

Democratic Breakdown and the Hidden Perils of the Democratic Peace

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Abstract

One empirical regularity in International Relations appears consistent: democracies rarely fight one another. However, this article maintains that the democratic peace comes with hidden costs. Democratic regimes are more pacifistic toward each other, but regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more bellicose than other authoritarian regimes. I argue that autocracies established through democratic breakdown are especially aggressive because they select leaders who tend to be impatient with democratic norms, and these leaders can leverage nationalism and mass mobilization fomented during the democratic era to support international aggression. Additionally, I argue that these factors interact with important institutional features that vary across authoritarian regimes. Post-democratic leaders lacking institutional constraints on their executive authority should be more aggressive than constrained post-democratic leaders and other unconstrained autocrats. Statistical analysis of militarized interstate disputes demonstrates that autocracies are more belligerent following democratic breakdown, especially under institutional conditions favorable to leaders instigating the breakdown. We should therefore be wary of urging democratization based on democratic peace when democracy has a high chance of reverting and focus more effort on ensuring that current democracies do not break down.

Keywords

Democratic peace, autocracy, interstate conflict, democratic breakdown

In a field with few ironclad laws, the democratic peace theory—the observation that democracies tend not to fight one another—is among the most significant nontrivial

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empirical regularities discovered in international politics. As Levy (1988: 662) writes, the democratic peace comes “as close as anything we have to an empirical law in International Relations.” Besides its influence within the scholarly community, the democratic peace theory has influenced important foreign policy decisions, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While democratic peace theory provides meager support for encouraging regime change as a mechanism to foster world peace (Russett, 2005), some research does suggest that increasing the number of democracies can decrease conflict in the international system (Kadera et al., 2003; Mitchell 2002). If true, then a world of democracies would be a more peaceful one, a possibility that understandably entices scholars and policymakers alike.

This article maintains that the democratic peace carries with it hidden costs that cast doubt on the argument that a more democratic world is necessarily more benign. Democracies are not indestructible, as a growing comparative literature on democratic death and decay makes clear (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Maeda, 2010). One might take comfort in the rationale that democratic breakdown leads states to become only as belligerent as other autocracies. However, there is reason to suspect that autocratic regimes born out of democratic breakdown are even more belligerent than otherwise similar autocracies. A reason for this counterintuitive possibility is that democratic competition, especially in nascent democracies, incentivizes elites to foment nationalism and mass mobilization (Mansfield and Snyder, 1995: 2002). While democratic norms and institutions help constrain these forces and thereby inhibit international aggression (Maoz and Russett, 1993), leaders that suspend the democratic process can leverage nationalism and mass mobilization cultivated during the democratic era to support aggressive foreign policy. Moreover, democratic breakdown paves way for leaders that are impatient with the democratic norms of their predecessors. Historians note this impatience with and sometimes outright hostility toward democratic norms, such as compromise and peaceful conflict resolution, undergirded the fascist movements of the 20th century (Paxton, 2004). When such leaders strip away democratic impediments to decisive action, they can harness nationalism and mass politics fostered during the democratic era to engage in international hostility unimpeded. Autocracies formed through democratic breakdown should thus be more aggressive than non-democracies that follow other autocracies.

Statistical analysis using a time-series cross-sectional dataset of directed dyads from 1946 to 2007 yields support for this argument. The analysis finds that autocracies formed through democratic breakdown are more likely to initiate militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). Moreover, the analysis reveals that the impact of democratic breakdown on conflict initiation varies according to the regime’s domestic institutions. When post-democratic leaders are institutionally constrained, they do not initiate conflict more frequently than other autocrats. Unconstrained post-democratic leaders, however, are exceptionally conflictual, suggesting that institutional and normative factors jointly produce autocratic belligerence. Lastly, the analysis finds that regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more likely to initiate conflict against democracies. In other words, former democracies are more aggressive toward democracies than autocratic regimes that were never democratic. This entails that a democratic world could serve as a foundation for “perpetual peace” (Kant, 1795 [1983]), but only when these democracies are highly consolidated and thus unlikely to relapse into authoritarianism. A world

where democracy can readily break down is potentially more dangerous than a world where those states were never democratic at all.

Democratic Peace and Autocratic War

Democratic peace theory—the empirical finding that democracies tend not to fight one another—is one of the most widely known regularities in international politics and thus requires little further introduction. Some scholars argue that the relationship is spurious and obtains due to exogenous factors—such as capitalism (Gartzke, 2007), contract-intensive economies (Mousseau, 2009), or US hegemony (Rosato, 2003)—but statistical evidence casts doubt on alternative explanations (Dafoe, 2011; Dafoe et al., 2013).¹ Since the argument here is that the democratic peace carries hidden costs even supposing it is entirely true, this article assumes that the democratic peace is valid and causal. In particular, this study subscribes to a prominent theory arguing that the democratic peace results from institutional constraints in democracies and normative commitments to compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (Maoz and Russett, 1993).

While many democratic peace scholars stress the importance of normative in addition to institutional factors (Doyle, 1986; Maoz and Russett, 1993; Mitchell, 2002; Risse-Kappen, 1995), research on autocratic aggression focuses almost exclusively on institutional constraints (or lack thereof). A sizable body of scholarship maintains that personalist regimes are more hostile because they lack institutional constraints on the executive (Peceny and Beer, 2003; Peceny and Butler, 2004; Reiter and Stam, 2003; Weeks, 2012).² Peceny and Butler (2004) use Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2003) selectorate theory to explain personalist belligerence: since in personalist regimes the winning coalition (regime insiders that state leaders rely upon for their survival) is small relative to the selectorate (individuals involved in selecting the state leaders), there is strong incentive for the winning coalition to remain loyal to the leader irrespective of their behavior in office.³ Other scholars forward similar explanations for autocratic belligerence. Jessica Weeks (2012) attributes personalist belligerence to the regime's lack of a domestic audience that can punish the leader for their belligerence.⁴ According to this argument, personalist regimes lack predictable mechanisms for restraining or removing belligerent leaders.

