

# The democratic peace theory politics essay



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War, conflict, warmongering, and power balance are just a few concepts involved within a nation's history. Along with many other concepts, War understood as an intentional armed conflict between communities in order to achieve political goals, has supported the public policy of many nations. In 1832 the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz (1832, p. 5) defined War as "an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfill our will", demonstrating how fundamental War was for nations that time. Although there are many arguments to support the nation's warmongering policies during the past decades there has been a discussion on how those policies might be necessary if some theorists have proven that Democracies don't fight Democracies (Rummel, 1999).

This essay will examine the existing arguments on "why democracies do not fight each other" using The Democratic Peace Theory and will give conclusions on how effective could be this theory during the present days, where the concept of War has changed.

### The Democratic Peace Theory

[...] Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere.

Democracies don't attack each other, they make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy.

William J. Clinton (January 1994)

The Democratic Peace Theory also called Mutual Democratic Pacifism gives a possible explanation on why democracies do not to war with each other.

Among others writers, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant outlined a first relevant idea in his essay *Perpetual Peace* (1795). Kant's theory is based on a world with countries sharing a common a constitutional republic as political regime, where people would appeal for a continuous or perpetual peace as an ideal for living. The premise of Kant's idea is that people will not decide to go on war unless to defend themselves and because of this there would be no aggressor nations and the war occurrences would end. For Kant, the reluctance of the people to support war and its related costs restrains democratic leaders from engaging conflicts with other nations.

After Kant, this strain of thought, where democracies are reluctant to use violent means against other democracies or other forms of governments, was continued across the centuries. The Kantian Idea of a pacific union fostered by shared or common values, cosmopolitan rights and the right of nations based on a federation of free states, had a support after the First World War, when idea of the right of nations to self-determination inspired the creation of the League of Nations. Important academics like Small and Singer (1976), Rummel (1979), Doyle (1986), Bueno de Mezquita and Lalman (1986), Geva, DeRouren and Mintz (1993), Rummel (1997), Starr (1997) and Danilovic and Clare (2007) have contributed with their work to support this theory.

Due to the multiple understandings of the basic elements of the Democratic Peace Theory is important to define the concepts of democracy and war. Rummel (1999, p. 10) provides an interesting definition of democracy as "democracies in its 20th century form means: regular elections for the most powerful government positions, competitive political parties, near universal

franchise, secret balloting and civil liberties and political rights”, in addition pre-20th democracies should be identified by “ periodic, competitive elections, that the powerful can be so kicked out of power, and that a body of citizens hold equal rights regardless of class or status”. However, Rummel does not take in account the transparency as an important element for a democracy. Transparency, understood as the open possibility of observation and discussion of a Government decisions and policies is a requisite for a modern democracy and reduces the possibilities of the governments to abuse.

Regarding to The concept of War, Most and Starr (1989) as cited in Starr (1997, p. 154) defines war as a “ sustained violent conflict fought by organized armed forces which are directed by a governmental authority”. Although this definition is comprehensive it is necessary to be actualized due to the changing components of modern war. Forsyth (2004, p. 17) define war as “ an act of force by a nation-state, crime organization, terror group, drug cartel, revolutionary group, or coalition of states to compel an enemy to do one’s will, accept a specific ideology, or prevent or allow unfettered criminal activity. The causes of war might include failures of diplomacy, communications, economic policies, or inadequate internal security. Wars should result in improved security for an affected nation’s citizens, but often result in degraded or deteriorated social conditions”.

Although the Democratic Peace Theory is quite controversial and has both weakness and strengths, its relative simplicity has challenged the predominant realist and neorealist theories of International Relations (IR) that have predominated in the international arena for several centuries.

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During the past decades, research undertaken in California (Buono de Mesquita and Lalman, 1986), Texas (Geva, DeRouren and Mintz, 1993), (Geva and Mintz, 1993), Hawaii (Rummel, 1997) and Illinois (Danilovic and Clare, 2007) confirmed in some extent the veracity of the Democratic Peace Theory. These studies showed that statistically the probability of a war between two democratic states is very low and that the democratic leaders are less interested in using military force or violent actions against other democracies.

