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## **Hawks and doves. Democratic peace theory revisited**

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# Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework, Concepts & Methods

## 3.1 Threat perception

The research question of this dissertation is: what influences decision-makers to attack another country when they are on the brink of war? This question brings together different explanations for the empirically observed democratic peace within one theoretical framework. The unit of analysis is the individual decision-maker. The focus of this research lies on how individual decision-makers perceive the threat of a severe interstate conflict and, moreover, how different factors influence their perception of threat.

### *Threat and perception*

The Oxford dictionary<sup>6</sup> defines threat as *a statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done*. Threats are expressed verbally or non-verbally (Gross Stein, 2013). When expressed verbally, there is often a stress on a conditional part of the threat: comply, or else there will be consequences. A verbal threat can, therefore, be quite clear. Within international relations, a threat is often expressed by nonverbal signals. Non-verbal threats are, however, problematic because it is not always clear to other parties what such a signal means. This diffusion can easily be misperceived (Jervis, 1976). If for instance, a state builds up military power this might unintentionally create an acute sense of threat among other states although this state might have meant it less threatening, or vice versa. In other words, it is hard to measure a threat objectively.

The Oxford dictionary defines perception as *the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses and the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted*. Threat perception is, by definition, dialectical. It is a process of information exchange between sender and receiver. Incongruence between the sent information and the received message about the threat is called a misperception of threat, which is often theoretically posited as a cause of war. On the side of the sender, the threat must be credible; the sender should make credible that he has the willingness and capacity to execute the threat, if necessary. On the side of the receiver, the threat must be understood in the way the sender intended. That understanding, however, is not inherently clear. Rather, it is influenced by the perception of the receiver. That process of individual perception is generated by emotions, processes of information and patterns of inference and attribution (Gross Stein, 2013, p. 365).

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/threat](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/threat)

### *Assumptions about threat*

The concepts of threat and threat perception are quite intangible. This research investigates the underlying assumptions of democratic peace theory and uses the perception of threat of an interstate conflict as the overarching concept to investigate these assumptions. To do so, it builds explicitly on an instrumental assumption; if decision-makers perceive the threat of a conflict as very high, most of them will decide to attack the state that creates the threat. The rationale behind that choice is as follows. Although many of us have neither been nor will ever be in the position where we stand across our opponent and realize it is either them or us, most of us feel (before any moral sense kicks in) that in some kind of biological sense we would attack the other in self-defense if were necessary to survive (Pinker, 2011; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Of course, it is possible to criticize that assumption. Indeed there might be inherently peaceful people who would rather be killed by others than kill them. However, democratic peace theory relies on that notion of survival: the assumption is that regime-type will affect the threat of a conflict. These theories expect that a threat cannot be reduced if at least one of the countries is a non-democracy, and essentially state the same: if the threat of a conflict is so high that war is likely, only the condition that the countries are both democratic will reduce the threat. In the words of the most outspoken proponents of the democratic peace:

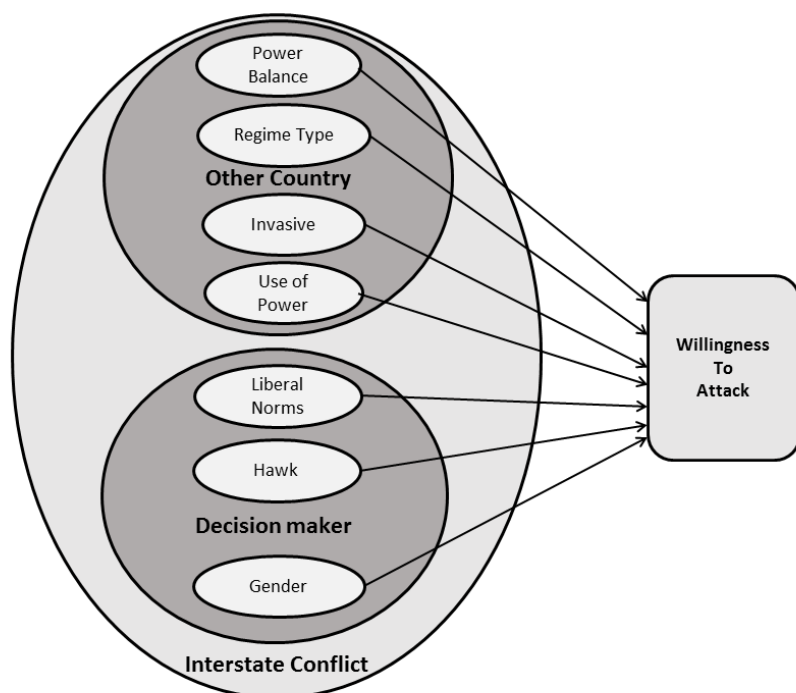
The anarchic nature of international politics implies that a clash between democratic and nondemocratic norms is dominated by the latter, rather than by the former [...] when a democratic state confronts a nondemocratic one, it may be forced to adapt to the norms of international conduct of the latter lest it be exploited or eliminated by the nondemocratic state that takes advantage of the inherent moderation of democracies. A conflict between non-democracies would be dominated by the norm of forceful conduct and by both parties' efforts to resolve the conflict through a decisive outcome and elimination of the opponent. Thus, conflicts between non-democracies are more likely to escalate into war than are conflicts between a democratic and non-democratic state. (Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993, p. 625)

So, for this research, it is instrumentally and explicitly assumed that the perception of a relatively severe threat is more likely to motivate individuals to attack the opposing country during an interstate conflict than the perception of a relatively mild threat. The decision to attack is associated with the perception of a severe threat.

The second explicit assumption used for this research is that the threat of an interstate conflict comprises several factors that might influence the perception of the threat by decision-makers. In other words, the threat of conflict perceived by decision-makers consists of all possible factors involved that inform the decision-maker about the threat. The core starting point is a conflict poised on the brink of war. A conflict as it is perceived by an individual, the decision-maker. The threat perception of the conflict can be influenced by several factors that are either contextual (system-level factors that inform about the positions of states in the international system, state-level factors that inform about the internal makeup of the states, and the actual behavior of the opposing state) or based on the individual traits (personal beliefs and characteristics) of decision-makers. Thus, decision-makers

assess a threat, based on the initial threat of the conflict, namely a conflict on the brink of war, and the moderation of different factors, and then decide – based on that assessment – how to respond to the threat. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the theoretical framework. The sections below discuss each identified factor.

**Figure 3.1 Threat of an interstate conflict as perceived by decision-maker**



### **3.2 The interstate conflict**

The theoretical framework, as shown in figure 3.1, starts with an interstate conflict on the brink of war. The threat of that conflict is, *ceteris paribus*, severe enough to expect that war is likely to occur. Consequently, the severity of that conflict must also be perceived by the other party as a real threat of which should be taken care. The conflict must generate a threat perception of such nature that, aside from any possible moderating factor, a decision to defend is highly likely: ‘if we do not act now to defend ourselves, we might suffer severely or even die’.

