

The spread of democracy research paper

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Years back, the general perception of democracy by most countries was that a democratic system of governance was only possible under particular socio-economic and cultural conditions and thus a preserve for the rich western countries. However, democracy characterized by regular free and fair elections is common in most countries today, with majority of them being poor developing nations.

Increasingly, democracy is becoming a universal concept as opposed to the earlier beliefs that it is a preserve for rich industrialized nations. In non-democratic countries, democratic movements are a common occurrence, where the citizenry demand freedom and expansion of the democratic space as a way of promoting peace and development.

Although the spread of democracy depends on internal attributes or societal factors within a nation, international influence also promotes the spread of democracy in non-democratic countries. Given the rapid global spread of democracy, multilateral assistance is important to promote democracy in non-democratic and autocratic countries. Democracy leads to peace either nationally or between countries, thus contributing to regional stability.

The social origins of democracy involved a revolutionary shift of the relative importance accorded to individuals by the society to a collective system where the rights and interests of all the society members were upheld.

The expansion in the democratic space gave rise to democratic forms of governance that contributed to the developments in the various aspects of the society. It contributed to developments in science, education, economy and culture in ancient world (Russett, and Oneal 2001, 112).

The earlier democratic forms of governance particularly the American democratic revolution, led to the rise of Renaissance in the field of science, religious reformation and the rise of capitalistic economies in earlier democracies. In the non-democratic governance, the social elite including the military or religious personalities or royalties ruled the countries.

The revolutionary shift particularly in Western Europe in the last century intended to advocate for the recognition of the rights of the individuals from the ruling elite and in the process give more power to the people. During this shift, political democratic institutions emerged to advocate for the interests, values, and rights of the people from the authoritarian leadership.

This shift was gradual, characterized by shift of power from a centralized system to the society. The military or monarchical rule gave way to the rule by the rich and wealthy traders in the society who comprised the majority of the earlier parliament. Later, the need for the recognition of universal rights and freedoms for all individuals necessitated the distribution of power to the commercial class and much later extended to all citizens.

The origin of democracy can be linked to the ancient city of Athens in Greece. The emphasis on freedom and earlier religious and philosophical studies in Greece coupled with the need for freedom of worship and trial by a competent judicial system contributed to the rise of democracy in this ancient civilization. The increasing concern over autonomy helped grow and stabilize independence that was a critical ingredient in major achievements in the field of politics and science.

In ancient Rome, the governance included aristocratic and democratic principles with the aim of promoting a collective welfare of all the members of the society. During this period, the empire enjoyed relative peace compared to the other nations in Europe. However, much of the rulers of the Roman Empire disrespected the rights of individuals leading to the collapse of the empire.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, political absolutism took over suppressing the individual rights and liberties. After the fall of the Roman rule, the security of the people in Europe was compromised giving way to protection by warlords in exchange for payment. Individuals submitted to authoritarian leadership of monarchs and appointed priests, thereby depriving the populace of their individual civil rights and privileges.

The economic development and religious practices were under control of these rulers. Economic freedom contributed to the rise of democratic governance in most civilizations of the ancient world. The growth in trade characterized by the use of a common currency shifted power and dependence from the monarchic leaders leading to wealthy merchants giving rise to a form of individualism, where the rich merchants enjoyed certain privileges.

The shift from a centralized power system to the new system characterized by economic freedom encouraged the social development and development of individual enterprises. The economic freedom also contributed to Renaissance financed by the wealth merchants giving way to a change in human thinking and social organizations. Learning, particularly of

philosophical concepts and languages provided the means of spreading new ideas on governance to all parts of a society contributing to breaking the prevalent political ideologies.

The increase in knowledge freed people from the religious and absolutistic control by demanding the recognition of individual rights and liberties from the ruling class. The intellectual and economic development in Europe led to religious reformation where the authority previously centralized in religious institutions, shifted to individuals giving rise to the democratic governance.

