Twitter Thread by Paul Poast

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Is it true that democracies don't go to war with each other?

Sort of. But I wouldn't base public policy on the finding.

Why? Let's turn to the data.

[THREAD]

> Democracies do not go to war with each other. There are a lot of empirical data to support that theory. I summarize that literature here. https://t.co/SQLk9J9rZ8 https://t.co/tLlSyisEIU
>
> — Michael McFaul (@McFaul) December 12, 2020

The idea of a "Democratic Peace" is a widely held view that's been around for a long time.

By 1988, there already existed enough studies on the topic for Jack Levy to famously label Democratic Peace "an empirical law"

have never fought on opposite sides. This absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations.[14]

The earliest empirical work on the topic was the 1964 report by Dean Babst published in the "Wisconsin Sociologist"

ELECTIVE GOVERNMENTS -- A FORCE FOR PEACE

Dean V. Babst
Wisconsin State Department of Public Welfare

Using the war participation data from Quincy Wright's "A Study of War", Babst produced the following two tables

Table 1

Independent Nations Which Participated in World War I

Allies and Associated Powers			Central Powers
Elective Governments	Non-Elective Governments		Non-Elective Governments
Australia	China	Montenergro	Austria-Hungary
Belgium	Costa Rica	Nicaragua	Bulgaria
Canada	Cuba	Panama	Germany
Great Britain	Greece	Portugal	Turkey
France	Guatemala	Rumania	
Italy	Haiti	Russia	
Brazil	Honduras	San Marino	
New Zealand	Japan	Serbia	
Union of South Africa	Liberia	Siam	
United States	Luxemburg		

The tables show that democracies were NOT on both sides (of course, Finland is awkward given that it fought WITH Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union).

Babst expanded his study beyond the World Wars in a 1972 paper in Industrial Research. He confirmed his finding.

In a 1976 paper published in the Jerusalem Journal of International Relations, J.D. Singer and Melvin Small sought to replicate and challenge Babst's findings

*The War-Proneness of Democratic Regimes, 1816–1965**

Melvin Small and J. David Singer

But they confirmed the finding that democracies (what they call "bourgeois democracies") do not appear to attack one another

Who Fights Against Whom?

Although bourgeois democracies are represented in significant numbers both as participants and initiators in major international wars since 1816, they do not seem to fight against one another. We found only two cases of wars between such states – an ephemeral republican France attacking an ephemeral republican Rome in 1849 and a rightward-drifting Finnish democracy joining Germany to attack Russia (and thus the Allied Nations) in 1941.

The Journal of Conflict Resolution (finally, a journal I recognize) got into the act in 1983 with a paper by Rudy Rummel

https://t.co/YZpsuRIcX0

Rummel looked at "Libertarian states", meaning states that emphasize individual freedom and hold competitive open elections, do not fight one another.

As shown below, there are simply no dots on the left-hand side.