Common to these theories is exclusive focus on the institutional factors leading to conflict. One reason why institutional explanations for personalist belligerence are necessarily incomplete is that lacking institutional constraints cannot account for willingness to initiate conflict. Scholars in this area are acutely aware of the dilemma. Weeks (2012: 329) writes that where “no powerful audience exists, we must focus instead on individual leader's preferences and perceptions.” We are thus left with heterogeneous individual-level causes to explain the leap to conflict when executive constraints are low. An expanding literature explores these individual-level contributors to conflict. One robust finding is that revolutionary leaders are especially belligerent, since revolutions select leader that are risk averse and aggressive on average (Colgan, 2013). Unconstrained executives are most belligerent when leaders are selected for individual personality traits that increase their propensity to start conflict (Colgan and Weeks, 2015). The argument in this article similarly combines institutional factors

with another set of individual-level traits: leader commitment to democratic norms regarding the appropriateness of conflict.

Democratic Breakdown and Interstate Conflict

If democratic peace is explained through institutional and normative mechanisms, then studies explaining autocratic belligerence solely through institutional factors miss an important piece of the puzzle.⁵ While empirical research on autocratic belligerence largely eschews noninstitutional explanations, philosophical treatises on the democratic peace since at least Schumpeter (1955: 24) conjecture that “warlike instincts” contribute to autocratic belligerence.⁶ Starting from the theoretical perspective that noninstitutional factors partly account for democratic peace, this article maintains that leaders’ normative commitments help explain autocratic belligerence. Norms are typically defined as “standard[s] of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891). According to the normative argument, liberal democratic states hold the belief that peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, such as third-party mediation, are the appropriate response to international disputes (Mitchell, 2002).

This article argues that leaders impatient with democratic norms have a greater propensity to initiate conflict. Leaders that deliberately dismantle democracy tend to harbor distrust of or impatience with democratic norms. Following the literature in behavioral economics, impatience is defined as the preference for small gains in the present over more substantial gains in the future (Benjamin et al., 2013; Dohman et al., 2010). For leaders that suspend democracy, democratic norms are often an encumbrance to reaping the potential short-term rewards of decisive action in both domestic and international politics. Central to this argument is the importance of leader selection for interstate relations. “Selection” refers to fact that democratic breakdown places leaders with unique personal characteristics into office, since only leaders with limited commitment to democratic ideals, if not outright hostility toward them, will suspend the democratic process. By focusing on the influence of democratic breakdown on conflict, this study follows recent research maintaining that “which way in” matters for international security because it selects for leaders with particular traits (Colgan, 2013: 661). Personality traits, demographic characteristics, and personal experience shape leader behavior (Colgan, 2013; Horowitz et al., 2005; Horowitz and Stam, 2014), although a relatively overlooked feature in existing research is leaders’ normative commitments (Shannon and Keller, 2007). In arguing that democratic breakdown selects for leaders uncommitted to democratic norms, this article contributes the understudied phenomena of how selecting leaders with certain normative commitments influences conflict.⁷

While democratic breakdown selects leaders impatient with democratic restrictions on their executive authority, this begs an important question: why should post-democratic leaders behave more aggressively than other autocracies? One reason is straightforward. Unlike other autocratic leaders, post-democratic ones explicitly seek to circumvent the democratic norms that limit decisive action. This cannot necessarily be generalizable to all autocracies, since some evidence suggests that autocracies behave more like democracies internationally as the proportion of democracies in the international system increases due to norm externalization; thus, many autocracies adhere to international

norms otherwise characteristic of democracies (Mitchell, 2002; see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998 on norm diffusion).⁸ Overturning democracy where it already exists, however, indicates at the very least an impatience with democratic norms and procedures that are viewed as unnecessarily restrictive. While conflict is necessarily costly, impatient individuals deviate from the assumptions of rationality by choosing suboptimal outcomes in the present rather than outcomes with a guaranteed higher payoff in the future (Benjamin et al., 2013; Dohmen et al., 2010).

Yet, there is a more potent reason that post-democratic leaders are more belligerent than other autocrats: they are able to harness nationalism and mass politics fostered during the democratic era. Research on democratization and war maintains that democracies, especially nascent ones, galvanize nationalism and mass mobilization due to democratic competition (Mansfield and Snyder, 1995, 2002). Such forces do not dissipate immediately upon suspension of the democratic process. Rather than having only a contemporaneous effect on political outcomes, democracy is a stock variable whose history exerts continued influence on contemporary events (Gerring et al., 2005). Some democratic features can persist into the post-democratic era. Post-democratic leaders can use nationalist rhetoric and mobilize mass movements—reserves carried over from the democratic period—to ensure their political survival. Suspending democracy presents considerable risks to leaders, since democratic breakdown precludes competing elites from future opportunities to exercise power. Harnessing nationalist fervor and mass political movements is one means by which leaders impatient with democratic norms can secure their political survival and ward off internal challengers after suspending democracy. This theory therefore draws upon the modernist school of nationalism, since it considers nationalism an instrument that elites can leverage for their personal interests (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Schrock-Jacobson, 2012: 828; Smith, 1991: 71).⁹