The democracies of the world seldom engage in international conflicts or wars between them as supported by empirical data research. This phenomenon shows a direct relationship between growth and expansion of democratic ideologies with peace or relative stability of a country or a region. In addition, the empirical research evidence suggests that violent actions are rare within democracies as opposed to aristocratic or purely monarchical countries. The democratic peace theory is based on Immanuel Kant's philosophical ideas.

Immanuel Kant in the 18th century postulated the idea that the establishment of democratic republics could contribute to world peace. He believed that with democratic governance, people will see no reason to go to war or engage in a conflict, unless in self-defense (Kant 1991, 106). If there is relative peace in a country or a region, wars could be limited if not eliminated. Kant's ideas gave rise to the modern democratic peace theory, which claims that democracies rarely engage in wars.

The democratic peace theory holds that democracies do not engage in war between themselves although they may engage in war with non-democracies. Empirical evidence supports this claim to some extent.

The proponents of the democratic peace attribute the lack of war in democracies or friendly relations between democracies to the peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms inherent in democratic societies or restraining public opinion. The democracies opt for peaceful means of solving internal political conflicts through mediation and dialogue rather than war or civil conflict.

Additionally, democracies engage in bilateral or multilateral trade, which eliminates chances of going to war in case of strained relations. Democracies also have established democratic institutions including a free electoral process and an influential legislature that deter the government from going into war.

The democratic peace theory advances two important reasons as to why democracies seldom engage in war with each other. Firstly, the democratic institutions in democracies deter these nations from engaging in war.

According to Doyle, basing his argument on Kant's philosophy, the democracies fail to go to war with each other because in a democracy, the leadership is answerable to the citizenry (Doyle 1983, 323). If the democratic government unilaterally decides to go to war against the public opinion, it faces the risk of removal from power through elections.

In addition, democracies allow the public opinion to be incorporated into a country's foreign policy hence reducing or eliminating the chances of going into war. The domestic political structures in democratic countries also contribute to avoidance of war by democratic nations as it increases political competition between the incumbent government and the opposition.

The second reason advanced by the proponents of the democratic peace theory involves the inherent social and cultural practices that promote peaceful resolution of conflicts allowing rival parties within a nation to reach a compromise, which is then extended to other democratic countries.

In addition, democracies also develop a positive perception of each other pertaining justice and conflict resolution within their boundaries, which encourage peaceful resolution of a common conflict. Democratic states also cooperate in many aspects, particularly in trade, because of common interests leading to a community of states with common interests that prevent wars among them or with other democratic states.

The critics of the democratic peace theory, among them Christopher Layne, argue that democracies fail to engage in wars because of other reasons other than those advanced by the democratic peace theory. The crises in democracies do not often result to war because of various reasons. Layne posits, the crisis between the “ Great Britain and France in 1898, which have the most developed democracies in the world, did not result to war because the British war machinery was simply overwhelming” (1994, 43-44).

Other critics argue that, only interstate wars conform to the democratic peace theory and that internal dispute resolution in a democratic nation cannot be attributed to democratic peace theory by considering the civil wars in democratic states such as the American Civil War of 1861-1865. This challenges the applicability of the democratic peace theory in internal disputes of democratic nations.

In contrast, non-democracies lack democratic norms of compromise and peaceful resolution of conflicts or crises. They are, therefore, war-prone and can engage in war with democratic states. Democratic states on the other hand exercise restraint when in a conflict with a non-democratic nation.

However, the democratic nation may go into war with a non-democratic nation if the expectations are not met or if the non-democratic state takes advantage of the moderation exercised by the democratic nation. Thus, according to the democratic peace theory, democratic nations develop peaceful relations with each other but behave differently to other non-democratic states.

The spread of democracy termed democratization began in the last century from a few democracies but spread to the current state where more than 50% of all the states are democratic republics. The spread of democracy even to non-democratic nations is partly dependent on the democratic nature of the surrounding nations or region.

