructs (what he calls secret) articles in which he explains how the laws of nature will (willingly or not) force free and autonomous individuals to use their moral law (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 28-39). Furthermore, he discusses the ethics of politicians in relation to reasonability within this same framework (Kant, 1795/2013a, pp. 43-63). It seems that in these last pages, Kant tries to explain in a more simplified way his core reasoning how he sees the determined future of individuals that reach rationality through freedom, which in the end can lead to reasonability (Wood, 1999, pp. 295-296).

In Perpetual Peace, it seems that Kant attempts to formulate a shortcut for the moral learning process that, in his view, can result in a perpetual peace. Although in his core writings Kant emphasizes that moral learning is an inner and incremental process, the simplicity of this booklet tempts to speculate that Kant might have hoped that things could get speeded up. He does discuss how the notion of freedom and free will cannot guarantee reasonability, after all, when one is free it is possible to choose to ignore the moral law inside. However, Kant (and liberalism with him) is deterministic of nature. He states:

> Perpetual peace is guaranteed by no less an authority than the great artist Nature herself (natura daedala rerum). The mechanical process of nature vividly exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men, even against their will and indeed by means of their very discord (Kant, 1795/2013a, p. 28).

When democratic peace theorists refer to Kant, they tend not to get into the details of Kant's work, nor do they theorize their arguments clearly in connection to Kant's philosophy. After all, these ideas have been, like constructivists argue, deeply engrained within the Western culture since Enlightenment. Many Westerners believe, on some level, that liberal democracy (as a form of the Kantian republic) is a superior form of government in which individuals do become 'better people'.

Explanations for the democratic peace, democratic peace theory, are often implicitly but firmly rooted in this Kantian belief system. The theories base themselves on the assumption that specific regimes will affect individuals in their

beliefs and practices so that their behavior will alter over time. The theories build on the assumed expectation that individuals, who live in a liberal society where the rules of the game enable them to be free and autonomous, will be enforced to be tolerant, to trust and to reciprocate that tolerance and trust until it becomes a natural inclination. The expectation is that most, if not all, individuals will be socialized within this process and thereby reinforce a society that is inherently based on freedom, autonomy, tolerance, trust, and reciprocity of those values and norms. Democratic peace theory also assume that within other regime-types individuals are unable to escape their more primal impulses to survive: they still feel the need to fight and kill for their benefit. This assumed expectation originates from the notion that non-democratic regimes do not support their citizens to live free and autonomous lives, but rather support the primal impulses of their citizens because these governments engage themselves in zero-sum politics, and suppress or kill political opponents.

These assumptions underpin democratic peace theory inherently. Democratic peace scholars argue that democracies do not fight with other democracies because these regimes share similar socialization processes and therefore practices. With a reversed logic these scholars claim that liberal democracies sometimes have to go to war with other regime-types: liberal democracies will have to defend themselves against regimes that lack this socialization process and therefore practice. They believe that liberal democracy produces a genuinely different society than any other regime, and expect that liberal democracy has such an influence on its citizens that it can affect the outcome of an interstate conflict that otherwise would escalate into war.

This liberal belief system underpins most studies that argue that liberal democracy, in general, is causing the democratic peace. However, to get to a more precise and also empirically testable explanation, it is important to define what specific feature(s) of liberal democracy can explain the apparent difference in expected behavior. Liberal democracy is not tangible; it is a construction embedded in a complex network of formal and informal practices. There is little consensus among liberal researchers on what specific feature(s) of liberal democracy can explain the observed peace. Largely, there are two kinds of explanations: the institutional (or sometimes called structural) explanation and the normative (sometimes called cultural) explanation. The latter explanation overlaps with the constructivist explanation because the notion of liberal norms shaping behavior is also part of the constructivist argument, as will be discussed below.

Democratic Institutions

Proponents of the institutional explanation argue that individuals will be more peaceful when they have to bear the (material and physical) costs of war themselves. When they live in a liberal democracy, so the argument goes, they have, through the use of democratic institutions, actual power to constrain political leaders that might want to go to war. Democratic leaders, who need to be (re-)elected, will take the wishes of the public into account and this way democratic citizens can control their

leaders. This latter mechanism is also called audience costs. However, how this mechanism precisely works, and through which institutions it works, is unclear. Many authors have hypothesized different institutional mechanisms, however based on the same assumption. Table 2.2 gives an overview of the indicators that are used to back up these explanations.

Firstly, some scholars argue that, because two liberal democracies in conflict will both rely on the existence of a peaceful audience that has democratic institutions to control their leaders, the result of that conflict will be an "amelioration of the security dilemma" (Fearon, 1994, p. 578).

Table 2.2 Explanations related to institutions

Indicators institutional explanation	Authors (year)
Mutual democratic institutional constraints	Huth & Allee (2002) Maoz & Russett (1993) Reiter & Tillman (2002) Rousseau (2005 Morgan & Campbell (1991)
Incomplete information	Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman (1992) Fearon (1994) Schultz (1999) Maoz & Russett (1993)
Audience costs	Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson & Smith (1999) Gelpi & Griesdorf (2001) Grieco & Gelpi (2011) Huth (2000) Huth & Allee (2002)
Large selectorate	Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson & Smith (2004)
Small/no coalition cabinet	Kaarbo (2012)

Fearon (1994) argues that in an interstate conflict, states try to assess the threat posed by other countries. Due to imperfect information, leaders will try to understand the behavior of other leaders to comprehend their intentions. He assumes that democratic leaders will be more careful to threaten other countries with war because their audience costs are higher than in other types of regimes. If democratic leaders make a threat, they will be held accountable. They will, therefore, be less likely to express a threat than autocratic leaders who have less to lose because they do not have similar audience costs. This notion is not only assumed to restrain the actual

behavior of democracies but also to provide other states with information about conflict behavior. If leaders want to mobilize support from the opposition or the public for a possible war, they will need time, which can be guaranteed by institutions. If two democracies are on the brink of war, the leaders of both democracies will know from each other that they are constrained. This knowledge buys the leaders extra time to try to solve the issues, which results in peaceful conflict resolution (Huth & Allee, 2002; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 626; Reiter & Tillman, 2002; Rousseau, 2005, pp. 20-21). These scholars expect that liberal democracies will only feel the need to go to war with non-democracies because they want to make sure that the other party will not take advantage of their peacefulness (Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 626). In other words: democracies only fight if aggressive (read: non-democratic) states force them.