Eliminating democratic constraints and nationalist coalition building gives leaders impatient with democratic norms increased opportunity to pursue aggressive foreign policies. Given that nationalists perceive certain territories as integral to their national identity, and the tight connection between nationalist and irredentist movements (Smith 1991: 75–76; Toft, 2002), nationalism is especially useful for leaders seeking territorial expansion. Leaders with nationalistic constituencies thus have greater potential, due to popular support, to undertake territorial conflicts against neighbors, conditional again on a leader who evinces impatience with peaceful bargaining strategies. Strategically positioned territory confers additional capability to states that secure it via the ability to fight on it in the future (Carter, 2010), meaning that impatient leaders have incentive to initiate territorial disputes even when they use nationalism instrumentally (i.e., they do not personally hold affective attachments to the territory).

Similar to theories of democratization and war (Mansfield and Snyder, 2002: 303), this account of democratic breakdown and war has commonalities with diversionary theories of war (see Tir, 2010 on diversionary territorial conflict).¹⁰ Conflict initiation may indeed have the effect of further rallying nationalist constituencies around the leader, which post-democratic leaders can use to ensure their survival against potential dissenters.¹¹ However, if the concern is unifying the country behind the leader to avoid backlash against overturning democracy, the incentive would be to launch a diversionary conflict prior to or immediately following democratic breakdown. The most prominent

cases of democratic breakdown and international aggression—including the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands, and Russia's more recent annexation of Crimea—do not follow the process entailed by this causal logic, since they occurred at least several years following democratic breakdown.

Examples of the devastating implications that leader selection through democratic breakdown have on international security are plentiful. For instance, the Argentinian junta launched a coup to initiate the “Dirty War” against the Triple A guerrillas and its sympathizers in large part because the democratic government was perceived as incapable of addressing the insurgent threat. The junta leaders, it turned out, also evinced extreme impatience with international mediation, a hallmark democratic norm, of the Beagle dispute with Chile; instead, the junta rejected previous commitments to allow an international tribunal to arbitrate the dispute and launched Operation Soberanía, thereby invading the neighboring state (Romero, 2002: chap. 6). Beliefs that democratic norms, including international norms of compromise and peaceful conflict resolution, inhibit strong and decisive foreign policy behavior increase the likelihood that leaders initiate military conflict.

The starkest examples of the connection between democratic breakdown and war, however, come from the history of fascism. Scholars of the subject aver that “the term fascism” should not be “used for predemocratic dictatorships” and include the abandonment of “democratic liberties” into its definition (Paxton, 2004: 216–218). This is sensible because both Hitler and Mussolini, leaders of the two historical fascist states, established their regimes by suspending the democratic process. It is abundantly clear that “[f]ascists despised . . . democratic institutions” and regarded parliament as “a place where unending inconclusive debates took place and where politicians were held in contempt because of their weakness” (Laqueur, 1996: 18). Clark (2012: 68) notes that Hitler's experience of viewing Czech theatrical filibustering in 1909 eradicated his “youthful admiration for the parliamentary system.” Democratic breakdown in pre-WWII Italy and Germany thus selected for leaders with normative commitments consciously opposed to democratic norms of cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution, or at least leaders who viewed democratic norms as needlessly inhibitive. And while fascism is perhaps applied only anachronistically or pejoratively to contemporary regimes, there are certainly contemporary analogs (Laqueur, 1996).¹²

Furthermore, fascist leaders clearly leveraged nationalism and mass mobilization cultivated during the democratic era to pursue their international ambitions. Mann (2004: 3), who uses extensive evidence from Nazi Germany to support his argument, writes that mass violence is the “dark side of democracy,” since the vitriolic nationalism that fuels genocide and mass killing “represents the perversion of modern aspirations to democracy.” Nazi Germany also used paramilitary forces formed during the Weimar era, which saw an upsurge in popular mobilization into locally organized armed groups, to suppress opposition and pave the way for the invasion of Poland.¹³ Fritzsche (1998: 199–202) further claims that what set the Nazis apart from their electoral competition was their ability to recreate “the spectacle of the resurgent nation,” and that many working-class voters, who would otherwise be anticipated to join left-leaning parties, were attracted in part by the Nazi message of “national solidarity.” Hitler's successes, leading up to and after the suspension of democracy, are thus partly attributable to his ability to use nationalism to mobilize potential supporters. Note that while nationalization and mass politics

are typically viewed as negatives, the argument here is that they only have negative consequences internationally when harnessed by post-democratic leaders. A similar argument is implied in the literature on civic associationism. While associationism is largely viewed as important to the growth and stability of democracy, there is evidence that it can undermine democracy when leveraged by fascist movements (Berman, 1997; Riley, 2005).