The democratization of a non-democratic nation is enhanced when the surrounding nations are democracies (Kant 1991, 114). Conversely, a

democratic state surrounded by authoritarian countries will most likely revert to non-democratic practices. The democratic states increased sharply after World War I but fell in the advent of World War II. At the end of the Cold War, the number of world democracies has continued to increase.

The democratization process and its contribution to peace are best explained by the classical theory by Immanuel Kant (Kant 1991, 112). Kant advanced a series of democratic processes that would eventually result to peace. Firstly, Kant argued that the idea of development of a peaceful democratic community would encourage the elimination of non-democratic ideologies.

He also considered the contribution of democracy based on democratic norms to the process of democratization and peace following an evolutionary pattern. However, the major concern is whether democratization reduces the chances of a nation engaging in warfare. Empirical evidence indicates that dictatorships increase the chances of a country going into civil war or engaging in war with other nations.

Democracy often in the Western world entails freedom of expression and association by all the citizens within a nation and people-driven governance characterized by free and fair elections. However, the role of democracy in the spread of peace within nations and between democracies is often contentious. Historically, democracy was a revolutionary and social movement whose main aim was to break away from the authoritarian rule in most countries.

The major reason for the rapid spread of democracy is that democracies rarely go to war. However, critics argue that established democracies do not engage in war with each other not because they uphold democratic principles, but because they have common trade and social institutions even within their borders.

While it is evident that democracy promotes peace and integration both nationally and internationally, new rivalries between states might generate interstate wars. During the Cold war, the rivalries between powerful democratic nations such as Russia and China led to minor wars and border insecurity.

Despite democracy being one way of solving interstate conflicts and achieving peace, in my opinion, democratization alone does not normally result to avoidance of wars. Countries that boast of internal democracy engage in warlike actions with their neighboring countries, which is a pointer that democracy does not always lead to peace like the tensions between India and Pakistan. Additionally, democracies just like military leaderships can opt for war, to improve their popularity among the electorate within a country.

The old regimes within democratic countries also manipulate democracy by engaging in war with neighboring states or against minority society within the democratic nation. In other emerging democracies, the regime, which is normally inclined towards authoritarian rule, uses the electoral process to consolidate power over the people with less regard to fundamental individual rights and liberties.

In my opinion, it is difficult to convince non-democratic states that democracy is beneficial compared to authoritarian rule. The ruling elite in democratic countries often use democracy and democratization as means of legitimizing cruelty and tyranny to its citizens. In some cases, the leaders exercise authority over the electoral process making it impossible to conduct free and fair elections.

In addition, in these countries, the freedom of the media is minimal and the opposition parties often face mistreatment from the governing party. In developed democracies, the threats of war with minority dissidents or with neighboring countries are common. Thus, the notion that democracy contributes to peace is not always right.

Indeed, in the modern era, democracy is used as one way of seeking international recognition by breakaway states while at the same time committing various acts of atrocity. This, in my opinion, further complicates the notion of democratic peace as held by the Western powerful democracies.

The leaders of the breakaway nations use ‘ democracy’ as the reason for seeking independence from the dominating state. However, in the process of democratization, the minorities are forced out of the territory as the leadership seeks to establish a homogeneous ethnic group to bolster their political interests.

Forced expulsion or genocide of the minority communities is committed in order to attain a uniform state comprising of a single ethnic group. After the

atrocities, performed in the name of democracy, a referendum is held to confirm the majority rule of the new state.

Modern democracy and peace belong to the new world order. Given that democracy alone faces challenges in achieving universal peace even between industrialized nations, the real world order provides an ideal way for countries to regulate its institutions in the wake of globalization in the 21st century.

This can be achieved through intergovernmental cooperation. In addition, the real world order provides means of engaging the non-democratic institutions through use of international institutions. Under the new world order, the international institutions such as the United Nations, undertake the role of ensuring peace and security of the nations with the support of developed nations.