These ideas are reflected in most studies into the institutional explanation for the democratic peace, although the ideas about which particular institution creates which particular mechanism vary. Schultz (1999) focuses on the transparency of information within democracies and has argued, in line with Fearon, that democracies are more careful in starting wars because they try to avoid misunderstandings about their intentions. Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith (1999) argue that democratic leaders are more selective when it comes to picking wars. Because of the audience costs, they will only start a war if their victory is ensured. The political costs that come from going to war and a failure to win a war will cost democratic leaders the support of the democratic audience. Therefore, these leaders will avoid war as much as possible, an argument that was supported by many authors (e.g. Gelpi & Griesdorf, 2001; Grieco & Gelpi, 2011; Huth, 2000; Huth & Allee, 2002; Morgan & Schwebach, 1992; Reiter & Tillman, 2002; Rousseau, 2005). The selectorate theory of Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith (2004) claims that when a state has a large winning coalition (such as in a democracy where many votes are needed to come to political power), the leaders will have to produce public goods to reward their supporters. But when a state has a small winning coalition (such as in an autocracy), the leaders can reward supporters with private goods. That will make the supporters from the latter coalition less critical and more loyal: it is important for them to support the powers that be for their benefit. In a large winning coalition, this works differently: because these supporters are more likely to defect they will be more critical of the leaders. The result is that in a country in which the selectorate relies on a large willing coalition, the leaders will be more careful.

These studies focus indeed on the presence of the mentioned different democratic institutions. However, the instrumentally used assumption is that individuals do not want war because they have to bear the physical and material costs of war themselves, and their political leaders do not. When they indeed have the power to decide over these matters, like in a democracy, they will become peaceful, whether or not this is due to the socialized liberal democratic norms. This assumption is, however, not tested by studying the institutions; an actual presence of an institution does not, by definition, capture the proposed causal mechanism. An

institution is expected to function in a certain way and whether or not this is the case is an empirical question.

Empirical evidence shows that this assumption does not find support: several studies show that individuals, also those living in democracies, are prepared to go to war when they believe the cause is right (see e.g. DeRouen, 2000; Gartner & Segura, 1998; Morgan & Anderson, 1999; Tir, 2010). More recent empirical findings show that the logic underlying theories of audience costs does not find support within democracies (Kertzer & Brutger, 2016).

Moreover, the logic of this assumption is weak. Why would political leaders be so much more war prone than their citizens? If that would be the case, then the normative argument (see in more detail below) that claims that most, if not all, individuals within a liberal democracy strongly endorse liberal norms would be invalid. After all, also politicians must have been socialized with these norms. Moreover, even when there would be such a pattern of war prone politicians versus peaceful citizens, empirical studies show that autocratic audiences are also of influence on foreign policy decision-making of the autocratic elite (Weeks, 2012). Another, but in this regard also relevant, empirical finding is that autocratic regimes cannot be 'black boxed' in their war proneness; different types of autocratic regimes vary in their conflict initiation (Peceny, Beer, & Sanchez-Terry, 2002; Weeks, 2008, 2012). A lot more research should be done to see if there are indeed differences between autocratic and democratic leaders.

The institutional explanation argues that leaders of liberal democracies are different from leaders of other regime-types because of the restraining institutions. As elaborated above, the assumption that underpins this explanation is empirically unsupported. It is thus insufficient to conclude without empirical testing that existing institutions fulfill their assumed task. We need to study leaders in relation to institutions, instead of studying institutions and assume that these evidently function as prescribed by normative theories.

A small body of work nuances the expectations of the institutional explanation, and focuses on the effect institutions might have on political leaders. Morgan and Campbell (1991) do not find support for the argument that democratic structures are responsible for a decrease in the probability of war between states. Their results show that the higher the decisional constraint is on leaders of major powers, the less likely these leaders will opt for war. However, when states are minor powers, a reverse effect is noticeable. Based on their results that there is more variation between democracies than expected, and the expectation that this variation is probably caused by interactions of different factors that influence these democratic leaders, Morgan and Campbell reject the structural explanation. They suggest that the political culture of democracies must be of greater influence on the peace between democracies, and that, moreover, the composition of the administration might also matter.

That latter insight is taken up by Kaarbo (2012) who investigates how coalition politics affects foreign policy decision-making. She finds that the expectation that coalition cabinets (due to multiple restraints) create more moderate foreign policies does not find support. Coalition cabinets turn out to be more extreme in their policy

outcomes: the higher the number of parties in a coalition, the riskier and more threatening the behavior of the coalition is. Kaarbo offers empirical evidence that attributes this behavior to the diffusion of responsibility and accountability that comes with such largely based coalitions (Kaarbo, 2012, pp. 236-241). Elman (2000) tries to unpack the different kinds of democratic regimes based on the institutional buildup for decision-making and finds that the institutional package of a democracy does not influence the decision-making process of the elite, but rather the preferences and interests of the decision-making elites. Her suggestion[4], therefore, is to study elite behavior to understand a bit more about possible domestic influences on foreign policy. Elman's suggestion points to a neo-classical realist notion: the influence of the interests and preferences of individuals. What these studies show is that within institutions individuals decide, often differently than theoretically expected. To investigate the institutional explanation of the democratic peace, we need to study the behavior of the decision-makers, and their interaction with these institutions, rather than the institutions themselves.