The argument that post-democratic regimes are especially belligerent is most similar to Mansfield and Snyder's (1995: 19; 2002) claim that democratizing states are more conflict-prone due to the opportunism of threatened elites. However, this study makes a competing argument: whereas Mansfield and Snyder find that movements from autocracy to anocracy or anocracy to democracy increase the propensity for conflict, this study theorizes that autocracies are most likely to initiate conflict when formed through democratic breakdown. There is good reason to suspect that these states become deadlier only following a complete democratic breakdown. Leaders that achieve electoral victory through nationalist coalition building and mass mobilization are not necessarily more prone to conflict initiation. Nationalism tout court does not conflict with democratic norms, and there is significant heterogeneity in which types of nationalism produce interstate conflict (Schrock-Jacobson, 2012). Rather, impatient leaders that use nationalistic rhetoric to safely jettison democracy are expected to be especially belligerent. Mansfield and Snyder (1995: 7) sometimes hint in this direction, noting that "the adverse effects of democratization on war-proneness may even heighten after democracy collapses." Leader selection through democratic breakdown, when coupled with nationalism carried over from the democratic era, accounts for the increased belligerence of post-democratic regimes, which is especially pertinent considering the limited evidence in favor of the argument that democratizing regimes are belligerent (Narang and Nelson, 2009). Given the longstanding finding that autocracies are more aggressive than democracies, this article maintains that transitions away from democracy are a more likely cause of international conflict than transitions toward democracy.

In short, the following hypothesis is derived from the theory:

Hypothesis 1. *Regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more likely than other autocracies to initiate military disputes.*

How Institutions Shape Post-Democratic Belligerence

The central argument is that leaders' normative commitments matter for international security, not that these features are the only relevant considerations. Evidence suggests that both normative and institutional factors sustain peaceful relations between pairs of democracies (Maoz and Russett, 1993; Reiter and Tillman, 2002). Following this logic, autocratic belligerence should result from institutional factors as well. Democratic breakdown selects leaders with limited commitment to democratic norms, which increases their propensity to start conflict, but even after suspending democracy these leaders may still face institutional constraints that nonetheless impede their ability to engage in international aggression.

Since post-democratic regimes are necessarily autocracies, it is necessary to focus on institutional variation among autocratic regimes. Previous research shows that autocratic institutions vary in the extent to which they allow regime insiders to hold leaders accountable for their foreign policy decisions (Weeks, 2008, 2012). As Geddes (2003: 50) writes, “the greatest threat to the survival of the leader” in autocratic regimes “comes from inside [the] ruling group” rather than “from outside opposition.” Regime insiders in autocratic regimes therefore function as domestic audiences, in that they have the means to punish leaders (e.g., by removing them office; see Fearon, 1994; Weeks, 2008). Although there are various ways to categorize autocratic regimes according to their domestic audiences (Geddes, 2003; Slater, 2003; Weeks, 2008, 2012), this article maintains that the most salient distinction is between leaders that face any audience costs and those that face none. Geddes’s (2003) typology of autocratic regimes—which includes personalist, single-party, military, and monarchic regimes—makes this distinction, since leaders in personalist regimes tightly control the security apparatus and can readily quash potential challengers. Leaders such as Stalin, Hitler, and Saddam Hussein, who exercised the ability to purge their inner circles, are most emblematic of the personalist dictator. For this reason, studies on autocratic audiences maintain that there is no domestic audience in personalist regimes because regime insiders cannot effectively coordinate to sanction the leader (Weeks, 2008: 46; 2012).

Other features of autocratic audience beyond its mere presence or absence might matter for international conflict. It is, for instance, possible to further distinguish between regimes with a military versus a civilian audience (Lai and Slater, 2006; Weeks, 2012). Yet, it is not anticipated that differences among these regimes, such as machines and juntas, are as strong as those between personalist and non-personalist dictatorships. Weeks (2012: 333) posits that military audiences are more belligerent because military officers are likelier to perceive force as routine and appropriate. Evidence for this conjecture is nonetheless mixed. In the US context, military officers do not advocate for especially aggressive foreign policy (Betts, 1997; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004). One recent study reveals that leaders with military experience are less likely to initiate conflict, a reticence they likely developed from personally experiencing the horrors of war (Horowitz and Stam, 2014). Similarly, another study finds that the relationship between military regimes and belligerence vanishes when controlling for hostile security environments (Kim, 2018). Given the repeated theoretical and empirical scrutiny brought to bear on the relationship between military regimes and conflict, it is reasonable to conclude that the distinction between military and civilian audiences is less salient than the distinction between the relative presence and absence of any significant domestic audience.

Domestic audiences, whether civilian or military, do not always constrain the leader. They sometimes embolden leaders to behave aggressively as well. Audience costs are traditionally conceived as a punishment for backing down after issuing a threat, and regimes that can generate audience costs signal resolve when outsiders can observe that the leader can be deposed for backing down (Fearon, 1994; Weeks, 2008). Leaders with domestic audiences (i.e., non-personalists) are therefore less likely to initiate conflict unless they are resolved not to yield. Audiences in some regimes, such as a junta with a

belligerent military audience, may pressure the leader to initiate a conflict from which he would face high costs for backing down. However, such emboldening often occurs from regime insiders in personalist regimes as well. Insiders that are readily replaceable are likely to encourage international belligerence when favored by the leader, creating an echo chamber effect (Weeks, 2012). Where personalist and non-personalist regimes differ is not in the capacity for emboldening, but in a capacity to restrain that exists only in non-personalist autocracies. On average, since they lack a domestic audience that can punish them for starting undesirable conflicts, it should be expected that personalist regimes are likelier than other autocracies to initiate conflict.