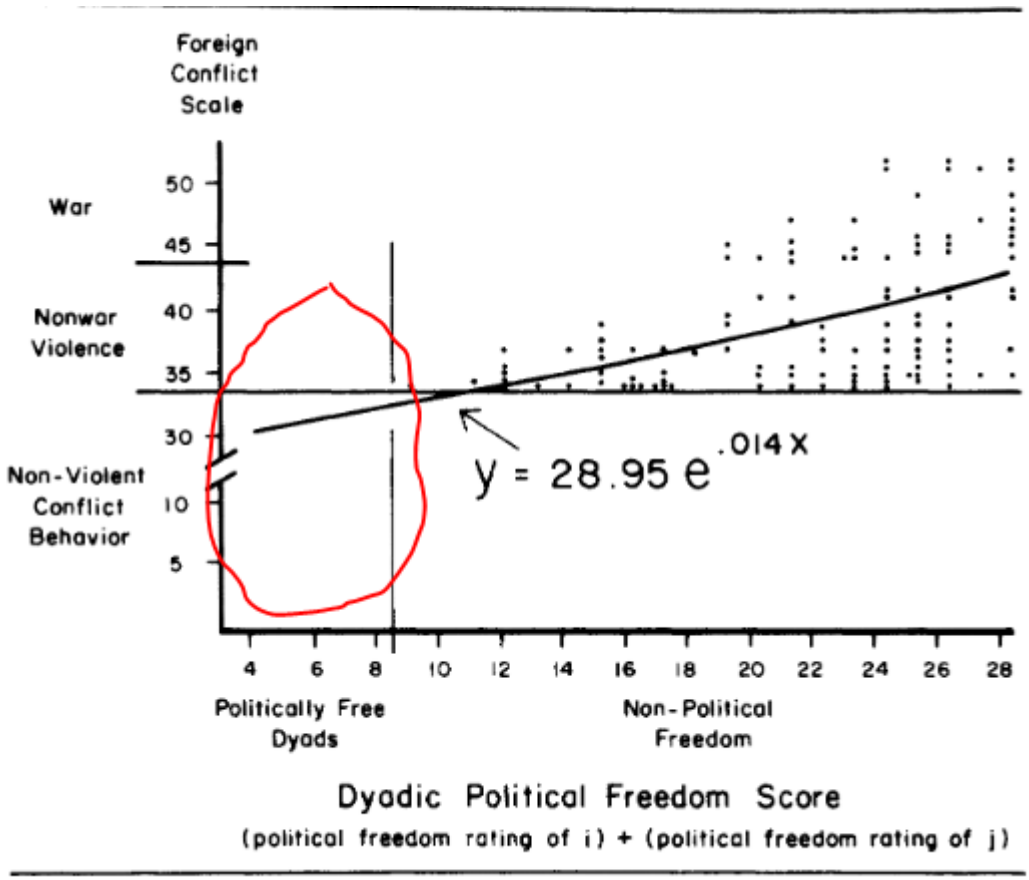


Figure 2: Dyadic Violence versus Political Freedom

So these were the studies that led Levy to make his "empirical law" claim.

But the work didn't stop (perhaps BECAUSE Levy made that claim)

In particular, Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett published two papers in the early 1990s that setup the study of democratic peace for a new generation of scholars.

The first, with a very descriptive title, was published in @II_journal in 1992

https://t.co/lbHubdHBSa

The second, and more famous paper, was published in @apsrjournal in 1993

https://t.co/Cx24knrE0w

A key innovation of the papers was to expand the consideration of "conflict" to "militarized interstate disputes (MIDs)", not just wars.

MIDs include wars and "lower levels of conflict", like ■

https://t.co/robuJHtp9X

> This incident is why the label "Militarized Interstate Dispute" is useful -- no fatalities, one day event, and no actual fighting.
>
> But if fighting had taken place? If fatalities had occurred? If it lasted for multiple days? Then it's something else -- #ModernMajorPowerWar? https://t.co/dGTh0lv2A6
>
> — Paul Poast (@ProfPaulPoast) October 3, 2018

In short, all wars are MIDs, but not all MIDs are wars.

This allowed Maoz and Russet to really find out how "pacific" democracies are to one another.

Both papers find that "democracies engage in militarized disputes with each other less than would be expected by chance"

So conflict is less (see neg coefficient in the logit model from their 1993 paper), but not zero.

TABLE 1

Effects of Joint Democracy and Potentially Confounding Factors on Conflict Involvement and Escalation

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	MILITARIZED DISPUTES[a]	INTERNATIONAL CRISES[b]
	Effect on Conflict Involvement	
Democracy	−.004 (.002)**	−.002 (.003)
Wealth	−.022 (.008)**	−.040 (.016)*
Growth	−.107 (.021)**	−.133 (.032)**
Alliance	−.517 (.105)**	−.339 (.165)*
Contiguity	1.419 (.108)**	1.964 (.190)**
Capability ratio	−.007 (.001)**	−.002 (.001)**
	Effect on Conflict Escalation	
Democracy	−.004 (.002)*	−.001 (.003)
Wealth	−.022 (.008)**	−.040 (.016)*
Growth	−.111 (.021)**	−.139 (.031)**
Alliance	−.522 (.105)**	−.336 (.164)*
Contiguity	1.417 (.108)**	1.962 (.190)**
Capability ratio	−.007 (.001)**	−.002 (.001)*

Note: N = 19,020. Entries are unstandardized parameter estimates in logistic regression equations; standard errors are in parentheses. Gamma is a measure of the difference between the observed and expected values throughout the analysis, appropriate for a priori prediction of monotonic relationships (Hildebrand, Laing, and Rosenthal 1977).
[a]Gamma = .54.
[b]Gamma = .59.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

This negative coefficient essentially became the focus of a host of further studies: studies seeking to confirm that it was negative...or show that it was a spurious finding.

Russett himself published a 1997 paper with John Oneal seeking to show how democracy is one part of a "triad of peace" (along with IO membership and dyadic trade)

https://t.co/sHtp70JAUX

Using a "dyadic design" (state A, state B, year t) they find that the higher is the lower of the two "Democracy" scores in the dyad, the less likely is the dyad to enter a conflict (did you follow that?)

$$DISPUTE_{ij,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * DEM_{L,t} + \beta_2 * GROWTH_{L,t} + \beta_3 * ALLIES_{ij,t} + \beta_4 * CONTIG_{ij,t} + \beta_5 * CAPRATIO_{ij,t} + \beta_6 * DEPEND_{L,t-1}. \quad (1)$$

TABLE 2. Models of Involvement in Militarized Disputes, 1950–1985: Assessing the Liberal Peace

Variable		*Eqn 1*	*Eqn 2*	*Eqn 3*	*Eqn 4*
Democracy score$_L$	β	-0.0497	-0.0554	-0.0413	-0.0457
	SE_β	0.0074	0.0077	0.0083	0.0076
	p	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

This particular paper set off a long series of papers trying to identify an omitted variable that would wipe-out the relationship, along with Oneal and Russett responding to those papers.