Liberal norms

The core argument of the so-called 'normative explanation' is that liberal democracies have a practice of liberal norms, which leads to trust and compromise within these regimes. Because liberal democracies share these norms with other liberal democracies, the theory also assumes that trust and compromise exist *between* liberal democracies (Danilovic & Clare, 2007; Dixon, 1994; Dixon & Senese, 2002, p. 549; Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Jakobsen, Jakobsen, & Ekevold, 2016; Johns & Davies, 2012; Kahl, 1998; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Mousseau, 1997; Owen, 1994; Rawls, 1999; Ray, 1995; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Rousseau, 2005, pp. 27-28; Rummel, 1983; Tomz & Weeks, 2013; Van Belle, 1997; Weart, 1998, pp. 75-93). The practices within all other regime-types (by democratic peace scholars referred to as non-democracies) are intrinsically more violent, due to the lack of these liberal norms, so the theory assumes. In the words of the most cited proponents of this explanation:

> Political conflicts in democracies are resolved through compromise rather than through elimination of opponents. This norm allows for an atmosphere of "live and let live" that results in a fundamental sense of stability at the personal, communal, and national level [.....] Political conflicts in nondemocratic regimes are more likely to be conducted and resolved through violence and coercion. This norm creates an atmosphere of mistrust and fear within and outside the government. (Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625)

Thus, following the normative explanation, liberal democracies are 'forced' to fight with non-democracies because of the lack of liberal norms of the latter. Liberal democracies will, therefore, have to adapt to the more violent norms of the non-democratic states (Kahl, 1998, pp. 125-129; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625; Rousseau, 2005, pp. 27-28; Russett, 1993b, pp. 32-33).

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[4] Elman is therefore included in table 2.5 and not in table 2.2

The theoretical justification for this assumed mechanism remains mostly unexplained in depth by Maoz and Russett (and many scholars with them, see e.g.Choi, 2010; Danilovic & Clare, 2007; Doyle, 1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1997, 2005; Oneal, Oneal, Maoz, & Russett, 1996; Owen, 1994; Risse-Kappen, 1991, 1995; Russett, 1993b; Russett & Oneal, 2001; Van Belle, 1997; Ward, Siverson, & Cao, 2007), besides a reference to the work of Kant. Although these studies refer to Kant, the theory sections do not clearly discuss what liberal Kantian norms precisely are, they do not theoretically elaborate how these norms relate causally to the observed peace, and they do not conceptualize liberal norms. Most immediately proceed to the operationalization. However, as will be explained more thoroughly below, the indicators these studies use to operationalize liberal norms do not measure liberal norms but rely on the expectation that the hypothesized liberal norms are present within liberal democracies.

Table 2.3 Explanations related to liberal democratic norms

Indicators normative explanation	Authors (year)
Regime stability & Political deaths	Maoz & Russett (1993)
Freedom house ratings	Dixon (1994) Dixon & Senese (2002) Mousseau (1997)
Press freedom	Van Belle (1997) Danilovic & Clare (2007)
Trust based on shared institutions and norms	Owen (1994)
Shared liberal identity	Kahl (1998) Risse-Kappen (1991, 1995) Weart (1998)
Shared liberal norms	Mintz & Geva (1993) Geva & Hanson (1999) Rousseau (2005) Johns & Davies (2012) Tomz & Weeks (2013) Jakobsen et al. (2016)

Maoz and Russett's (1993) measure for liberal norms is seen as "the best measure of political norms used to date" (Rousseau, 2005, p. 208). They operationalize the thinly defined concept of liberal norms by measuring the stability of a regime, combined with the number of political deaths in a regime. However plausible that measure might seem, it does not actually measure the presence of liberal norms; it only

assumes that the presence of liberal norms will create higher stability in a regime and will decrease political deaths. It is a proxy that seems tautological: their measure is an assumed effect of norms, which are assumed present. It does not measure liberal norms directly.

Others authors use proxies that are just as distant from an actual measure of liberal norms. For instance, they use institutional arrangements that are expected to breed liberal norms as proxies; freedom of press, civil rights, and legal equality (whether or not as measured by Freedom House) to name a few (Danilovic & Clare, 2007; Dixon, 1993; Dixon & Senese, 2002; Jakobsen et al., 2016; Mousseau, 1997; Van Belle, 1997). The proxies are also problematic; the presence of the norms are assumed and not measured, so we still do not know whether or not norms are of effect. Jakobsen et al. (2016) attempted to measure the norm of tolerance, and study its influence on the bellicosity of individuals. However, they do not investigate whether or not tolerance interacts with regime-type, as expected by the normative explanation. Therefore, their argument that individuals within democracies are more bellicose than individuals within other regime-types remains empirically unsupported.

Others use anecdotal evidence to show that liberal norms are applied by the leaders of liberal democracies during interstate conflicts. These scholars argue that mutual democratic institutions and shared liberal norms create a shared identity which would function as a token of trust that they can work out any conflict peacefully (Kahl, 1998; Owen, 1994; Risse-Kappen, 1991, 1995; Weart, 1998). These studies also aggregate an assumed effect of institutions and norms as the evidence that liberal norms (in the form of a liberal identity) exist, which affect the war-proneness of political leaders and subsequently their behavior.

The studies above can convincingly show that a correlation exists between the absence of war and liberal democracies. However, the evidence does not demonstrate convincingly that liberal norms exist at large among individuals – including the political elite- within liberal democracies, and are of the assumed effect. The aggregation of an assumed effect is problematic because the theoretical justification rests on a socialization process that is assumed to create liberal norms at the individual level first and foremost.

A small body of empirical work does that exactly. It studies the mechanism of the democratic peace at the individual level with the use of experiments. Mintz and Geva (1993) conduct experiments among US students, US nonstudents, and Israeli students to investigate if there is a different response to an invasion by a neighboring state (of their own country) when participants know that the foreign invasion is initiated either by democratic demand or by a dictator. They find that the opposing state is in any case perceived as a 'bad guy', irrespective of the regime-type. Moreover, the results show that the participants are more willing to attack the opponent if led by a dictator. Moreover, the participants would see an attack on another democracy as a policy failure. Based on these results, Mintz and Geva argue that leaders within democracies would have little incentives to start a war with another democracy, which might explain the democratic peace. They also found that regime-type does not

affect the participants to opt for a different policy option, such as a blockade or to take no action at all. Their results, moreover, show no significant difference between student samples and nonstudent (non-representative) samples.

