

Importance of democracy to absence of war politics essay



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In this essay, I argue that democracy is not important to the absence of war among states because it cannot be conclusively demonstrated that democracy is either sufficient for or a pre-requisite of peace. This essay will first examine the various explanations for how democracy contributes to peace, before going on to provide a critique of the explanations and demonstrating how democracy is not necessary for peace between states.

Democratic peace theorists offer two main explanations for why democracies contribute to an absence of war among states. The first explanation deals with factors inherent to democracies in order to show why democratic states are less likely to engage in interstate conflict. Such inherent factors include the Pacific Public Thesis, the Institutional Thesis and the Political Cultural Thesis[i]. The Pacific Peace Thesis advocates that since people in democracies possess “ greater control over the policies of their country”[ii]compared to people in non-democratic states, their rational self-interest and unwillingness to bear the burdens to conflict lead to a peace-inclined democratic state. The Institutional Thesis emphasises the “ dispersion of political power”[iii]within a democracy that “ constrains (a president or prime minister) from using military force”[iv]and makes peace more creditable because the policy of war can only pass if “ approved by popular sanction and the action of diverse governmental bodies”[v]. Finally, the Political-Cultural Thesis proposes the view that democratic states which practice “ nonviolent resolution of domestic conflicts”[vi]will also be inclined to display similar behaviour with regards to foreign affairs. The inherent-democratic-factors explanation suggests that democratic states are less

inclined to war compared to their non-democratic counterparts due to their political composition.

However, it is clear that being democratic does not mean that such states will be predisposed to peace. Immanuel Kant acknowledged that democratic peace only extend to “ relations between democratic states”[vii]and that democracies would still have to resort to the “ older, more terrible logic of realism”[viii]in dealing with non-democratic states, like the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, subscription to the democratic ideal does not restrain states from all conflicts but only from conflicts with other democratic states. Nevertheless, the assertion that democratic states do not fight with each other is also problematic. Critics have pointed out that democratic peace theorists rely on “ a pattern of shifting and loose definitions”[ix]of what constitutes a democracy to exclude problematic cases like pre-1914 Germany in order to defend the validity of their theory. Definitional difficulties aside, the “ statistical rarity of both democracy and war”[x]means that the absence of war among democratic states can be attributed to a “ statistical improbability”[xi]rather than the effect of democracy on states. Therefore, the relationship between democracies and peace among states is “ spurious”[xii]and the absence of interstate war can better be explained by other realist and neoliberal theories which do not see democracy as a pre-requisite to peace.

The second explanation for how democracy contributes to peace between states focuses on how the relationship between democratic states is conducive for economic interdependence and the formation of security communities. Economic interdependence among self-rational, democratic

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states makes interstate conflicts unlikely because “ the use of military force does adversely affect states’ commercial relations”[xiii]. According to the constructivist view, economic interdependence among democratic states also leads to increased communication between them and “ important channels for averting state conflict”[xiv]. Over time, economic interdependence between democratic states will result in the formation of a security community. The shared values of democracy and capitalism within the security community “ make a resort to force unimaginable”[xv]. Members within a security community are also more likely join international organisations, which “ encourage cooperation by facilitating consultation and coordination”[xvi], further reducing the possibility of interstate conflict.

However, it cannot be conclusively proven that democracy is essential for explaining the absence of war among states. Democracy is not a prerequisite of economic interdependence since it can arise between non-democratic states as well. The realist view of hegemonic stability theory proposes that in order for states to “ have confidence in and engage with free trade in an anarchic environment”[xvii]; all that is required is for a hegemon to provide stability within the international economic order. Free trade within these states, which need not be democratic, will still result in a situation of economic interdependence that discourages war between them. Although self-rationality of states is an important component of this argument, democracy is not required for economic interdependence to form between states.

Also, security communities can exist independently of democratic values and norms. The case of ASEAN provides us an example of an instance in which <https://assignbuster.com/importance-of-democracy-to-absence-of-war-politics-essay/>

member states of a security community “ do not share liberal-democratic values or a substantial degree of intra-regional economic interdependence”[xviii]. Instead, other more important factors that result in the formation of security communities include “ the deliberate creation of, and adherence to, norms, symbols and habits”[xix]. Therefore, while security communities might be important to the absence of war among states, the ideal of democracy itself is not a vital factor in the formation of security communities.

In conclusion, the mere subscription of states to the political ideology of democracy does not guarantee that they will be inherently more peaceful than non-democratic states. Also, while peace might be possible amongst democratic state, definitional and statistical problems cast doubt on the validity of democratic peace. In addition, while economic interdependence and security communities are two of the strongest arguments with regards to democratic peace, both of these theories can still exist in the absence of democracy. Since democracy is neither sufficient to guarantee a peaceful state nor is it essential for peace among states, it is therefore of no importance in explaining the absence of war among states.