The argument that personalist regimes are more aggressive due to limited constraints is not new (Reiter and Stam, 2003; Peceny and Beer, 2004; Weeks, 2008, 2012). But this presents an additional puzzle: why, even when they lack constraints, do personalists actually initiate conflict? Weeks (2012: 329) acknowledges this puzzle, writing that for personalist regimes “we must focus instead on individual leader’s preferences and perceptions.” Psychological exploration into the lives of notorious dictators highlights their grandiosity and ambition (Post, 2004, 2014: chap. 12; see Weeks, 2012: 335). However, these studies often deliberately probe the minds of exceptionally belligerent autocrats, such as Saddam Hussein, and it is unclear how well these factors generalize to all personalist dictators. Dispositions such as ambition and grandiosity are common to political figures across regime type—Post (2014) highlights these features in democratic leaders such as John F. Kennedy and Woodrow Wilson—making it unclear whether these features simply appear amplified in personalist regimes because the leader is unconstrained and thus freer to act out their whims. One generalizable implication of the theory outlined in the previous section is that leaders impatient with democratic norms and who seek decisive action in international affairs are likeliest to initiate conflict when there is no domestic audience to constrain them. Furthermore, examining differences across personalist regimes according to the means by which they are selected into office makes it easier to rule out the possibility that limited constraints alone are responsible for the belligerence of personalist leaders.

It is therefore hypothesized that personalist regimes are not equally belligerent. Personalist regimes formed through democratic breakdown, it is argued, are especially likely to initiate interstate conflict even when compared with other personalist regimes. Not only do these regimes lack domestic audiences that could constrain leaders from conflict initiation, they also select into office leaders that are impatient with or hostile toward democratic norms; other personalists might often be content abiding by international norms of peaceful conflict resolution when doing so does not affect their political survival. Institutional constraints and normative commitments thus jointly produce conflictual international behavior. This runs contrary to some research positing that personalist hostility supports a purely institutional theory of conflict at the expense of normative explanations (Peceny and Butler, 2004).

Hypothesis 2. *Personalist regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more likely than other personalists and non-personalist post-democracies to initiate military conflict.*

How Democratic Breakdown Can Break Down Democratic Peace

Selecting leaders impatient with democratic norms has important implications for democratic peace. According to constructivist theory, which is relevant given the concern with norms in this article, what matters for dyadic conflict behavior are not necessarily material factors but the mutually constituted identities that states form about themselves and others (Wendt, 1999). Risse-Kappen (1995) develops a social-constructivist account of the normative democratic peace. His theoretical position is that democratic states construct other states as “friends” or “enemies,” and this determines the decision-rules that democracies use in interaction with other states; fellow democracies, as “friends,” evoke decision-rules consistent with the normative explanations for the democratic peace, whereas “potential enmity . . . creates a realist world of anarchy when democratic states interact with authoritarian regimes” (Risse-Kappen, 1995: 492).

This study draws upon social constructivist explanations for dyadic interstate conflict but focuses more on perceptions in autocratic than democratic regimes.¹⁴ Leaders impatient with democratic norms not only skirt democratic principles such as peaceful conflict resolution, they are likely to hold different perceptions of democratic states. Relative to autocratic leaders content with adhering to democratic norms in international politics, post-democratic leaders are anticipated to act more aggressively toward democracies since bargaining with these states is likelier to involve following democratic norms that they perceive as restrictive, protracted, and perhaps even illegitimate. In turn, democracies are more likely to view decisive international action as an affront to democratic norms, making it more difficult for them to back down when confronted. Here the Argentinian junta again fits, as it invaded the Falklands Islands and thereby commenced war with Great Britain. The latter viewed the invasion as an untenable authoritarian provocation. For instance, the leader of the British opposition, Michael Foot, unequivocally denounced “the Argentine action as that of a ruthless dictatorship acting against a small democracy” (Freedman, 2005: 16). In the extreme, post-democratic leaders that demonstrate more explicit hostility toward democratic norms are liable to construct democracies as enemies. Continuing with the example of fascism, one recent study maintains that Hitler’s ideology developed in part from his post-WWI belief that Great Britain and the United States were enemies and threats to German supremacy (Simms, 2014). When they see democratic norms and their proponents as threats to their ambitions, post-democratic leaders can frame democracies as enemies that stifle the pursuit of state or national goals.

Although traditionally constructivist theory concerns states rather than leaders, it is relatively straightforward to bring leaders into analytical focus. State leaders that dispense with democracy, it is maintained, are at least indifferent to democratic norms, and as per the modernist conception of nationalism they can manipulate nationalist constituencies galvanized under democracy. Even when their constituencies have internalized some democratic norms, these leaders can use nationalistic rhetoric to elevate goals such as ensuring the integrity or supremacy of the nation above adherence to democratic values. Following the constructivist literature that addresses the ways individual agents influence broader social norms, it is contended that post-democratic leaders can carry

out “strategic social construction” by shaping shared meanings about state identity (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 888; Widmaier et al., 2007: 748). While they do not necessarily construct and propagate new norms, as norm entrepreneurs do (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), these leaders can give normative primacy to nationalist ambitions and, having suspended democracy, suppress countervailing groups that were able to challenge hegemonic narratives under democracy. Since democratic breakdown usually occurs in fledging or intermediate democracies, whose citizens have probably not internalized democratic norms to the same extent as highly consolidated ones, post-democratic leaders face fewer challenges in reorienting preexisting commitments to democratic norms. Moreover, norms are applicable only to “actors with a given identity” consistent with those norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891; see Jurkovich, 2019). By suspending democracy, post-democratic leaders can more readily frame democratic norms as inconsistent with state identity and, in some cases, frame other values, such as national empowerment, as more appropriate. There is additional evidence that international revisionism originates in state identity-building projects (Lyll, 2005). It is conceivable from this perspective that nation-building following democratic breakdown entrenches a revisionist identity that challenges democracy, especially in the post-WWII period with the democratic United States retaining hegemonic status.