The theory by itself and the results of these studies are deeply debated, but it is possible to derive some basic conclusions. First, the republican liberalism, as a theory of International Relations (IR) that supports the Democratic Peace Theory, might question the applicability of the realist theory of IR, which argues that the balance of power and common strategic goals are the main point of explanation for the stable and peaceful relations between democratic nations. The presented researches and arguments suggest that democratic states are continuously motivated by the necessity of a peaceful coexistence with its neighbors using the same regulations that characterize their domestic policy. These nations expect that other democracies will solve misunderstandings using consideration and a nonviolent scheme, and that their leaders will continuously foster collaborative and peaceful relations with each other. A good example of this reasoning is the speech of United States President, George W. Bush, who in 1994 said " And the reason why I'm so strong on democracy is democracies don't go to war with each other. And the reason why the people of most societies is don't like war, and they understand what war means.

Second, the Democratic Peace Theory might challenge the usefulness of other political ideas, different from democracy, in today's world. This thesis is supported by Rummel (1989, p. 10) when states that " Democracy is a general cure for political or collective violence of any kind - it is a method of nonviolence". Since a significant number of academic works identify democracies as political system less susceptible to create and promote violent means of foreign policy, with a relatively unrestricted amount of civil rights and participation, it is possible to identify democracy as a more desirable political system when compared with totalitarian, fascist or communist regimes.

Finally, political process such as transparency, cooperation, democratization, and integration could improve the relations among nations. Starr (1997, p. 155) highlights the importance of these elements when suggest that " the theories of integration stress the role of learning in the development of norms of cooperation and a sense of community, they stress the need for mutual benefits and the positive impact of the interdependence on the management of interdependent relations". However, it is important to point out the fact that unstable democracies or nations within a democratization process are not completely peaceful, and that might occur when the political institutions are not strong enough to support the system or when the country leading sectors are intimidated by the transition process.

Two classic and different streams of thought, one structural and one normative, explain the Democratic Peace Theory. On the one hand, the structural variant maintain that the organizations or institutions are restricted to go on war due to the diverse economical, social and political

costs for the government and the population, making war an undesirable option for the resolution of misunderstandings between nations. In addition, the importance of individual freedoms and free elections, maximize the leaders' political responsibilities inasmuch as they might be replaced if fail to maintain an adequate foreign policy. This view has been supported in the work of Geva, DeRouren and Mintz (1993, p. 224) when concluding: "the major reason why the use of force against other democracies is counterproductive from a political standpoint is because it is perceived by the public as a failure of foreign policy". Democratic institutions such as transparency, political pluralism, and legal rights, among others, make it difficult for governments and its leaders to create false reasons to convince their population to declare war to other state. Transparency is an important factor when thinking about democratic dyads because it means that both states can look through each other and know, or infer, their intentions. Starr (1997, p. 157) states, "such transparency means that each party has too much information about the other to create convincing enemy images, for either elite or masses".

On the other hand, a normative variant, sometimes called cultural explanation, maintains that common liberal and democratic values explain the stability and peaceful relations between democratic states. According to this variant, the existent culture regarding to democratic political values and conflict resolution means, support truthful ties between states and its leaders. In addition, these leaders expect that their counterparts will also understand the necessity of solving the differences without violent methods. In this extent is very important to emphasize how the democratic perception

of a certain state made by other, could modify the motivation for warmongering policies. Supporting this, Elman (1997) argues that “ political ideology, therefore, determines how democracies distinguish allies from adversaries: democracies that represent and act in their citizens’ interests are treated with respect and consideration, whereas non-democracies that use violence and oppression against their own people are regarded with mistrust and suspicion”.

Another explanation in addition to the structural and normative explanation of the Democratic Peace Theory is the “ Power Transition Theory” formulated in 1958 by A. F. K. Organski. This theory presents the international politics arena as a hierarchy with 4 levels of power between the states (a dominant state, great powers, middle powers and small powers), analyzing the cyclic occurrence of wars and the effect of transition power in the occurrence of conflicts. Organski (1980, p. 19) states that “ An even distribution of political, economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of nations is likely to increase the probability of war; peace is preserved best when there is an imbalance of national capabilities between disadvantaged and advantaged nations; the aggressor will come from a small group of dissatisfied strong countries; and it is the weaker, rather than the stronger; power that is most likely to be the aggressor”. This work suggests, therefore, that democracies are satisfied states that share strong economic goals and are less likely to fight about territory, in other words, peaceful means of discussion will prevail but not violent ones.

Even though the Democratic Peace Theory provides a plausible explanation for the non-violent behavior between democratic states, a great amount of <https://assignbuster.com/the-democratic-peace-theory-politics-essay/>



criticism exist among the academy. This criticism could be divided in two variants, first, one related to the methodology used to undertake the researches and analyze the empirical data. Several academics argue that there is always some degree of subjectivity regarding to the studies performed and the results are, in some extent, affected by this prejudices.