The communication between the sender and the receiver of the threat is not flawless. The exchanged information is crucial for both parties to estimate the severity of the threat, and subsequently make their decisions. The literature considers incomplete information often to be a problem in this process. On the side of the sender, incomplete or incorrect information can (deliberately or not) be distributed

in an attempt to convince the other to relinquish. On the side of receiver, the incomplete information (whether misperceived or misguided) can ignite a battle in defense (Fearon, 1995; Jervis, 1976). However, which specific factors guide these perceptions is not clear-cut. An outbreak of war can be linked to different necessary and sufficient conditions, and it is, therefore, hard to pinpoint exact causes of war. If studies of the causes of war show anything, it is that there is no such thing as a simple cause-and-effect relationship between factors (Fearon, 1995; Goertz & Levy, 2007; Mahoney, 2007; Sobek, 2009; Vasquez, 2000). Different factors can play a role in this informational process. The literature distinguishes between systemic factors (e.g. status- and security dilemmas (Fearon, 2011; Jervis, 1978; Lebow, 2010; Vasquez, 2000) or the anticipation of a rise of power from the other party leading to a decision to act before it is too late (Fearon, 1995, pp. 402-408; Mearsheimer, 2001; Sobek, 2009, pp. 151-171)), domestic factors (e.g. domestic politics that are shaped by procedural habits (Redd & Mintz, 2013) or domestic identities (Allison et al., 1971; Rousseau, 2006)), and individual factors (e.g. leaders that misperceive due to individual characteristics (Goertz & Levy, 2007, pp. 32-34) or to predispositions towards other countries (Herrmann, 2013)).

Similar to the democratic peace literature, the literature on the causes of war discusses several competing explanations without being able to pin down a specific explanatory factor. Both fields of study seemingly argue the inverted view of the other one. The democratic peace literature discusses the moderating factors that are believed to reduce the risk of war, whereas the literature on the causes of war discusses the moderating factors that can increase the risk of war. Therefore, to come to a clear understanding of the influence of several factors, a theoretical separation between the core reasons of the conflict, on the one hand, and the moderating factors, on the other hand, is in order.

An interstate conflict in this research is a conflict between states based on a disagreement over an issue that leads to a serious threat between these states. That conflict could revolve around all kinds of issues, but commonly the list boils down to material and/or ideational reasons. Material reasons often involve territory or resources, such as indivisible goods or disagreements over common resources (Fearon, 1995, pp. 385, 389-390, 391-393; Sobek, 2009, pp. 151-171). Ideational reasons are often related to the state's political ideology, culture and/or religion which is rejected (Geis et al., 2006; Ish-Shalom, 2006), or to a need for honor (e.g. after a history of humiliation between states) (Lebow, 2008). Whatever the inducement of the conflict, it is up to the parties involved to resolve it. If that does not work out, the conflict can remain (or reoccur) and eventually lead to war. The latter outcome is more likely if an enduring conflict between states leads parties to the conviction that negotiations will not lead to a preferable outcome and war might be the better and safer way out. Theoretically, the outbreak of war is thereby not per se understood as a result of a rational cost-benefit calculation where the expected benefits of war at least compensate the expected costs of war (Fearon, 1995; Huth, 2000), but rather as a process internal to the individual decision-makers that is

related to the threat of the conflict. In other words, more factors than costs and benefits alone determine the threat perception.

The theoretical framework aims to disentangle different factors that together might create the threat of an interstate conflict (as perceived by decision-makers). To do so, it is theoretically assumed that for decision-makers, an interstate conflict consists of two parts: 1) the core issue of conflict between the states, and 2) the behavior of the opposing state during the conflict. The separation of these aspects makes it theoretically possible to distinguish between the necessary and sufficient conditions to cause a war. An interstate dispute might be necessary to cause a war, but might not be a sufficient condition. A specific action forthcoming from the conflict might be a necessary condition for war, but not a sufficient one. However, when combined, these two factors might offer the sufficient and necessary conditions to cause a war. This theoretical distinction between the issue and the actions to conceptualize the conflict helps to examine the different aspects of a conflict that might influence threat perception, separately from any moderating factor.

Existing experimental studies do not consider these two aspects of an interstate conflict together. The other state is depicted as an aggressor that is either building a nuclear weapon or invading the other country (Bakker, 2017; Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Johns & Davies, 2012; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Rousseau, 2005; Tomz & Weeks, 2013), thereby creating a conflict that is perceived as highly threatening. However, keeping the severity of the conflict constant (namely high) while not distinguishing between the issue and the behavior of the opponent will not help to understand the respective effects, nor the possible interactions with potential moderating factors. By making a distinction between the issue of a conflict and the actions the state takes in relation to that issue, this continuum can be created.

The issue of the conflict needs to be as 'morally neutral' as possible, which means: a conflict in which both of the states seem to have a legitimate claim. For instance, a territorial dispute in the classic sense – one state comes and takes control over a piece of territory – could create, based on the principles of just war, a 'bad state-good state' atmosphere.<sup>7</sup> If the core of the conflict is basically about the opponent invading sovereign territory, it is quite hard to distinguish between the threat of the issue and the threat of the behavior of the opponent, let alone other moderating factors. When the other state is already perceived as a 'bad guy' it would seem to no longer matter whether that state is democratic or not. That said, the core issue needs to be sufficiently threatening. If the issue in itself is non-threatening, then possible moderating factors will not matter much. Therefore, the starting point must be an issue that is threatening enough to lead to war, but morally neutral enough to distinguish between the actual conflict and the behavior of the opponent. Accordingly, the selected core issue is a dispute over resources. Indivisible goods are often considered as a cause for war (Fearon, 1995, p. 382) if one of the parties feels that they need full control over the resources to be safe. It follows that an issue over an

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<sup>7</sup> Also the UN Charter, Chapter VII, subscribes to this notion. Art. 51 of this chapter states: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security."

indivisible good is sufficiently threatening in itself, but is not necessarily connected to the behavior of the other state.

### **3.3 Possible moderating factors**

#### ***Contextual factors: invasion and use of power***

The threat of the conflict thus starts with an issue over resources, an issue that has escalated into a serious conflict. The choice for this issue makes it theoretically possible to understand the influence of the behavior of the opponent in relation to the threat perception of decision-makers. If bargaining over the issue fails, decision-makers might decide to take actions to put pressure on the other state to force a resolution. The longer the bargaining takes, the more likely it is that the conflict remains and will reoccur in the future, which is considered to increase the probability of war (Vasquez, 2000, p. 367). The behavior of the opponent (or: the actions of the opponent) to settle the issue is supposed to moderate the severity of the threat of the conflict. The behavior of the opponent is a contextual factor that is used to define the conflict. The theoretical distinction between the issue of the conflict, on the one hand, and the behavior of the other state, on the other hand, allows studying the impact the behavior of an opposing state can have on an ongoing conflict, separate from the issue of that same conflict. Similarly, it is important to distinguish between the behavior of the opponent and other characteristics of the opponent that might also influence the perception of threat. In other words, the behavior of the opponent needs to be conceptualized in such a way that other possible influential factors (such as material factors that are related to the distribution of power (realist in nature), and/or ideational factors that are related to the specific characteristics of political regimes (liberal in nature), and to existing images of identities (constructivist in nature)) are not part of that concept. These factors need to be considered theoretically separate from the behavior of the state. This approach is taken below.