Democratic breakdown therefore has significant potential to alter the mutually constituted identities between two formerly democratic states. On the one hand, post-democratic leaders impatient with democratic norms can frame democratic norms as inappropriate given their state’s newfound non-democratic character. In the extreme, they can frame democratic norms as impediments to the achievement of national ambitions and strategically construct democracies as enemies. On the other hand, democracies are likely to approach the suspension of democracy with considerable skepticism and to consider post-democracies as enemies with malign intentions. Risse-Kapfen (1995) argues that democracies infer aggressive motives from the domestic structures in autocracies and construct them as “enemies” accordingly, and this should extend to post-democratic states (which are autocracies by definition). Yet, there is good reason to believe that democracies will not be the first movers in a conflict against post-democratic regimes. Democratic publics are often difficult to sway in favor of conflict since, unlike in autocracies, competing elites can lobby against international intervention. For instance, FDR recognized the threat of Nazi Germany and sought military action but was inhibited by popular support for non-interventionist foreign policy; some scholars even claim, not without controversy, that FDR manufactured a crisis to justify military action (Krebs, 2015; Schuessler, 2010: 144–145).

It is therefore hypothesized that post-democratic regimes are likelier than other autocracies to initiate conflict *against democracies*. This hypothesis is most closely related to the democratic peace theory, since it concerns the regime type in both sides in the dyad, and thus has more serious implications for the democratic peace. If former democracies are more aggressive toward democracies than other autocracies, then the dyads that sustain the democratic peace could become even more conflictual than other mixed dyads should a democratic breakdown in one side occur. Additionally, it is argued that this relationship holds for personalist regimes: post-democratic personalists are likelier than other personalists to initiate conflict against democracies. Previous research finds that

personalists are especially aggressive toward democracies (Reiter and Stam, 2003). The theory outlined above suggests that this relationship is partly attributable to the perceptions that personalists hold about democracies, and that post-democratic personalists formed through democratic breakdown are more hostile toward democracies than personalists that follow a different autocratic regime.

Hypothesis 3a. *Regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more likely than otherwise similar autocracies to initiate military conflict against democracies.*

Hypothesis 3b. *Personalist regimes formed through democratic breakdown are more likely than other personalist regimes to initiate military conflict against democracies.*

Research Design

These hypotheses are tested using a time-series cross-sectional dataset, where the unit of analysis is the politically relevant directed-dyad. Politically relevant dyads are dyads that are contiguous or where one side is a major power; existing evidence suggests restricting to these dyads does not introduce selection bias into studies of conflict (Lemke and Reed, 2001). Due to variable restrictions, the analysis covers the 1946 to 2007 time period. Using this sample of directed dyads as the unit of analysis is appropriate for several reasons. First, although it is related to monadic theories of interstate conflict (Mansfield and Snyder, 1995, 2001), there are dyadic components to the theory. Post-democratic leaders, it is maintained, are likelier than other autocratic leaders to initiate conflict against neighbors and major powers. Nationalism, which post-democratic leaders have as a strategic advantage in manipulating, primarily shapes attitudes toward neighboring groups and states (Saideman and Ayres, 2008; Schrock-Jacobson, 2012: 828, 834).¹⁵ It is therefore expected that post-democratic regimes, due to their heightened nationalism, are likelier than other regimes to initiate conflict against states with which they have an opportunity to interact, which fits with the instrumentalist view of nationalism. Hypotheses 3a and 3b are even more explicitly dyadic, since they pertain to regime characteristics in both sides in a dyad.¹⁶ Second, dyadic analysis is preferable to monadic analysis because it allows this study to control for important dyadic features that could confound the relationship between democratic breakdown and conflict (e.g., relative power and alliances). A monadic analysis would not allow for taking these dyadic features into consideration. Third, directed dyads are necessary because the hypotheses stipulate that some regimes are more likely to initiate conflict and using undirected dyads does not allow researchers to differentiate between initiator and target (Reiter and Stam, 2003). Fourth, at a conceptual level, interstate conflict is always a dyadic affair and aggregating dyadic interstate conflict data can often present empirical problems (Maoz et al., 2019: 20).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is a binary indicator denoting whether state A initiated a militarized interstate dispute (MID) against state B in a given year. MIDs identifies all

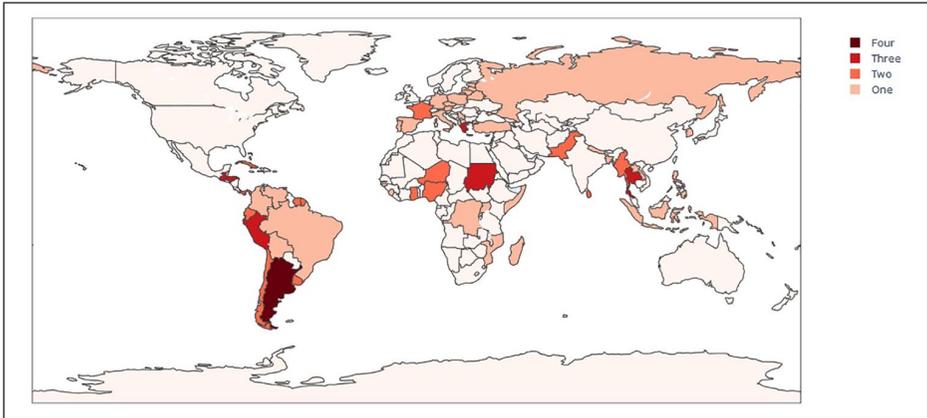


Figure 1. Number of Democratic Breakdowns by Country.