Geva and Hanson (1999) conduct a somewhat similar experiment among US students and use a hypothetical scenario with hypothetical countries (instead of the real countries from which participants originate) in an interstate conflict. They do not measure democracy and autocracy directly; they use the perception of the other state based on socio-cultural characteristics. They find that a perception of cultural similarity leads citizens to assign their adversary a democratic status, similar to their own. On top of that, these participants are less likely to support an attack if they perceive the other country as a democracy. In their conclusion, Geva and Hanson thus indicate that the democratic peace could very well be less associated to regime-type, and more to the notion of in-group and out-group, based on socio-cultural similarities.

Using an experimental approach among US students, Rousseau (2005) also tests whether democratic individuals are more inclined to work out a severe interstate conflict peacefully if the opponent has a democratically elected president instead of a military dictator. He also measures the effect of a larger and a smaller military capacity in comparison to the opponent. His findings show that the participants are more inclined to use force towards the dictator than towards the democratic president. Moreover, he finds that relying on a higher military capacity than the opponent would also have a significant influence on the willingness to use force.

Tomz and Weeks (2013) conduct a similar experiment among representative samples of US and British citizens. They test the impact of regime-type, alliances and military capacity to assess whether the participants are more willing to attack an autocracy over a democracy during a conflict over nuclear capabilities. Their findings indicate that the threat perception of the respondents is much higher when the other state is autocratic and that they are therefore significantly more willing to attack a nuclear installation of that state. They moreover find that the participants would find it more immoral to attack a democracy than an autocracy.

Johns and Davies (2012) also use survey experiments in the US and Britain and show that these citizens are, in a similar conflict situation, significant more willingly to attack a dictatorship than a democratic state. They furthermore find that participants are more willing to attack an Islamic state than a Christian state. Besides the experimental treatments, they also inquire whether different levels of nationalism, authoritarianism, and social dominance influence the willingness to attack and find that these actor-based factors had a significant influence.

These studies seem to, more or less, support the theoretical claim that individuals who live in a liberal democracy are less willing to go to war with another liberal democracy. All participants are living in liberal-democracies, and therefore it might seem that individuals within liberal democracies are indeed more peaceful towards other liberal democracies than towards autocracies. It might indicate that these responses could, on an aggregate level, explain the democratic peace.

The question is, however, whether or not these empirical tests have indeed tested for the causal mechanism of the democratic peace. At the core of the normative explanation lies the assumption that the specific regime-type of liberal democracy socializes its individual members (mass and elite alike) with liberal democratic norms. Norms that inspire them to resolve political conflicts peacefully. At the core of that explanation also lies the specific assumption that individual members of non-democracies (basically all other regime-types) lack this socialization process. This logic is also assumed applicable on an aggregated level. If a conflict between two democracies reaches the brink of war, liberal norms are assumed to guide the behavior of these states. The two democracies will not fight, even when the conflict is serious and severe (Danilovic & Clare, 2007; Dixon, 1994; Dixon & Senese, 2002, p. 549; Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Jakobsen et al., 2016; Johns & Davies, 2012; Kahl, 1998; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Mousseau, 1997; Owen, 1994; Rawls, 1999; Ray, 1995; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Rousseau, 2005, pp. 27-28; Rummel, 1983; Tomz & Weeks, 2013; Van Belle, 1997; Weart, 1998, pp. 75-93).

Maoz & Russett (1993) refer to Kant to justify the mechanism they hypothesize. Although they mention Kant explicitly, they do not refer to specific pages in Kant's collection of work but to the work of Michael Doyle (Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625). Doyle has translated the work of Kant for the field of international relations into a plea for liberal democracies to come to perpetual peace (Doyle, 1983a, 1983b, 1986; 1997, p. 300; 2005). However, also Doyle does not specify the concept of liberal norms, nor does he specify a specific mechanism. He only describes an assumed functioning of norms of peaceful behavior:

> We can speculate that the process might work something like this: The leaders and publics of domestically just republics, which rest on consent, presume foreign republics to be also consensual, just and therefore deserving of accommodation. The experience of cooperation helps engender further cooperative behavior when the consequences of state policy are unclear but (potentially) mutually beneficial. At the same time, Liberal states assume that non Liberal governments are perceived to be in a state of aggression with their own people, their foreign relations become for Liberal governments deeply suspect (Doyle, 1997, p. 282).

Just like the quote of Maoz and Russett above (1993, p. 625), this quote also shows an expectation about the norms of liberal democracy, i.e. the norms of peaceful conflict resolution: these are expected to grow among individuals who are raised within a liberal democracy, but not among individuals that grow up in another kind of regime. These authors base their expectations on the belief that something special happens only within a liberal democracy; individuals learn to be morally better people. This belief in the 'moral learning' process is also reflected in the work of contemporary Kantian philosopher John Rawls. He argues that if individuals live long enough under the rules of a self-established reasonably just constitutional democracy, they will internalize these rules as intrinsic norms (Rawls, 1999, pp. 12-14). These rules rely on freedom and equality for each citizen, tolerance of each other and reciprocity of these rules. Living under these rules over the years will then also create interpersonal trust

between these citizens (Rawls, 1999, pp. 13-16, 22-23), something he calls a necessary psychological process (Rawls, 1999, p. 44). The same Rawls expects to occur between peoples of reasonably just constitutional democracies when they make similar rules that reflect freedom and equality for every citizen, tolerance, and reciprocity, but now applied to the relations between the peoples:

> Thus, when the Law of Peoples is honored by peoples over a certain period of time [......] these peoples tend to develop mutual trust and confidence in one another. Moreover, these peoples see those norms as advantageous for themselves and for those they care for, and therefore as time goes on they tend to accept that law as an ideal of conduct. (Rawls, 1999, p. 44)

And:

> Liberal peoples are not inflamed by what Rousseau diagnosed as arrogant or wounded pride or by lack of due self-respect. Their self-respect rests on the freedom and integrity of their citizens and the justice and decency of their domestic political and social institutions. It rests also on the achievements of their public and civic culture. All these things are rooted in their civic society [.......] when liberal peoples do go to war, it is only with unsatisfied societies or outlaw states. (Rawls, 1999, p. 48)

The bottom line is: liberal norms are assumed to be present within liberal democracies and absent in countries with other regime-types. Although it might seem plausible to assume liberal norms to be present among individuals in liberal democracies, to argue that these norms are functioning as 'a law of nature' (Hayes, 2012, p. 775) seems to be at least tautological. This assumption, therefore, should be treated as an empirical question (Hermann & Kegley, 1995, p. 19), rather than an instrumental assumption that black-boxes a whole population into a homogenous mass. As studies of political norms and values show, norms, values and attitudes vary significantly within and between societies (see e.g. Almond & Verba, 1963, pp. 22-33; Chilton, 1987; Ronald Inglehart, 1988, 2003; Ronald Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Jackman & Miller, 1996; Putnam, 1993; Pye, 1972; Seligson, 2002; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2013; Widmaier, 2005).

The experimental studies discussed above do not test this mechanism. First of all, these studies are conducted within liberal democracies (mainly the US and the UK), so there is still evidence lacking from other regime-types. While the democratic peace theory implies that there must be a difference between individuals growing up in liberal democracies and other regimes, there is no evidence to suggest that this is indeed the case. It might be possible that these results would be the same for samples of nondemocratic populations as well, but this remains an empirical question until the results of democracies will be compared with similar experiments conducted on individuals that have grown up in nondemocratic settings. Secondly, in none of the cases, it is measured whether the liberal norms, which are so intrinsically part of the normative explanation, are indeed present. In each of these studies is assumed that citizens of liberal democracies differ from others because of the expected presence of liberal norms. It is impossible to argue that the normative explanation is backed by empirical evidence because the empirical tests are only conducted within liberal democracies.

In a previous study (Bakker, 2017), I considered these points of criticism. In an experimental setting, I tested the effect of regime-type on the support for war, and compared the results of individuals socialized within an autocratic regime (the People's Republic of China) and individuals socialized within a liberal democracy (The Netherlands). Moreover, I measured the level of liberal norms of these individuals and tested for the assumed influence of these norms on the support for war. The comparison between samples of different regime-types shows to be valuable. First of all, the results show that liberal norms are not exclusively present within a liberal democracy. Although there is a slight significant difference, on average, between the Chinese and the Dutch participants, the Chinese participants in this study show similarly varying patterns of levels of liberal norms as the Dutch participants. More importantly, the liberal norms do not have any influence on the support for war of both samples. When the most important factor, regime-type, is investigated without the consideration of the other factors, it shows that indeed it has a significant influence on the Dutch participants: they are more likely to want to go to war with an autocracy than with a democracy. However, in comparison with the Chinese group, it shows that the Chinese participants' support for war is comparable to the support for war of the Dutch participants *with democracies*. In other words: because the Chinese participants are more peaceful toward all regime-types, the comparison shows that the Dutch participants are not more peaceful toward other democracies, but rather more war-prone toward autocracies. However, within a multivariate analysis, the effect of regime-type fades out and shows to have no significant influence. The multivariate analysis also considers the threat of the conflict, and personal characteristics of the participants and shows that the hawkishness of an individual can explain why they support war. Moreover, it indicates that the threat of the conflict is the key indicator for the support for war.

This latter study confirms the arguments above: it is important it is to follow the logic of the normative explanation and test its assumptions first. Furthermore, it indicates that the threat of a conflict needs examination as a possible explanatory factor. Earlier experimental work has not varied for the threat of the conflict, nor the possible interaction with other factors. Instead, the threat of the conflict was held constant without checking the perception of threat and its potential influence on the outcomes of the study. By keeping threat constant, it is hard to entangle the actual effect of regime-type without understanding the relationship between the regime-type and the perception of threat.

Based on these insights, an empirical test of the normative explanation would have to measure the actual presence or absence of liberal norms within liberal democracies and within non-democracies, and then test whether these norms influence the willingness of individuals to go to war. Moreover, a comparison should be made between samples of different regime-types to see whether or not there is a different effect on this willingness depending on the regime-type of the opposing country. Furthermore, the perception of threat should be considered more systematically in relation to the factors that do construct threat.

2.2.2. Realist and other system-level explanations

On the other side of the debate stand scholars that argue that the democratic peace can be explained by a factor collinear with democracy. These scholars are often, however not always, of the realist school of international relations. Realists often claim their theories to be explanatory and describe the world by the 'objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau, 1978, pp. 1-2) and are therefore not normative (see Bell, 2002, pp. 221-222). However, recent literature has argued that realism can be considered to be a belief system and that it is not free of ideological bias (Bell, 2002; Kertzer & McGraw, 2012; Oren, 2009).