These omitted variables included...

...Cold War interests...
https://t.co/kKDb7ojyYb

...dyad specific effects...

https://t.co/ILc6WPLEl6

...too many control variables...

https://t.co/t9oqLXQ9Bf

...capitalism...

https://t.co/4vSa2OBgoh

...contract intensive economies...

https://t.co/Q3Tf2HcpOE

....concentration of democracies...

https://t.co/F5OGM5IHVh

...and, most recently, it might be the case that the "Democratic Peace" is really a product of empowering women via universal suffrage.

https://t.co/KURONXwhZW

Here's the thing: the findings in all of these studies hing on measuring democracy.

That's not a trivial matter.

Most rely on the Polity measure of democracy

https://t.co/rpJgbSS5Kf

The Polity measure of democracy runs from -10 (full authoritarian regime - think Saddam Hussein's Iraq) to 10 (full liberal democracy - think Sweden).

In most of the above studies, a pair of countries are considering "jointly democratic" if both have Polity scores >= 6.

How does Polity acquire that score? A key component in the Polity coding is "Executive Constraints". You can see this by looking at the weights in the codebook

Authority Coding	**Scale Weight**
Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment (XRCOMP):	
(3) Election	+2
(2) Transitional	+1
Openness of Executive Recruitment (XROPEN):	
only if XRCOMP is Election (3) or Transitional (2)	
(3) Dual/election	+1
(4) Election	+1
Constraint on Chief Executive (XCONST):	
(7) Executive parity or subordination	+4
(6) Intermediate category	+3
(5) Substantial limitations	+2
(4) Intermediate category	+1
Competitiveness of Political Participation (PARCOMP):	
(5) Competitive	+3
(4) Transitional	+2
(3) Factional	+1

How does the Polity project determine the constraints on a leader (or determine any of the other components)?

Human coding (think of small armies of graduate student RAs)!

But this is where things become tricky, as highlighted in a recent @Journal_of_GSS pieces by @JeffDColgan...

https://t.co/d6Ztq2zis5



... and by @sarahsunnbush.

https://t.co/uv4ZAgS4ke



The pieces show that the coding of a country's regime type is often influenced by how Americans piece a country: this coder bias can lead to unequal treatment of countries or unequal coding of countries at different times.

Consider this VERY telling (and perhaps damning) passage from Colgan's paper (notable that it deals with Iran, which was the impetus for @McFaul's original tweet)

For one period, 1997–2003, Iran's Polity score jumped massively, by nine points. What accounts for this change? It coincides with the presidency of Khatami, a pro-Western reformer. Khatami tried to befriend the United States and reorient Iranian foreign policy. He also campaigned to make the government more accountable to the people. He did not, however, change or even seek to change the constitution or any of the key institutions or processes of the regime, saying, "there will not be a democratic regime in the true sense of the word."[9] Moreover, even his limited reform efforts failed.

Needless to say, prominent comparative politics scholars are also not enamored with how Polity codes democracy

https://t.co/bgeYuzJrNl

> \U0001f6a8The problems with democracy coding and bias \U0001f6a8 Political scientists among you will know about the Polity IV score. This has been until recently the preferred measure of democracy for many scholars. So why, you may ask, does it not like democracy in US or UK? 1/n
>
> — Ben W. Ansell (@benwansell) February 17, 2020

As you can image, biases in how we code a country's democracy can, in turn, influence our inferences about the democratic peace.

A great piece making this point is by @Idooren in @Journal_IS: a lot of the democratic piece hinges on how we code Germany in 1914

https://t.co/y6Ygv1Ri2N

The Subjectivity of the "Democratic" Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany
Ido Oren
International Security
The MIT Press
Volume 20, Number 2, Fall 1995
pp. 147-184

There are other critiques of the data that we could discuss, such as "euro-centrism" in our coding of wars...

https://t.co/4Uy8pJ7mz0

> Recent scholarship has called attention to how Western-centric biases shape our understandings of war --- including which belligerents & wars matter for our studies.
>
> A quick thread, drawing on data from my book, Divided Armies. 1/10
>
> — Jason Lyall (@jaylyall_red5) November 20, 2020

....or who gets counted as a participant (see Stam, Reiter, and @mchorowitz).

https://t.co/5gLD0yA9bI

The overall point should be clear: the democratic peace relies a lot on how we code our data and what we consider to be a "conflict".

When it comes to the "Democratic Peace" claim, there seems to be a 'there, there', but it's far from solid enough to be an "empirical law", let alone the basis for policy recommendations.

[END]