“historical cases in which the threat, display or use of military force by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property or territory of another state” (Jones et al., 1996: 168). Following convention in the literature, joiners on the initiating side are coded as initiators and joiners on the target side are coded as targets (Colgan and Weeks, 2015; Reiter and Stam, 2002). The analysis uses Maoz et al.’s (2019) updated dyadic militarized interstate dispute data, which comes in directed-dyad format.

Independent Variables

The key independent variable is whether the current regime in state A was formed through democratic breakdown. Data on democratic breakdown comes from Boix et al. (2013), which includes a democratic breakdown variable for whether the state transitioned away from democracy in a given year. The authors code a state as democratic when it “has competitive elections and has enfranchised a majority of the male population” and a breakdown occurs when the state reverts from these criteria (e.g., elections are suspended, Boix et al., 2013: 1529). This variable is appropriate because it captures a qualitative shift from democracy to autocracy, which proxies such as change in polity score might not.

These data are used to create a binary indicator coded 1 for the year marking the democratic breakdown and for every subsequent year where the regime formed through democratic breakdown remains in power (i.e., until it transitions back to democracy or is replaced by another form of autocracy, such as from a personalist to a military regime) and 0 otherwise. Notably, since all regimes coded positively on this variable are firm autocracies the results cannot be driven by democratizing regimes (e.g., Mansfield and Snyder, 1995, 2002). Although the MID data extends to 2010, Boix et al. (2013) democratic breakdown data covers only through 2007 and thus the analysis covers the 1946 to 2007 time period. Figure 1 depicts the global distribution of the number of democratic

breakdowns by country. As shown, democratic breakdowns have occurred in various countries in each continent, mitigating concerns that regional heterogeneity might account for the relationship between democratic breakdown and conflict.

Geddes et al. (2014) data on autocratic regimes are used to operationalize regime types according to their domestic audiences. In these data, regimes are defined as “basic informal and formal rules that determine what interests are represented in the authoritarian leadership group and whether these interests can constrain the dictator” (Geddes et al., 2014: 314). As other scholars observe, the focus on leader constraints makes this regime typology an appropriate measure of the ability for different autocrats to generate audience costs (Weeks, 2008, 2012). Since the theoretical concern is with the differing conflict behavior between autocracies with and without domestic audiences, this analysis differentiates strictly between personalist and non-personalist autocracies. Personalist regimes are autocracies in which the leader is “unconstrained by either a strong party or a unified military” (Geddes et al., 2014: 317), meaning there is no domestic audience that can effectively coordinate to sanction the leader initiating an unwanted conflict.

Control Variables

Several control variables that are theoretically relevant potential confounders between democratic breakdown and conflict are included to avoid omitted variable bias (Kadera and Mitchell, 2005). The following variables are included in each model. (1) State capabilities are controlled for by including measures for each state’s military capabilities, a binary measure for whether it is a major power, and state A’s proportion of the dyadic capabilities. These data are derived from the Correlates of War (COW) Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores. (2) Alliances are controlled for using a measure of the two states’ alliance portfolio similarity (global s-score). These data come from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project (Chiba et al., 2015). (3) Two binary indicators for whether either state was involved in civil war are included, given that states experiencing civil war are more likely to become involved in MIDs (Gleditsch et al., 2008). Data for civil war come from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Armed Conflict dataset, where a state is coded as experiencing civil war when it has at least 1000 battle deaths in a given year. (4) A regime duration variable is included to ensure that the results are not driven by regime age. (5) Lastly, a cubic polynomial counting the number of years since the last MID in the directed-dyad, along with the squared and cubed values of this term, is added to the models to control for temporal dependence in the data (Carter and Signorino, 2010).

Another possible confounder is interstate rivalry. It is possible, for various reasons, that rivalry affects both democratic breakdown and conflict initiation. Rivalry is frequently associated with interstate conflict and it is further plausible that state leaders are more likely to suspend democracy to act decisively against rival states. Gibler (2017), for instance, argues that rivalry causes both conflict and parity as rival states internally balance against one another, and it is a short leap to suggest that rivalry similarly selects regime characteristics that in turn affect conflict. Therefore, a control variable for whether the states in the dyad are rivals is included. Thompson’s (2001) strategic rivalry data is used to measure rivalry, since his perceptual definition of rivalry ensures that the states consider themselves rivals (Gibler, 2017: 32). Although other rivalry data are available,

these operationalize whether states have experienced a certain number of disputes within a given time period (Kline et al., 2006). Since Thompson's (2001) rivalry data extends only till 1999, however, this variable is not included in every model to ensure results are not driven by truncating the time period under examination. One additional confounder is territorial dispute, since states with ongoing territorial disputes may be both more likely to suspend democracy and more likely to initiate conflict. To control for this possibility, Frederick et al. (2017) binary territorial claims indicator is included. This variable measures whether two or more states claim sovereignty over the same specific territory. Similar to the rivalry data, this variable extends only till 2001 and thus is not included in every model to ensure that temporal truncation is not driving the results.

Statistical Approach

The models are estimated using logistic regression, since the dependent variable is a dichotomous measure for whether state A in the dyad initiates a MID against state B. Standard errors are clustered on the directed-dyad to account for unmodeled heterogeneity within country pairs. Since few observations are coded positively on the dependent variable, each model is also estimated using Firth's (1993) penalized maximum likelihood logistic regression. This strategy mitigates against potential bias due to separation and quasi-separation, and simulation evidence demonstrates that it outperforms alternative estimators in addressing rare events bias (Cook et al., 2018; Puhr et al., 2017).