Realists belong to a large but closely related family of scholars, that ranges from classical realists (e.g. Morgenthau, 1978), neo- (or structural) realists (e.g. Jervis, 1976; Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1967) to neo-classical realists (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009; Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2010). Although their ideas vary, they share three core assumptions (Gilpin, 1986). They all have a pessimistic view of human nature and believe the world we lve in to be full of conflict. They, moreover, all consider states to be the central actors within an anarchic international system, and as a consequence of that anarchy, they lastly believe actors to have to rely on self-help to survive, which creates an enduring struggle for power between actors (Gilpin, 1986, pp. 304-305). This set of assumptions forms a framework that resonates with the classical realist belief in a Hobbesian world, in which the state of nature causes *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all). In the state of nature, people can and will take whatever they want unless their passions are tamed by a sovereign (Hobbes, 1651/2006, pp. 161-166). Everybody is a threat. For neo-realists, these ideas about human nature are transposed to the behavior of states that, as unitary actors, have to deal with each other in the state of nature: the anarchic international system. States struggle for power, and until a state is powerful enough, it perceives other states as threatening. The most recent strand of neo-classical realists, also, emphasizes the importance of domestic politics as an intervening variable on foreign policy decisions within the dominant influence of the international system. Influences of domestic politics (such as public opinion, interest groups, and industry) can alter a perception of threat between states (Lobell et al., 2009). When studying the democratic peace from a realist perspective, the relative power position between states is more important than regime-type. In other words: realists expect an imbalance in state capacities will have a bigger influence on the outcome of an interstate conflict than regime-type.

The realist belief system underpins a body of studies into an explanation for the democratic peace. This particular group of studies does not deny the empirical regularity, but they do contend that the relationship between democracy and peace is spurious, due to collinearity of democracy with other explanatory factors. Many of them (besides neo-classical realists) argue that an explanation cannot be found within the domestic regimes of states, but can be found at a higher level of analysis. The theoretical argument is that all states need to survive in the anarchic international system, whether they are democratic or not (Waltz, 1967, 2000). States are constantly under the threat of other states becoming stronger: they are forced to

play the game of power politics that is blind to the regime-types of these states because only survival counts (Mearsheimer, 2001). Neo-classical realists do not specifically differ from this line of thinking but do consider domestic processes in their studies to explain why states behave in a certain way in response to threats (Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009).

Empirical work, based on this theoretical reasoning, tries to bring to light the validity of those arguments and show what system-level explanatory factor might be responsible for the democratic peace. These studies state that factors, collinear with democracy, might be responsible for the empirical regularity, such as common interests, military alliances, strategic interests, geographical proximity, economic interdependence, the Cold War, capitalism, modernization, power politics (e.g.Elman, 1997, 2000; Farber & Gowa, 1995, 1997; Gat, 2005; Geis, Brock, & Müller, 2006; Geis & Wagner, 2011; Gowa, 1999, 2011; Layne, 1994; Rosato, 2003; Waltz, 2000). Most of these scholars argue that the regime-type of a state is irrelevant. Instead, they focus on system-level explanations.

The notion of the balance of power is conceptualized and empirically tested by several authors. Farber and Gowa (1995, 1997; 1999) argue that common interests between Western states during the Cold War have caused peace between these states instead of their common polities. These shared interests, developed during the Cold War, have tied befriended allies together, resulting in a long-term interest-based peace between these states (Gowa, 2011).

For these authors, the Cold War was the condition that forced states to cooperate or not. Common interests decreased the perception of threat between states. Rosato (2003) argues, in line with Farber and Gowa, that the dominance of the US over the Americas and Europe since the end of the WW II is of great importance; the efforts of the US to maintain an European peace through the encouragement of economic and military alliances during the Cold War remains until today. Rosato thereby echoes the neo-realist thought of Waltz (2000), who argues that states conduct power politics within an anarchic international system. Within the unipolar system that rose since the end of the Cold War, the US dictates all relations between Western states, thereby reducing the threat due to the balance of power.

Layne (1994) argues, through the example of four case studies in which democratic states stand on the brink of war with other democracies, that it was not the common democratic norms that withheld these states from attacking each other, but matters of prudence in the light of national interests that were at stake. Judgment calls on the military capacity of the other party or the realization that others could take advantage from an occurring war withheld these democratic states from war, not their shared set of norms. Layne furthermore argued that the democratic peace thesis does not consider important factors in matters of war and peace such as military strength, country size, population size, and region. These are all factors that can influence the threat from one state to another. He, therefore, poses the question whether or not a reversed causality might be at work: states that have to exist in a less threatening external environment might more easily develop into a democracy than countries that live under constant external threat (Layne, 1994, pp. 44-45).

Table 2.4 Explanations related to system-level factors

Indicators for system-level effects	Authors (year)
Common interests during Cold war	Farber & Gowa (1995, 1997) Gowa (1999, 2011)
Hegemonic position of USA	Rosato (2003)
Power politics	Waltz (2000
Strategic interests	Layne (1994)
Geographical proximity	Thompson (1996) Gibler (2007) Kacowitz (1995) Henderson (2004) James, Park & Choi (2006)
Modernity	Gat (2005)
Capitalism	Mousseau, Hegre & Oneal (2003) Hegre (2000) Gartzke (2007) Gartzke & Weisiger (2014) Gleditsch (2008)
Trade networks	Dorussen & Ward (2010)

The influence of geopolitical pressures is often brought up as a relevant explanatory factor (Thompson, 1996) to mediate the perception of threat between states. Others argue that proximity, for instance, or geographical distance plays a role. They claim that states are conservative powers and like the status quo that subsequently leads to a zone of peace (but not necessarily constituted of democracies) (Gibler, 2007; Kacowicz, 1995). A related argument is that experience with the neighboring countries in a region explains the lack of conflict between neighboring states (Henderson, 2004; James, Park, & Choi, 2006).

There are also non-realist scholars who argue that system-level factors are the dominant explanation for the observed peace instead of state-level or individual level factors. These explanations take specific structures at system-level as the core of their explanation. One of those comes from Gat (2005), who contends that the expansion of industrial and technological power in the Western world has initiated economic growth, which subsequently created interdependent and therefore peaceful relationships. He argues that this process affects democracies as well as other regime-types. He acknowledges that countries often stand on the path of democratization, but argues that this path exists of a complex interaction of industrialization,

technological innovation, and economic growth, or said differently: modernization. Similarly, Hegre (2000), and Mousseau, Hegre and Oneal (2003) argue that it is the wealth of countries rather than the nature of the regime that causes the democratic peace, an argument that was echoed by Gartzke (2007; Gartzke & Weisiger, 2014). He contends that the interdependent capitalistic economic structure has caused peace, independent of regime-types. Gartzke's argument is supported by a study of Gleditsch (2008), with the difference that the latter author argues that economic liberalism is the driving force. Where Gartzke argues that capitalist peace is not the same as democratic peace, Gleditsch argues that it is indeed a liberal peace. Dorussen and Ward (2010) support that argument and show that trade networks are a pacifying power between democratic states since WWII. Although the details differ, the main argument of these studies is that economic interdependence between states mediates the perception of threat between these states.