The behavior of the other state is, within this theoretical framework, divided into two behavioral actions: invasiveness (hereafter: invasion) and the use of power. The choice for invasion stems from the earlier experiments which do not control for the invasiveness of the opponent, but equate an invasion (or other aggressive behavior) as the severe conflict. To consider an invasion as an instrument of the opponent (and thus a separate element of the conflict) rather than an intrinsic part of the conflict will provide more insights into the threat perception of decision-makers, in particular in relation to other explanatory factors. The same logic underlies the choice for conceptualizing the use of power as a separate part of the conflict. Invasion is conceptualized as the willingness of states to invade properties (territory or resources) of the other state with the purpose of annexing it. The use of power is conceptualized through a continuum that ranges from the use of soft power (e.g. using diplomacy) to the use of hard power (aggressive: e.g. using the military) of the other state (Nye, 1990).

To summarize, the expectation is that if states find themselves in a severe interstate conflict about an indivisible good, the threat of this conflict will increase if



one of the actors shows invades territory of the other state and/or uses hard power. This is formulated within the following hypotheses:

*H1: During a severe interstate conflict, decision-makers will be more likely to take military action towards the opposing state that invades their territory over the opposing state that does not invade their territory.*

*H2: During a severe interstate conflict, decision-makers will be more likely to take military action towards the opposing state that uses hard power over the opposing state that uses soft power.*

### ***Liberal Democracy***

Within the democratic peace literature, as produced by the liberal and constructivist schools, regime-type is postulated as the main moderating factor. Liberal theories base themselves on the assumption that the international system is anarchic and states rely on self-help. Thus, logically, it is acknowledged that severe threats will need a defense. However, liberal theories also see a way out of this Hobbesian system where the logic of consequences dictates their actions. Liberal scholars argue that the regime-type liberal democracy can moderate the threat, as long as both<sup>8</sup> states are liberal democracies. In other words, democratic peace theory expects that if two states are in a severe conflict which, according to the logic of expected consequences, is very likely to end in war, the probability of that outcome is strongly reduced if both states are liberal democracies. This expectation makes regime-type by far the most important moderating factor within the liberal theories to explain the democratic peace: liberal democracy is expected to breed a different sort of human beings.

The concept of regime-type is a spectrum with liberal democracy on the one side and autocracy on the other. The justification for this spectrum lies in the democratic peace literature, which understands democracy as a liberal democracy in the sense that Dahl (1971, 2000) used it: a regime with institutions that guarantee equality and freedom. Democratic peace theory makes a rather 'black and white' distinction between democracy and non-democracy. With democracy they denote a liberal society that enables its citizens to be free and autonomous, or in other words, a full-fledged liberal democracy in which, next to the democratic institutions, universal human rights and civic liberties are ensured (Dahl, 1971, 2000; Merkel, 2004, pp. 38-42; Møller & Skaaning, 2010, p. 263; Sartori, 1987). In contrast, what democratic peace theorists call non-democracy essentially comprises every regime that is not liberal democratic. For many years already, scholars of comparative politics have

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<sup>8</sup> There is also a modest strand of research into the so-called monadic version of the democratic peace, in which liberal-democracies are considered to be intrinsically more peaceful than other regime-types, in other words, it is then not about dyads of democracies, but democracies standing on their own being peaceful (see e.g. Benoit, 1996; Pickering, 2002; Rousseau, 2005). However, this assumption is very difficult to sustain in the light of the wars that have been fought by liberal-democracies in last decades. Therefore, the democratic peace factors are considered from the dyadic point of view, thereby following the mainstream literature on democratic peace.

highlighted substantial variation in non-democratic regimes (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Sartori, 1987). However, many IR studies do see autocracies, dictatorships, single-party regimes, theocracies and military juntas as fitting into just one category: autocracy. They thus use non-democracy as a container concept. Also, a competitive authoritarian regime that lies somewhere between autocracy and democracy (this is often called a hybrid regime because it combines democratic and autocratic features and is often quite stable in its prevailing powers (Bogaards, 2009; Morlino, 2009), seems a likely candidate to be conceptualized as a non-democracy. Also, new democracies are contained within the same concept of non-democracy, based on the assumption that liberal norms need time to be instilled among the members of a newly founded liberal democracy (Booth & Bayer Richard, 1996; Gibson & Duch, 1993). Russett briefly discusses the 'young democracy' in which norms could not have developed well enough to apply to international relations, which might lead to war (Russett, 1993a, p. 34). Thereby, Russett indicates there is more to regime-type than the dichotomy he sketches. If we follow democratic peace theory that focuses on the notion of liberal democracy as one pole and autocracy (being the complete opposite of liberal democracy) as the other pole, we can also see that spectrum as a continuum.

This dissertation follows the regime-type categorization of Levitsky and Way (2010, pp. 6-7) who categorize regime-types along the spectrum described above. To conceptualize an authoritarian regime, as well as a hybrid regime, they use Dahl's conceptualization of democracy. Following that line of thought, for the concept of liberal democracy this research uses a regime in which democratic institutions guarantee equality of the law and individual autonomy and freedom. The concept of democratic institutions is based on the work of Dahl (1971, 2000). The normative notion of democracy rests on the assumption that all citizens are equal in the sense that every citizen can have an equal say in decision-making. Citizens are ensured equality by three main formal institutional arrangements: competition between elites, participation of citizens, and civil rights (Dahl, 2000). Free, fair and frequent elections to choose government officials guarantee the competition between elites. Active and passive electoral rights guarantee the participation of citizens. The civil rights, which concretize these arrangements, include the freedom to assembly, the right to free speech and the right to alternative information to ensure that competition and participation can be combined. Levitsky and Way (2010) add another characteristic to this concept by arguing that the level playing field between incumbents and the opposition is often an implicit dimension within democratic theory but needs to be conceptualized as well. The opposition might have constitutional rights and thereby, on paper, all means available to oppose incumbents, but if the playing field is skewed, that might violate their potential actions in such a severe way that the actual practice of democracy is not guaranteed (2010, p. 6). Their concept of a hybrid regime depicts a state in which all constitutional arrangements necessary to ensure democratic practice are in place but in which the incumbents abuse these arrangements in such a way that either free elections are impossible and/or there is no de facto protection of civil liberties and/or

there is no reasonably level playing field for the opposition (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 7). Based on this notion, Levitsky and Way argue that within an authoritarian regime, there are “no viable channels to legally contest for the opposition” and “civil liberties are systematically repressed by the government” (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 7). Following Russett’s logic that norms will start to develop within countries that are in transition, or seem to be able to transit, to democracy, we might expect a certain level of liberal norms, although not as high as within fully fledged liberal democracies. The presence of those norms should have a lesser but moderating effect on the support for military action. That also applies to the concept of the hybrid regime, which is a regime-type that lies between the two poles – it is worthwhile to see whether democratic peace theory is right to consider all regimes that are not liberal democratic as autocracies, or whether there is variance among different categories of regime-type.