However, the world order faces challenges amongst them, the unpopularity of the concept. In addition, centralized rulemaking body requires universal participation by all the member states including the non-democratic states. The major challenge includes the fact that the United Nations cannot operate effectively without support from the powerful democracies neither will the states approve overall authority to this international body that would compromise their sovereignty.

The common belief that the new world order will bring universal peace even to authoritarian-ruled countries is based on the democratic peace theory,

which postulates that democracies seldom engage in war amongst themselves.

While democracies may engage in war with non-democracies, they abstain from engaging in war amongst themselves hence establishing a 'zone of peace'. The zone of peace will keep on expanding with the spread of democracy until universal peace and democracy is attained in all regions of the globe through an international federation.

The notion of a zone of peace, established under a democracy, began in the eighteenth century based on the Kant's ideologies about the democratic peace and the idea of a global federation. The origin of the idea for a common federation has its roots from military alliances common in the sixteenth century.

The military alliances promoted peaceful resolution of conflicts by allowing enemy states to cooperate. However, the new world order bases its quest for global peace through international institutions, while Kant's theory holds that universal peace can be attained through the establishment of democratic republics in the countries of the world.

In addition, the peace theory, which advocates for the formation of an international federation to enhance peaceful coexistence among nations, claims that democratic nations act only peacefully towards each other but can fight with non-democratic nations. However, Kant expected democratic nations to behave peacefully towards all the other nations, whether democratic or non-democratic as a way of achieving global peace.

Democracies often remain peaceful unless they are attacked or threatened by regimes from non-democratic nations. Under the democracy theory, the democratic nations are justified to employ force against authoritarian regimes because the non-democratic states may interfere with the peaceful democratic life in these countries. In addition, democracies cannot go to war with one another in order to promote the spread of peace among nations.

Thus, the spread of democracy is believed to increase the level of regional stability and peace among the various nations of the world beginning with the zones of peace and later spread to include the other non-democratic countries or the 'war zones'. However, powerful nations particularly the Western governments and the International institutions such as NATO have wrongly used the spread of democracy to propagate forceful intrusion into relatively stable countries.

The 'zones of peace' as supported by liberal democracies are portrayed as just and the best way of attaining global peace. However, other forms of political organizations can also promote the development of specific 'zones of peace'. The liberal democratic peace can be achieved through other forms of political organizations other than the liberal democracy supported by the Western world (Singer, and Wildavsky 1993, 32).

Countries that do not conform to the ideologies of the liberal democracies or the Western cultural or socio-economic practices, experience relative peace and have friendly relations with the neighboring nations. The current democratic peace theory proposes a universal peace and security among

nations, which is only achievable through democratic practices and international institutions' presence.

In my opinion, democracy can spread both within a nation and internationally with help from democratic institutions within a democratic state and the international institutions such as the UN. However, the control of political affairs of the country should be left to the citizenry as opposed to the forceful application of the democratic principles on the people.

Otherwise, the citizens would retaliate with revolt, which could harm the spread of the democratic peace.

Internationally, democratic peace can spread through emphasis of respect to fundamental human rights by all nations irrespective of whether they uphold liberal-democratic ideologies or they are simply non-democratic. The social development and expansion in religious and economic freedoms can also contribute to the spread of democratic peace across the world.

Despite democracy playing a vital role in the spread of peace, it faces many impediments in the spread of democracy among many nations. In most authoritarian nations, reforms are rare with electoral systems that deter the spread of democratic peace.

In addition, these countries have a weak and non-vibrant civil society and cannot effectively challenge the governing regime. Other emerging democracies practice authoritarian rule under the guise of democracy. The international institutions such as the United Nations help to foster democratic peace in nations faced with governance challenges.

The United Nations, comprised of different democratic nations, undertakes to prevent common problems that hinder the spread of democratic peace. In particular, the internal conflicts or civil wars within a nation, government atrocities against its own people and wars between states are the major concerns of the United Nations of the Security Council (Luard 1986, 93).