The common denominator from these studies and the realist explanations is that they expect that a particular structural effect on the aggregated system-level affects the behavior of states. However, as argued above, to see whether these structures influence the willingness to go to war, we need to study the influence of these structures on the decision-makers.

2.3 Individuals matter

Within social sciences, we often use assumptions instrumentally to test our theories. Due to the nature of social reality, it is almost inevitable not to do so. However, these assumptions need to be stated and used explicitly and need to be disentangled from the actual theoretical explanation. In the case of democratic peace research, the assumptions used have created a tautological effect: the assumptions are part of the explanation although these are empirical questions (Gates, Knutsen, & Moses, 1996; Kegley & Hermann, 1995, p. 19; Kertzer, 2017). Democratic peace theory is in the first place founded on assumptions about individuals who are affected by the liberal democratic regime they live in, in contrast to individuals who have not have lived in a democracy. It is important to test these assumtpions first, before we build our theories on them.

Political psychologists argue that the dynamics of international relations can (partly) be explained by theories of political psychology. They claim that the personal psychology of individuals (e.g. decision-makers and political leaders), and psychological processes between individuals (e.g. group dynamics or the forming of public opinion) and/or groups of individuals need studying in order to come to a comprehensive understanding of events and phenomena in international relations (see e.g. Hermann, 1980, 2005; Hermann & Hagan, 1998; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann & Kegley, 1995; Hermann, Preston, Korany, & Shaw, 2001; Herrmann, 2013; Herrmann, Voss, Schooler, & Ciarrochi, 1997; Holsti, 1962, 1970; Holsti & Rosenau, 1988; Janis, 1982; Jervis, 1976, 2006, 2017; Kaarbo & Hermann,

1998; Kegley & Hermann, 1995; Kowert & Hermann, 1997; Lebow, 1981; McDermott, 2004).

The current research builds on that argument. It takes an agency-based position and studies the decision-making process of individuals during an interstate conflict. It, moreover, tests which factors (structure-based or not) are of influence on the decision-making of these individuals. The main reason for this approach is that the decision to go to war or not, "the locus of decision-making" lies at the individual level (Kegley & Hermann, 1995, p. 10). That does not imply we should study only psychological factors that can influence decision-making, nor does it imply that various system-level and state-level factors can and do not influence decision-making. The point is: all factors are in the first place perceived and assessed by individuals (Hermann, 2001, p. 48; Horowitz, Stam, & Ellis, 2015). States are often assumed to act as if they are a unitary actor and although that assumption can help to simplify explanatory theories, it does no justice to the complexity of what a state empirically entails. The state does not notice shifts in power relations, or perceive similar identities or specific threat, nor does the state decide how to respond to these shifts, identities or threats. The individuals who direct the state do: they notice, perceive and decide. The bottom line is that at the helm of every state stands a captain (or a team of steersmen and a captain): individuals decide about the course of the state. The state's assessment of an interstate conflict thereby lies in the threat perception of individual decision-makers, who might be sensitive to different moderating[5] factors. Therefore, the process of threat perception must be analyzed at the individual level, before the output of that decision-making can be explained at an aggregate level.

Furthermore, as elaborated above, democratic peace theory is rooted in liberal belief systems about individuals and, in particular, the effect liberal democracy has on them. These assumed effects of liberal democracy on its citizens (mass and elite alike) and their subsequent behavior thus explicitly support the notion that individuals perceive, behave and decide as a homogeneous mass and that liberal society can be considered to be a black box. However, from the field of comparative politics, we learn that societies, also not liberal ones, are a black box. Studies of political culture show that individuals vary significantly within societies in pre-dispositions, personal characteristics and internalized norms (See for instance Almond & Verba, 1963, pp. 22-33; Chilton, 1987; Ronald Inglehart, 1988, 2003; Ronald Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Jackman & Miller, 1996; Putnam, 1993; Pye, 1972; Seligson, 2002; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2013). Thus, specific assumptions about individuals in relation to their political regimes are empirical questions first and only. If we want to understand how decision-makers assess the threat of an interstate conflict, we need to investigate the influence of contextual factors and the influence of personal beliefs and characteristics in one research design.

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[5] Please note that the word moderator (or verb: to moderate) is used in a methodological sense, it means: a factor that increases or decreases the effect/influence of another factor.

2.3.1 Individual level explanations

Only a few scholars study the democratic peace from a political psychological perspective. As discussed above, Elman (2000) argues that the interests and preferences of decision-makers play a major role in their decision-making process. This argument resonates with Hermann and Kegley (1995), who argue that the perceived threat of opposing countries, alongside with the leadership style of democratic elites might moderate decision-making processes. They, therefore, argue that democratic peace research should take these factors also into account when assessing elite responses to the assumed restrictions of liberal norms and democratic structures. Farnham (2003) argues that the perceived threat of a conflict is of most influence on the decision-making process. She shows, through a study of the leaders involved in the Munich Crisis, that different leaders perceive threat differently, and that also regime-type is perceived differently by democratic leaders. She argues for more research at the individual level, in which the personal characteristics of leaders are also taken into account, in particular in interaction with other factors (2003, pp. 412-413).