However, the liberal explanations are less straightforward than simply arguing that the regime-type liberal democracy causes the democratic peace, as is often seen in the literature. Two possible causal mechanisms are put forward in different strands of the liberal literature. On the one hand, there is the argument that democratic institutions are responsible for the democratic peace; on the other hand, the argument goes that the liberal political culture (where liberal norms prevail) is the most important moderating factor. Both explanations rest on a complex constellation of 1) assumptions about individuals, and 2) the expected behavior that emerges from those assumptions. The assumptions are not the same for these two explanations, which leads to the conceptual difficulty that regime-type cannot be used as such, but needs to be broken down to distinguish clearly between democratic institutions and liberal norms. Of course, it could be argued that institutions and culture are interdependent. However, the academic debate over what came first, institutions or culture, and the direction of influence is still going strong (see e.g. Almond & Verba, 1963; Chilton, 1987; Easton, 1990; Ronald Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Putnam, 1993) and does not point conclusively to an answer in favor of one of these features. For this research, however, this answer is of lesser importance. Within liberal explanations of the democratic peace, both moderating factors rest on different assumptions about human kind, and subsequently different causal mechanisms. Thus, conceptually, a distinction is made between both factors to achieve theoretical clarity. This research does not contend that institutions do not breed political culture, nor does it argue that a specific political culture has helped to create institutions. Rather, it examines if both of these factors are possibly moderating the perception of threat by individuals independently or conjointly.

#### *Democratic institutions (structural or institutional explanation)*

The institutional explanation postulates that if two states are in a severe conflict that stands on the brink of war, their respective decision-makers will not go to war if both states have democratic institutions. The logic behind this explanation is that democratic audiences have institutions to control their leaders, whereas audiences of other regime-types do not. Thus, it is expected that if both states possess democratic

institutions they can constrain their leaders and war will not occur. Moreover, mutual knowledge about those institutional restraints is assumed to 'buy more time', which subsequently is used to come to a peaceful conflict resolution. However, if at least one of these states does not have democratic institutions, war is expected to be more likely, because at least one of the states in the conflict cannot be constrained.

*H3: If at least one of the states in an interstate conflict does not have democratic institutions, its decision-makers will be more likely to take military action against the other state, but if both of the states have democratic institutions, decision-makers will be less likely to take military action against the other state.*

The conceptualization of the institutions utilizes Dah's concept as described above (Dahl, 1971, 2000).

*Liberal norms (the normative or cultural explanation)*

To recap the logic of the normative explanation: when states involved in an interstate conflict both have liberal-democratic regimes, they will be able to work out a nonviolent solution because they share the same norms. In contrast, when at least one of the states does not have a liberal democratic regime, and the states, therefore, do not share liberal norms, war will be a more likely outcome. Thus, if states do not share a political culture of liberal norms, decision-makers will be more likely to support military action against the other state than when states do share such a political culture. As detailed above, the normative explanation rests on three assumptions about individuals within liberal democracies. The first is that these individuals are socialized with liberal norms. The second is that during an interstate conflict these liberal-norm-imbued individuals will be less war-prone if the other state has a liberal political culture. Subsequently, the third assumption is that if the other state does not have a liberal democratic political culture, these individuals will be more war-prone. Conversely, these assumptions dictate assumptions about individuals that are raised within another type of regime, often called non-democracies. The first assumption is that these individuals do not have internalized liberal norms. The second assumption is that these non-liberal-norm-imbued individuals will be war-prone in a severe interstate conflict. These assumptions lead to the following hypotheses:

*H4: Decision-makers, born and raised in a consolidated liberal democracy, have internalized liberal norms in contrast to decision-makers who are not born and raised in a liberal democracy.*

*H5: A higher level of liberal norms will make it less likely for decision-makers to take military action against a state with a liberal political culture; however, a lower level of liberal norms will make it more likely for decision-makers to take military action against any opposing state, regardless of their political culture.*

As explained above, most previous studies operationalize liberal norms based on the expectations of what liberal norms in a society can accomplish, and not on a theoretically established concept based on the liberal theory that was underlying these expectations (see e.g. Danilovic & Clare, 2007; Dixon, 1993; Dixon & Senese, 2002; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993; Mousseau, 1997; Owen, 1994; Weart, 1998). In this dissertation, political and societal norms are conceptually understood as an informal institution that socializes individuals to behave appropriately within a particular situation (March & Olsen, 1989, pp. 23, 160-162). This socialization process leads to habitualized behavior, a routine, which helps individuals to behave according to knowledge and beliefs which they are not always consciously aware of (Scott, 2001, pp. 67, 80). The concept of liberal norms in this dissertation relies on the liberal theory of Immanuel Kant. As discussed in chapter 2, Kant's deontological expectations of the free and autonomous individual have been elevated to empirical 'truths' by proponents of the liberal norms explanation who have argued that individuals socialized in a liberal society will behave as Kant theorized. To empirically test for the ideal type, the concept of liberal norms for this research is following the Kantian notion of liberal norms. The following chapter discusses the used concept of liberal norms extensively discussed; a short description suffices here.

Kant's premises for the perpetual peace he envisaged are built on the rational individual. Kant assumes that individuals can only be rational if they are free from oppression by others. That freedom could be realized, in his vision, by the bottom-up creation of republican institutions by all individuals within a society. When that freedom is secured, and individuals could accordingly be rational, a socialization process would initiate and create rationality based on reasonability among the members of the society. In other words: the process would create liberal norms. These liberal norms would consist of a feeling of freedom from the state, a feeling of autonomy over actions in life, trust of others, tolerance towards others to act as free as they like, and the willingness to reciprocate all these norms towards others.

Liberal norms are constituted by different and dialectical dimensions that are seemingly entangled, and all expected to exist within the overarching concept of liberal norms. An individual, who is socialized with liberal norms, is rational, feels free from and by the state and government, feels the autonomy to decide over life, tolerates and trusts others, and reciprocates the rights of others to live by these norms as well. Feeling free from the government also enhances the ability to make autonomous decisions in life, a necessity to reach reasonability: if one feels free to decide about anything in their lives, one can choose to consider others as well. Deciding autonomously over life can generate decisions that are built on trust, tolerance and reciprocity. When one trusts, one dares to reciprocate trust. When one

experiences tolerance and freedom from others who choose autonomously to trust and tolerate, the wish to reciprocate can flourish. The presence of tolerance alone is not sufficient to assume that liberal norms exist. Instead, this tolerance needs to be reciprocated by others who trust that others will also reciprocate tolerance. Also, the existence of reciprocity alone is not enough, because the expectation of reciprocity should be associated with specific norms.