However, these global institutions experience faces challenges from the member states that may refuse to comply with the laid down statutes as seen during the Cold War. The structural frameworks of the new world order relies on the development of these international institutions, which should have formal authority to promote peace even if it means the use of force.

However, the West including the United States refuses to vest authority to the legitimate global institutions and thus affects their operations. In addition, these global institutions contribute less, if any, to the welfare of the citizens of most countries. The global interests, particularly of the non-Western developed countries during the Cold War coupled with the perceived ineffectiveness of the International institutions in promoting peace contribute to the continuation of authoritarian governance.

In my opinion, the UN system as presently constituted has the potential of promoting peace and security than during the Cold War. The new challenges facing the UN's operations include the potential security risk of countries amassing weapons of mass destruction.

However, I believe that the UN through various commitments can solve this potential crisis and contribute to peace among nations. Through mobilization

of UN peace keeping activities to countries ravaged by war, peaceful negotiations, and conflict resolution can be reached. The UN can also authorize the use of force in exceptional circumstances, especially in countries ravaged by war or in case of potential threat of weapons of mass destruction, which is important in promoting peace among countries.

The UN also promotes the establishment of democratic governance in a country by first allowing a transitional government to be in place. This, in my opinion, is a vital step in rebuilding a state ravaged by war. The UN has the mandate to carry out inspection and monitoring of a country's nuclear plants to ascertain the activities of the nuclear plant. Thus, any potential threats from weapons of mass destruction can be avoided and contribute to global peace.

Under the UN Charter, the relations between nations are covered. However, the internal activities of nations such as civil wars and weapon amassment by nations remain unregulated. In addition, the Charter provided for open membership by all interested nations regardless of whether they are democracies or not.

However, I think the operations of the UN could be enhanced if the membership comprised of democracies only because democracies respect human rights and fundamental rights. Additionally, democracies seldom engage in wars between themselves and do not allow killing by governments or civil wars to occur.

Thus, creating a UN institution that is comprised of democratic nations only would contribute to the expansion of democracy and peace among nations. Democracies are also less prone to engage in production of weapons of mass destruction and are more likely to comply with international laws and treaties than non-democracies. Democratic nations are less likely to be threats to international peace than dictatorships and therefore, form important members of the UN.

In addition to contributing to the spread of peace, democratization or the spread of democracy has promoted international cooperation particularly with regard to peace and security of nations (Spencer 1998, 305).

Democracies often do not fight other democracies but can engage in war with authoritarian regimes when attacked.

The democratic nations cooperate through international institutions under the new world order to promote global peace in the nations of the world. Democracies often respect and trust the democratic practices of the other democratic nations leading to peaceful relations and expansion of democratic peace among nations.

The spread of democracy also has promoted international cooperation in trade and economic sectors, which is not feasible in war or international conflict. However, economic depressions or boundary dispute between democratic nations may strain the international relations enjoyed by democracies.

The integration of the world economy particularly in the areas of communication and trade can be attributed to the spread of democracy. This has encouraged cooperation in the management and regulation of the international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank. Additionally, democratic nations cooperate in promoting the spread of democracy by advocating for a vibrant civil societies and democratic institutions in non-democratic institutions.

The democratic peace theory holds that democracies rarely engage in war amongst them but can fight with authoritarian regimes. The spread of democracy, therefore, contribute to the spread of international peace among nations as postulated under the new world order. However, some democracies engage in dictatorial leadership and in the process hinder the spread of democratic peace. The international institutions play an important role in promoting the spread of democratic peace.

In addition, democracy promotes international cooperation among nations particularly in world economy and international trade. Given the important role played by international institutions in the spread of democratic peace, the membership of the United Nations or the United Nations Security Council should comprise of developed democracies in order to grow and consolidate democratic peace.

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