Table 2.5 Explanations related to decision-makers/political leaders

Leaders are influenced by	Authors (year)
Own preferences and interests	Elman (2000)
Leadership style	Hermann & Kegley (1995)
Own threat perception	Farnham (2003) Owen (1994)
Leadership Style	Keller (2005)
Belief systems	Schafer & Walker (2006) Bakker (2017)

Keller (2005), who seconds that finding, also builds on the framework of Hermann and Kegley and tests the impact of leadership style, and its interaction with regime-type. He finds that the perceptions and beliefs of democratic leaders are of significant influence on conflict situations. Leaders vary significantly, depending on leadership style, threat perception, and belief system, in the way they respond to constraints. They also differ in their response to regime-types. He concludes that the influence of regime-type is thus contingent on leadership style. Schafer and Walker (2006) study the operational codes of US President Clinton and British Prime Minister Blair in relation to the Kosovo conflict. They find that the belief systems of these leaders are affecting their cooperative behavior differently, in particular towards non-democracies. Toward other democracies it seemed that their beliefs had less impact;

they both showed similar cooperative behavior. The results of a study by Johns and Davies (2012) shows that images based on religion and culture have a significant effect on the willingness to attack an opponent. Regime-type turns out to have a much smaller, however significant, effect. It is of importance to note that Johns and Davies control for individually based beliefs (Johns & Davies, 2012, pp. 1044-1045). Although the authors do not highlight or discuss the results; nationalism, authoritarianism, and social dominance show to be of highly significant effect on the willingness to attack. Individually based beliefs and characteristics seem to matter. These finding resonates with my study (Bakker, 2017) that shows that decision-makers who have more hawkish beliefs are significantly more willing to use force than decision-makers that are more dovish.

2.4 Individuals under threat

This dissertation studies individual decision-makers who are socialized within different regime-types and investigates what factors influence their decision to attack the opposing country during an interstate conflict. The research centers on the perceived threat of an interstate conflict of decision-makers with as leading research question: *What influences decision-makers to decide to attack another country when they are on the brink of war?* This study considers the possible influence of democratic institutions and liberal norms. Moreover, it expands the focus to other possible influential factors by using the perception of threat of decision-makers as an overarching concept.

After all, democratic peace theory posits that liberal democracy in some way affects decision-makers to behave more peaceful towards other democracies. The empirical finding of the democratic peace is an *ex-post* ascertainment. Explanations that claim that liberal democracy is the explanatory factor for the democratic peace search for a mechanism prior to the occurrence of peace. They thus argue that something *ex-ante* of a possible war must have happened to avoid that war. Their argument implies that there must have been a conflict to begin with that could have led to war, but it did not because both states were democratic. Their argument can not be that there was no war to begin with (because both states were democratic). Such an argument would seriously undermine the causal logic of their explanation: if there was no conflict severe enough to start a war, why would the democratic peace differ from any other peace between states? Wars, after all, do not occur that frequently and need a severe conflict between states before they break loose, if at all.

Proponents of the democratic peace, in conclusion, do not posit an argument about peace; they posit an argument about the moderation of the factor liberal democracy on the threat of war in an interstate conflict. Just like adversaries of the democratic peace thesis argue that another factor moderates the threat of war in an interstate conflict.

If the democratic peace indeed exists because states are democratic, the evidence is needed to explain which and how particular aspects of democracy moderate a conflict from the brink of war towards peace. Similarly, if the democratic

peace does not exist, but is caused by other factors that are collinear with democracy, the evidence is also needed to explain how these factors moderate the severe conflict from the brink of war to peace. Thus, any explanation that argues that the democratic peace can be explained by a (set of) specific factor(s) (whether or not that factor is democracy) argues that there must be a mechanism that moderates the perception of threat between states in severe conflict. The overarching focus should, therefore, lie on what factors moderate the perception of threat of an interstate conflict.

Within IR theories in general, threat perception is considered a core concept. For realists, threat is associated with (military) power and shifts in the power of states. Simply put, if two states perceive their relative powers to be about equal, there is a balance. If a state increases its military power, it is perceived a bigger threat than before and vice versa if the military power decreases. Liberals also agree upon this power shift mechanism, with the important difference that they believe there are also other moderating factors that possibly decrease the perception of threat between states, namely the rise of liberal norms and institutions. To them, if a democratic state increases its military power it is not perceived a bigger threat than before because it is democratic. Constructivists turn the perception of threat around: they argue that power shifts do not matter; as long as the identity of both states is perceived to be similar there is no real threat. Other explanatory theories that are related to the democratic peace also rely on the perception of threat as a central part of their explanation. Theories of war, for instance. In these theories, the focus lies either on the unable (or unwilling) sender of a threat who cannot credibly communicate its capacities, or on factors that create ambiguity of threat in the environment (such as security and status dilemma, institutional and political-cultural factors) (Gross Stein, 2013, p. 368). Within the democratic peace literature, however, the perception of threat is usually implicitly assumed, and not understood as a key part of the explanation.

This research, therefore, starts from the perception of threat. It argues that if we want to understand how decision-makers decide to go to war or not, we have to start with the presence of a conflict on the brink of war, after which several factors can be researched to see whether or not these factors influence that decision. This study investigates individual decision-makers. Based on the research above, it investigates what constitutes the perception of threat of decision-makers. It does so by investigating the possible influence of 1) The nature of the conflict, 2) The behavior of the other state, 3) The regime-type, 4) Liberal norms, 5) Personal beliefs about conflict resolution, 6) Gender, and 7) The balance of power, within one research design. It furthermore compares the results of decision-makers that were socialized within a liberal democracy with decision-makers that were socialized within a hybrid regime and an autocracy.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed why it is important to study individual decision-makers if we want to understand why states go to war with each other. Furthermore, it has argued why the perception of threat of decision-makers can serve as an umbrella to study this mechanism. The next chapter explains how the perception of threat over-arches the different strands of literature that have tried to explain or refute the notion of democratic peace theory, namely that liberal democracy causes peace between pairs of democracies. It links these different studies into the causes of war and peace under one theoretical framework from a micro-level perspective. It does include macro-level explanations, and translates these to the individual level perspective of decision-makers. It furthermore conceptualizes the independent and dependent variables and ends with a discussion of the methodology.