Therefore, liberal norms in this dissertation are based on five dimensions: freedom, autonomy, tolerance, interpersonal trust, and reciprocity, which are all required to be present for liberal norms to be considered to exist. Liberal norms need to be present at the individual level, ideally for every person within a liberal society, but at least for the decisive bulk of the society. Therefore, to capture the essence of liberal norms within a society, individuals need to be examined on the existence of these norms within themselves, but consequently also how the norms of their society are reflected onto them. Thus, all five dimensions need to be present to approximate the existence of liberal norms as closely as possible.

### ***System-level factors***

The system-level factors that are hypothesized by most realist scholars to influence the perception of threat by decision-makers are conceptualized as information about the capacities of the states involved in the interstate conflict. When an individual perceives the threat of an interstate conflict, information about the other state can be an important moderating factor for the perception of threat. This information is not limited to the presence or absence of liberal democratic features, such as institutions and norms, but it can just as well be the information about the role that the involved states play within the international system. Knowing the power and identity of the other state can, therefore, be important for threat perception and subsequently the support for war.

According to realist theories, the international system is anarchic and states rely on self-help to survive. If a balance of power exists between states, it is possible for the system to be conflict-free. However, a change in the status quo, such as increases or decreases of the military and/or economic powers of states can disrupt the balance of power between states. Based on the realist strand of literature, a balance of power exists between two states if they do not have any relative military or economic advantage over each other. A balance of power, therefore, means a status quo based on relative equal powers (whether or not forthcoming from alliances). That leads to the following hypothesis:

*H6: During a severe interstate conflict without a balance of power between states, decision-makers will be more likely to take military action towards the opposing state than during a severe interstate conflict with a balance of power between states.*

Conceptually, this hypothesis implies that if two states are similar in military power, economic power, and have approximately the same size of territory and population,

there is a balance of power between them. In that case, a conflict over a resource is not expected to lead to war as long as these factors do not divert from the status quo. The same applies to the expectations that follow from the system-level argument posed by Gartzke, which posits that if states are economically interdependent they will not go to war with each other. A war would damage economic agreements, and trade would stop, which would affect the economy of both states. Individuals, whose jobs and ability to take care of their families rest on a healthy economy, would therefore not support a war that would jeopardize their incomes. Thus, if two states are in a severe conflict that would logically lead to a high probability of war, this war will be less likely if there are economic trade agreements. Economic ties are conceptualized as two states being tightly economically connected, for instance, by having trade agreements that aim at long-term economic relationships. These agreements would not include ad hoc contracts or single trade deals, but rather entail a commitment from all parties involved to cooperate economically for an extended period of time. Free trade agreements, which eliminate tariffs and stimulate economic cooperation, are a good example.

### ***Psychological factors***

With Elman and other political psychologists (Elman, 2000; Farnham, 2003; Hermann & Hagan, 1998; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann & Kegley, 1995; Holsti, 1962, 1970; Holsti & Rosenau, 1988; Horowitz, McDermott, & Stam, 2005; Johnson et al., 2006; Keller, 2005; Keller & Yang, 2008; McDermott, 2004, 2011; McDermott & Cowden, 2001; McIntyre et al., 2007; Owen, 1994), I argue that there is an inherent need to study the individual characteristics of decision-makers in relation to the decision to go to war or not. As argued in chapter 2, individuals matter when it comes to the perception of threat of an interstate conflict. When individuals have to make a decision that will determine the outcome of an interstate conflict, all kind of factors might influence their decision, including factors that are more personal than contextual.

When following the logic of the democratic peace explanations, the socialization process within liberal democracies would overtake all other socialization processes, as well as all personal factors that might be of influence on decision-making. In other words, democratic peace theorists posit that the issue of whether or not an individual has specific beliefs about conflict resolution would be wiped out by the 'moral learning process' that is expected to occur within liberal democracies simply because people are born and raised within a liberal democracy. Moreover, these theorists posit that such a process would not occur within different regime-types. Therefore, other possible factors such as personal belief systems and personal characteristics of individuals will have to be considered when studying the decision-making process about going to war or not. The empirical question is whether the influence of regime-type is indeed as strong as expected such that most individuals and political leaders within liberal democracies have liberal norms imbued and other possible factors have no effect whatsoever on their conflict resolution decision-

making process. Moreover, of course, the contrasting question is whether such a mechanism is indeed absent among decision-makers within other regime-types.

Researchers of decision-making processes show that individual characteristics, such as belief systems about conflict resolution, leadership styles, gender and emotions can matter when it comes to decision-making, including in liberal democracies (see e.g. the work of Bakker, 2017; Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Hermann, 1980; Hermann, 2005; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann & Kegley, 1995; Hermann et al., 2001; Hetherington & Suhay, 2011; Kaarbo & Hermann, 1998; Kegley & Hermann, 1995; McDermott, Cowden, & Koopman, 2002; Mintz, 2004, 2007; Post, 2004).

There are many individual-centric factors that could be considered. This study builds on earlier work of political and social psychologists that shows that belief systems about the nature of conflict resolution have an influence on the perception of threat in international relations and therefore on decision-making.

### *Hawkish or Dovish belief system*

Just like the belief in the democratic peace can guide foreign policy decisions of Western decision-makers (Avtalyon-Bakker, 2013; Burgos, 2008; Ish-Shalom, 2006, 2015), a hawkish or dovish belief system can affect the decision to fight or not with another country (Bakker, 2017). There has been little research into the hawk-dove belief system in relation to democratic peace theory. Braumoeller (1997) follows the logic of the moral learning process of liberal norms and tests whether or not this process could be detected in former Soviet countries during the end of the 1990s. He finds that liberal norms indeed started to develop by the end of the century in these countries. However, the norms were then not (yet) of sufficient influence to moderate hawkish behavior. It might be that, in line with the expectations posited by the normative explanation, liberal norms need some time to develop and be internalized. However, this expectation also dictates that the moment the norms are consolidated these should overrule other possible explanatory factors at the micro-level. In a previous study (Bakker, 2017), I measured the level of hawkishness and tested the hypothesis whether or not hawkish beliefs affect individuals within democracies and autocracies in their support for war. The results show that for individuals of both regime-types hawkishness is an important explanatory factor to explain the willingness to go to war. No matter the regime-type individuals are socialized in; the more hawkish they are, the more likely they are willing to go to war. Accordingly, there is good cause to consider hawkishness within this research design.

