



Introduction to International Relations

Chapter Notes: Conclusion

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Conclusion:

The Democratic Peace

Chapter Overview

The conclusion examines several explanations to account for the increasingly well-supported phenomenon of the democratic peace. According to nearly all research conducted on this topic, established democracies do not fight other strong democracies. Each perspective offers different reasons as to why this occurs. Realists suggest that the democratic peace is a result of the fact that democracies often belong to the same alliances or that they are able to effectively balance power, thereby decreasing the need for war. The identity perspective proposes that democracies are inherently peaceful or that they are bound together by common norms. Liberals, finally, argue that democracies do not fight other democracies because of the high levels of trade between them, the fact that they belong to common institutions, or the possibility that they possess superior negotiating skills that allow them to deftly avoid war.

What is the democratic peace?

- Statistical findings demonstrate that strong democracies do not war with other strong democracies.
- This is “as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations.”
- Democracies also fight non-democracies with less frequency than non-democracies.

Possible explanations

- Democracies are more peaceful than other states.
 - o Democracy itself is the source of this explanation, so it is an identity explanation at the domestic level.
- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they share common domestic norms and institutions.
 - o With its emphasis on common norms, this statement is an identity explanation. It comes from the systemic structural level of analysis.

- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they trade more with one another and do not want to forfeit the mutual gains from trade.
 - o Trade creates a stake in non-zero sum gains that countries do not want to forfeit through war. This explanation is a liberal one at the systemic process level.
- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they belong to the same international institutions whose laws and practices they follow.
 - o This explanation depends upon interactions within institutions, so it is from the liberal perspective at either the systemic process or systemic structural level.
- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they have unique contracting or negotiating advantages that allow them to settle disputes without war.
 - o Negotiations or diplomacy cause the democratic peace, so it is a liberal explanation at the systemic process level.
- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they belong to the same alliances counterbalancing or fighting other alliances.
 - o If alliances or the balance of power explain the outcome, then the argument is a realist one at either the systemic structure or the systemic process level.
- Democracies do not go to war with one another because they successfully use balance of power politics to avoid war.
 - o On its face, this argument is realist because it stresses the balance of power, not democracy itself or institutional factors. It is at the systemic process level of analysis.

Thought Questions

2. Which perspective offers the strongest explanations for the democratic peace? Why?
3. Which perspective offers the weakest explanations for the democratic peace? Why?
4. Do you think that the democratic peace will be a long-lasting phenomenon? Why or why not?
5. In response to the democratic peace, should U.S. foreign policy encourage the spread of democracy? If so, how?
6. Can you think of any other possible explanations for the democratic peace?