The term *hawk* was introduced by Smith and Price (1973), who studied the logic of animal conflict: a hawk would always decide to injure the other party to make sure that there would not be retaliation. This metaphor held. It became the one pole on the so-called hawk-dove continuum. On this continuum the hawk is considered to be the aggressive, offensive party, and the dove is considered the one that seeks cooperation and peaceful reconciliation of conflicts (Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Freund, 1994; Braumoeller, 1997; D'Agostino, 1995; Kahneman & Renshon, 2007, 2009; Klugman, 1985; I. Maoz, 2003). Kahneman and Renshon (2007, 2009) understand a hawkish



belief system as a cognitive bias that affects the way individuals interpret information and make decisions. Being hawkish means that hawkish individuals rely on a belief system that hinges towards 'suspicion, hostility and aggression in the conduct of conflict' (Kahneman & Renshon, 2009, p. 79). Hawks see relationships as competitive, feeling the need to win relative to others, and have a fierce belief in controlling by force and action (Klugman, 1985, pp. 579-580). Being dovish means that individuals hinge towards over-cooperation, or unreciprocated cooperation with an opponent (Colaresi, 2004). Doves consider relationships as cooperative and stress the importance of seeing different sides to conflicts. Doves tend to refuse to categorize individuals into groups, and therefore possible opponents, but feel that all individuals are part of a universal people. This view leads to a feeling of responsibility that is larger than the self or the direct surroundings of the self, namely a responsibility towards the whole world (Klugman, 1985, pp. 581-582). Earlier research of hawkish positions is often related to the position a participant could take in an actual conflict, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (I. Maoz, 2003); however, the continuum is often used as a way to categorize the foreign policy behavior outcomes of leaders or states (Colaresi, 2004) or as a conventional framework within the media about political leaders.

Several studies argue that it is unlikely that hawkish and dovish belief systems can alter by events. A more hawkish individual is considered likely to use force to resolve conflicts, whereas a more dovish individual is considered to be less likely to use force in a similar case, no matter the context (D'Agostino, 1995; Kahneman & Renshon, 2007; Klugman, 1985; Liebes, 1992; I. Maoz, 2003; Rathbun, Kertzer, Reifler, Goren, & Scotto, 2016; Schultz, 2005). Testing whether or not hawkishness or dovishness, respectively, is of influence on the willingness to take military action might seem close to being tautological, or at least too plausible. However, theories of international relations are structure-specific and thereby assume that agents are affected by structures, such as regime-type as posited in democratic peace theory. Following the logic of democratic peace theory, it would not matter whether decision-makers are hawkish or dovish, their behavior would not be guided by those beliefs. Therefore, the following hypothesis needs to be tested and understood in the whole theoretical framework of all hypotheses:

*H7: During a severe interstate conflict, more hawkish decision-makers are more likely to take military action than more dovish decision-makers.*

### *Gender*

Whoever looks around on social media is likely to run into the argument that the world would be peaceful if women ran it. It seems like conventional wisdom that women are more peace-loving than men, but that idea is not per se supported by empirical evidence. When we look at the few women who have become political leaders, their records do not seem to support this notion. For example, Israeli prime minister Golda Meir was involved in seven interstate conflicts and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in one interstate conflict. Since there have not been

enough female leaders to conclusively study their behavior during conflicts on the brink of war (Caprioli & Boyer, 2001), it is hard to verify the gender claim. Several studies have, however, shown that gender does matter: women are more peaceful than men (Bendyna, Finucane, Kirby, O'Donnell, & Wilcox, 1996; McDermott & Cowden, 2001; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986). Moreover, studies have shown a relationship between gender equality and the absence of interstate conflict (Caprioli, 2000), as well as between gender inequality and intrastate conflict (Caprioli, 2005). On the other hand, some evidence suggests that within particular conflicts, women do not differ from men in their support for war (Tessler & Robbins, 2007; Tessler & Warriner, 1997). However, these studies are about mass support for violence in the Middle East. This insight connects to the notion that the threat of a conflict is created by the information decision-makers have about a conflict and all factors involved. Therefore, this research controls for gender as a possible moderating factor with the following hypothesis:

*H8: During a severe interstate conflict, male decision-makers will be more likely to take military action towards the opposing state over female decision-makers.*

### **3.4 Concept of military action**

Within the democratic peace literature, the dependent variable is war. The concept of war is often defined differently. For instance, the Oxford Dictionary<sup>9</sup> defines it as “hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state”. This definition describes war as an observational concept. From a different angle, Von Clausewitz argues that “war is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself”. (Clausewitz, 1832/2014, p. 396). Here, war is an ideational concept. In this latter conceptualization, war is an outcome of a deliberate policy choice made in an attempt to get the other party to act in a particular way.

Most democratic peace studies have conceptualized and operationalized war based on the Correlates of War project<sup>10</sup> (COW), which defines war as ‘sustained combat involving regular armed forces between two or more independent states and a minimum of 1.000 fatalities in total’. That concept is based on observational principles, which brings it closer to an operationalization than a conceptualization. Moreover, the parameters are defined quite sharply and create a polarity between war and peace based on an operationalization that is rooted in observation. This concept does not do justice to interstate conflicts that have been quite destructive and deadly but fall short of these parameters (Gochman & Maoz, 1984; Jones, Bremer, & Singer,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/225589?rskey=nfENSy&result=1#eid>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>

1996; Z. Maoz, 1993; Z. Maoz & Abdolali, 1989; Z. Maoz & Russett, 1993). In more recent studies of democratic peace a broader concept of war has therefore been used: the military interstate dispute (MID) (see for the birth of this: Gochman & Maoz, 1984). "Militarized interstate disputes are united historical cases of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state. Disputes are composed of incidents that range in intensity from threats to use force to actual combat short of war" (Jones et al., 1996). This conceptualization captures the observational aspect of violent clashes between parties and also includes the more ideational aspect by theoretically linking a scale of threat to the concept.

There is, however, an apparent problem with testing a possible explanation for the democratic peace: war or MID and peace are *ex-post* assessments and do not inform us in any way about how these outcomes are created. In other words, to empirically test whether regime-type (or any other factor) influences the behavior of decision-makers in such a way that a war is prevented or not, we have to study that mechanism before a war has even started. When, for instance, a preventive strike starts, it is then unclear what will be the result of that decision, just like the scope of the conflict is not yet known. Explanations of the democratic peace rely on an *ex-ante* predicted mechanism: these theories argue that wars are avoided because individuals within liberal democracies respond differently than within other regimes to the threats of opposing countries. To test whether that mechanism indeed functions as such during a conflict, the focus of research must be at the moment before a war: what influences decision-makers to be willing to use military force? This question closely connects with the conceptualization of war by Von Clausewitz, since it considers the step towards the use of force, and possibly the outbreak of war, as a policy option, as a means to a political end.

The MID concept suits this research. It gets at the willingness to use military action that has the potential to escalate into a full-blown war as conceptualized by the COW. However, at the same time, it is not limited to that aspect and leaves room for the use of military force, which is by definition almost always deadly for at least a few, if not many, people involved, on a spectrum of different intensities of war. In this research, the willingness to use military action is considered as the first step towards war, thereby assuming that decision-makers are well aware of the likelihood that their action can lead to a full-blown war.

The choice for using the spectrum of the MID as a concept of war, in particular when understood as means to a political end, opens up the possibility that decision-makers can opt for another policy decision than one that leads most likely to war. When two states are in a severe interstate conflict, the decision of how to deal with the conflict is not likely to be a binary choice between fight or negotiate. If the choice for a military action is considered to be the most likely road to war, and the choice for an attempt to negotiate is considered the most likely way to peace, then it is plausible that decision-makers might opt for a policy that lies in between these options. Stated differently: the strict dichotomy of war and peace as often used by democratic peace

theory is conceptually insufficient. When we consider an interstate conflict on the brink of war, there are more options to resolve the conflict than to negotiate or to attack. The idea of conflict resolution is to bring conflicting parties together to forge a solution with which both can and will agree. If a resolution to the conflict cannot be reached by negotiating, there are many possible actions a state can take to try to deter or compel the other party into the desired behavior. Practically speaking, decision-makers might have all kinds of reasonable arguments for wanting to try an option less threatening than an attack but at the same time more threatening than negotiations. Whether or not these options indeed lead to the desired outcome is the question. In theory, the decision to continue negotiations might still lead in the end to a full-blown war, but logically it is less likely.

Besides the conceptualization of military action as a proxy of the willingness to go to war, it is also wise to conceptualize a spectrum between negotiate on the 'peace pole' and attack on the 'war pole', leaving room for other policy options that fall in between these two endpoints. To put it in Von Clausewitz's terminology, there are different means to the end that decision-makers seek. There needs to be a rationale for assigning these policy options a place on this spectrum, and that rationale can be based on the threatening nature of the option, in relation to the two poles and the other options lying between them. More concretely, along with this spectrum from most threatening to least threatening option, there could be several options in decreasing nature of threat (or decreasing likelihood to lead to war). The MID definition is helpful when we consider the increasingly threatening nature of the policy options that lie on the spectrum between the absence of force (to negotiate) – which is the most likely of all options to lead to peace – and the use of full military force – which is the option most likely to lead to full-blown war. This conceptualization also leaves room for other policy options that lie on this spectrum. The freezing of economic and diplomatic relations is more threatening than to negotiate but less threatening than to block a port or to attack the other state. In this way, it is possible to understand foreign policy options as a result of threat in a more refined sense.

### **3.5 Methodology**

#### *Research strategy*

This research aims to ascertain which factors influence decision-makers to attack another country during an interstate conflict. The level of analysis is the individual level of decision-makers. The assumption is that several system level, state level, and individual level factors can influence the threat perception of decision-makers, which can subsequently lead to the decision to go to war. The focus of this study is on the detection of a mechanism that underlies the choice of decision-makers to attack another country when on the brink of war. The goal is to achieve theoretical clarification that will benefit democratic peace theory in particular and theories of conflict resolution in general. When testing theories with the purpose to develop theories, it is prudent to have maximal control over the independent variables. With

the use of observational (real-world) data, it is impossible to control for independent variables systematically and randomly.

The core analytical instrument is, therefore, a decision-making experiment. This dissertation, accordingly, follows earlier experimental studies on the micro-level mechanisms of the democratic peace (Bakker, 2017; Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Rousseau, 2005; Tomz & Weeks, 2013). Moreover, an experimental approach is well suited to study the micro-level and also offers the best and transparent control over independent variables in such a way that they can be considered within the analytical design (Druckman & Kam, 2011, p. 44). Of course, experiments alone cannot provide all the evidence. The power of an experiment is to detect a mechanism, after which other methodology can be used to study the same mechanism. A comparison of the experimental results with results collected using observational data, for instance, can help to arrive at a better understanding of cause and effect (Druckman et al. 2011: 5).

Therefore, this dissertation uses the increasingly advised 'mixed-method' design to connect the experimental data with 'real-world' data (Lieberman, 2005; Munck & Snyder, 2007; Tarrow, 1995, 2004). The core analytical instrument is an experiment, which is supported, on the one hand, by a study of large-N observational data to see whether the samples of respondents used within the experiments show similarity with representative samples from their countries, based on well-established datasets. This observational data is analyzed with the commonly used statistical methodology. On the other hand, a case study is used to illustrate the found mechanism in a real-world interstate conflict with process tracing methodology. Process tracing is a helpful approach to investigate a within-case mechanism (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 145). The aim of this methodology is not to find patterns that indicate a likelihood of independent variables affecting the dependent variable. Rather, it opens the black box of the mechanism and checks whether all the steps of the process are there. In other words, step-by-step it shows how one variable can relate to the other (Collier, 2011, p. 824; George & Bennett, 2005). Therefore, this methodology lends itself well to mixed methods, in which a causal mechanism established by large-N and experimental methods can be illustrated, or not (Lieberman, 2005). The power of the combination of these different methodologies lies in the individual strengths of each method. The value of the experimental methodology is that it is particularly suited to detect a very 'clean' causal mechanism. The large-N study allows for a comparison between the student samples and representative samples of their populations, respectively. Moreover, the value of the process tracing method is that the within-case study can show how experimental results can 'come to life', and offer a narrative of why one factor influences the other.

### *Case selection*

The difference that democratic peace theory assumes regarding the socialization of individuals by their regime-type dictates the case selection. So, by studying individuals who are supposedly influenced by a specific regime-type, it is important to distinguish between individuals who are socialized within different regime-types.

This dissertation re-conceptualizes non-democracy into different regime-types, as discussed above. For this study, it selects two types: a hybrid regime and a full-fledged autocracy with a single party. Consequently, this study focuses on samples of decision-makers from three different regime-types: liberal democracy, hybrid regime, and an autocracy.

The samples of decision-makers come from three different regime-types: the United States of America (hereafter US) as a full-fledged liberal democracy, the Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) as a hybrid regime, and the People's Republic of China (hereafter China) as a full-fledged autocracy. The selection of these countries is based on two parameters. First of all, the aim is to study individuals who are socialized within a particular regime-type. The US is one of the oldest full-fledged, bottom-up liberal democracies, and it furthermore occupies a central position in most democratic peace studies. China, with its one-party system and low adherence to human rights, has been a clear example of an autocratic regime for many years. Since Russia blossomed out of the former Soviet Union, it has been traveling from the autocratic regime it once was toward democracy and back and forth, thereby making it an example of a hybrid regime. That indication of the regime-type for these countries is supported by the results of Freedom House 2014<sup>11</sup> and Polity IV 2014.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, since the US, Russia, and China are all powerful players on the world stage, it can be expected that individuals coming from these states subconsciously have their unique perceptions about the role of their own country in the world. All three countries have massive populations, large territories and standing armies that rely on impressive defense budgets. All three countries are involved in conflict zones, and each has a seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. It can thus be expected that in samples from the US, Russia, and China it will be less likely that individuals will be affected by perceptions of the power of the world of their home-country, its size, or its population. To give an example: Sweden would be, theoretically, a good example of a liberal democracy, but individuals from Sweden might have a different perception of their country's world power than individuals from China. Although the experiments are built on scenarios about hypothetical conflicts, the chance that participants will be affected by different perceptions about the place of their home country in the world is minimized by this case selection.

### *Samples of respondents*

Three student samples, one from each of the three countries, are used as a proxy for decision-makers, just as in most earlier experimental studies on the democratic peace (Bakker, 2017; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993; Rousseau, 2005). Moreover, the use of student samples offers the best and most convenient opportunity at this point to come to produce comparable results. It would be impossible to reach large enough samples of decision-makers in all three countries, as decision-makers are too busy making real-world decisions. Also, conducting an experiment about the political system can be a sensitive topic in China. Using

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<sup>11</sup> Freedom House (2014); US: free (democracy), Russia: not free (hybrid), China: not free (Autocracy).

<sup>12</sup> Polity IV (2014); US: 10 (democracy), Russia: 4 (anocracy), China: -7 (autocracy).

students is one of the more accessible options. Another aspect of the use of students samples is the notion that, in particular within Russia and China, students can be considered to be the new elite. Political elites are generally university-educated. The student sample used in Russia, for example, comprises students from the Higher School of Economics, which has been shown to produce the new political elite of Russia (Mickiewicz, 2014).

Although the use of convenience samples is often the reason for debate among political scientists, theoretically this approach does make sense. Concerns are often related to the external validity of these samples. However, external validity does not only from a representative sample of a population, particularly not when a study aims at theoretical clarification. When experiments are used to provide theoretical clarity, their value lies in teaching us about the theory much more than the replication of real life (Druckman & Kam, 2011, p. 44). Druckman and Kam effectively show that the use of students does not 'intrinsically pose a problem for a study's external validity' (2011, p. 41) unless the 'size of an experimental treatment effect depends on a characteristic on which the convenience sample has virtually no variance' (2011, p. 41). These authors, who support their argument with convincing results (Druckman & Kam, 2011, pp. 45-52), contend that when an experiment aims at learning about a theory and studying its mechanisms, and thereby adds to an existing research agenda, as most experiments are, the generalizability of the participants should be weighed against the generalizability of many other factors involved, such as setting, timing, context, conceptual operationalizations (Druckman & Kam, 2011, pp. 44, 53). A few studies also show that when an experiment is replicated on a non-student sample (Mintz & Geva, 1993), or on political leaders (Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, & Renshon, 2016), the results are similar.

This study uses student populations for theoretical and practical reasons and has gone to great lengths to ensure internal validity. The primary aim of this study is to produce theoretical clarification; it empirically tests implicit and untested assumptions that are used as part of the explanatory power of democratic peace theory. This theory assumes that there is a particular effect of growing up in a liberal democratic society on all, or at least the bulk of, its citizens that is completely lacking within other regime-types. Therefore, a homogeneous sample could suffice for such a test (Morton & Williams, 2010, pp. 331-347) because the effect is assumed to be present among all citizens. Taking into account that in non-democratic settings it would be extremely difficult to achieve representative samples, or even other homogeneous samples aside from student populations, the *first test* of a theoretical argument among convenience samples is therefore warranted for this study.

The experiment is designed carefully. It relies, as mentioned above, on examples of earlier work (Geva et al., 1993; Geva & Hanson, 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993). Moreover, it is tested<sup>13</sup> thoroughly to make sure that the treatments are conceived as anticipated. Lastly, as elaborated in chapter 5, all efforts are made to create an experimental reality for the participants.

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<sup>13</sup> Several tests were conducted on Dutch student samples

### *Observational Large-N data*

The measure of liberal norms is conducted on representative samples of the populations of the US, Russia, and China, through the use of established and observational large-N data of the World Values Survey. The World Values Survey is a cooperative global network of social scientists who work together to measure changing values and beliefs of individuals. The data collection started in 1981 and since then has regularly measured (in a total now of six waves) the values and beliefs of about 400.000 respondents in about 100 countries all over the world. The values and beliefs are measured among nationally representative samples through one common questionnaire, which lends itself to comparative purposes. Of course, criticism can be raised about the traveling of concepts and the influence of language and culture on the results. However, the World Values Survey is by far the most comprehensive data set available when it comes to individual level values, between countries as well as over time. The fact that the same measure of liberal norms is used on representative samples of the US, Russia, and China allows for comparison with the student samples used in the experiments.

### *Case study*

Besides the results of the experiments and the results of the large-N observational data, a real-world case study is used to triangulate the results. That case study is the decision-making process of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the escalation of the Falklands conflict between the UK and Argentina. The decision-making process led to the 1982 Falklands War between Argentina and Great Britain. This case is well suited to this research project for several reasons. Firstly, it entails an interstate conflict between a liberal democracy and an autocracy over a territory that is disputed by both, which approximates the conceptual interstate conflict. Secondly, based on democratic peace theory, it would make perfect sense that a conflict between a liberal democracy (UK) and an autocracy (Argentina) would lead to war. That makes it a perfect example to study the results generated by the experiments within a real-world case. Thirdly, other factors conceptualized above are also present, such as invasiveness, use of power, and Margaret Thatcher as an (often considered) hawkish leader. Lastly, the Falklands War is well documented by respected scholars and journalists with access to classified materials (Freedman, 2004; Hastings & Jenkins, 1987). Most of these classified materials were moreover released in 2012 and published through the library of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (1991-2016). Also the work, life and personality of the main decision-maker of this conflict, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, is not only well researched by scholars, but also documented thoroughly by journalists and Thatcher herself (Aitken, 2013; Crichlow, 2006; Dyson, 2008; Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1991-2016; Moore, 2013; Steinberg, 2008; Thatcher, 1995).



### **3.6 Conclusion**

Democratic peace theorists believe that individuals, whether they belong to the masses or the elite, are socialized within the superstructure of their political system's regime-type. However, the emphasis within this literature lies on one particular regime-type, namely liberal democracy. A lot of explicit and implicit assumptions are made about the effect liberal democracy has and how this effect overshadows other potentially relevant factors that might influence decision-making regarding the use of force. Although a lot is assumed about decision-makers in the democratic peace literature (especially as a result of all non-liberal democracies being lumped together into one category), these assumptions are hardly ever tested empirically (or compared with the evidence from liberal democracies). This chapter brought the literature review of the preceding chapter together into a coherent theoretical framework that can be tested. It, furthermore, formulated the concepts used within this research and discussed the research strategy and the data used.

The theoretical framework brings together the different components of democratic peace theory, psychological insights of decision-making studies and the possible influence of system-level factors as posited by the realist paradigm of international relations. This framework connects these different explanations under the concept of the threat of a conflict and argues that an interstate conflict on the brink of war inherently presents a threat. The threat can be moderated by several factors which can be contextual (information about the other state and its behavior) and personal (belief systems and characteristics) to the decision-makers. The dissertation proceeds by performing several empirical tests of the formulated hypotheses in this chapter. In the next chapter, a clear conceptualization of liberal norms is presented, more thoroughly than has been done thus far within democratic peace theory. Chapter 4 then proceeds to a discussion of the operationalization of this concept, after which the level of liberal norms is measured among representative samples of the US, Russia, and China, as well as among student samples of these three world powers.