Empirical Results

Table 1 displays the results from three logistic regression models estimating the effects of autocracy on conflict initiation after disaggregating autocracies into post-democratic and other autocracies.¹⁷ All three models are estimated with the full set of covariates. Model 2 adds the binary indicators for strategic rivalry and territorial dispute, and model 3 is estimated using Firth's (1993) penalized maximum likelihood logistic regression. In each model, the indicator for post-democratic autocracy is positive and statistically significant at the 1 percent error level or higher (p -value < 0.01). Autocracies, whether formed through democratic breakdown or not, are more likely than democracies (the baseline category) to initiate militarized conflict, which is unsurprising since some research finds that democracies are generally less conflictual than autocracies due to institutional constraints (Russett and Oneal, 2001).

Yet, the main interest here is in comparing the coefficient estimates for autocracies formed through democratic breakdown with those for autocracies that came to power through other means. Figure 2 presents the substantive effects that the various regime variables have on conflict initiation. The first two estimates in the figure are derived from model 1. These simulated values show the marginal effect that regime type has on the propensity for state A in the dyad to initiate conflict, holding other covariates in the model constant at their mean values. As shown, post-democratic autocracies have a .0081 probability, versus .0045 for other autocracies, of MID initiation. Although these values are small, given the low baseline probability of international conflict, the predicted probability that post-democratic autocracies initiate a MID is nearly twice that of other autocracies. A

Table 1. Democratic Breakdown and Militarized Interstate Disputes.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Post-Democracy	0.613*** (0.149)	0.539*** (0.153)	0.614*** (0.090)
Other Autocracy	0.348*** (0.120)	0.291*** (0.107)	0.347*** (0.063)
Capabilities, Side A	3.862*** (1.037)	3.024*** (1.035)	3.868*** (0.686)
Capabilities, Side B	5.677*** (1.045)	5.210*** (1.019)	5.685*** (0.662)
Side A's Share of Dyadic Capabilities	0.492*** (0.183)	0.704*** (0.211)	0.491*** (0.109)
Global S-Score	-0.163 (0.167)	-0.320** (0.144)	-0.163* (0.088)
Rivalry		1.988*** (0.153)	
Territorial Dispute		0.675*** (0.134)	
Civil War, Side A	0.685*** (0.133)	0.621*** (0.140)	0.688*** (0.098)
Civil War, Side B	0.381*** (0.143)	0.277* (0.163)	0.386*** (0.112)
Major Power, Side A	-1.217*** (0.223)	-0.692*** (0.229)	-1.217*** (0.114)
Major Power, Side B	-1.378*** (0.255)	-0.686*** (0.242)	-1.377*** (0.121)
Regime Duration	0.001 (0.001)	< 0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
t	-0.120*** (0.014)	-0.051*** (0.017)	-0.119*** (0.013)
t^2	0.002*** (0.001)	< -0.001 (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
t^3	< -0.001 (< 0.001)	< 0.001 (< 0.001)	< -0.001 (< 0.001)
Constant	-3.219*** (0.246)	-4.355*** (0.252)	-3.217*** (0.119)
AIC	15,497	12,944	15,378
BIC	15,642	13,107	15,524
Observations	118,141	108,479	118,141

Robust standard errors in parentheses. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion; BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

two-tailed Wald test from model 3, which uses Firth's (1993) bias-correction procedure, indicates that post-democratic regimes have a 1.3 times greater odds of initiating a MID

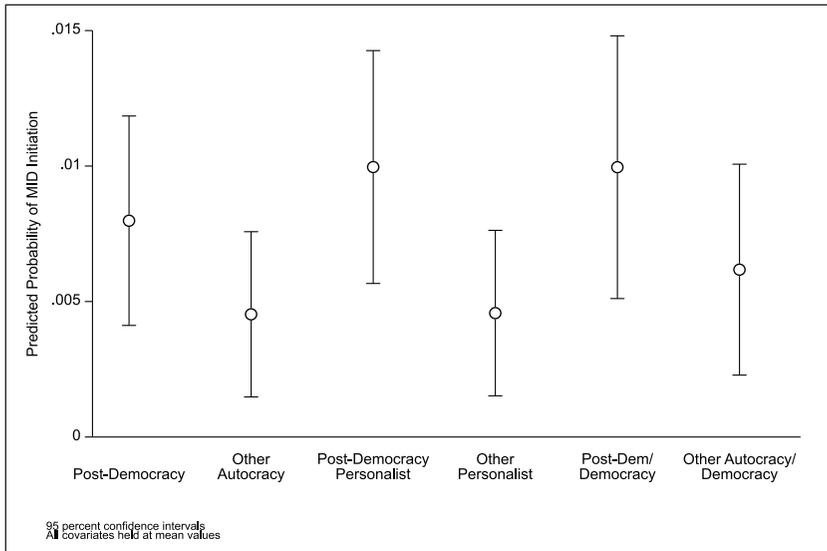


Figure 2. Predicted Probability of MID Initiation by Post-Democratic and Other Autocracies.

than other autocracies, a difference that is statistically significant at the 1 percent error level (p -value = .003). Thus, there is support in favor of H1.

Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the effect of democratic breakdown on militarized conflict varies according to the regime’s institutional characteristics. Table 2 presents the results from the analysis after distinguishing among personalist post-democracies, non-personalist post-democracies, and other personalist regimes.¹⁸ Each model includes the base covariates, model 5 includes the dyadic rivalry and territorial dispute indicators, and model 7 is estimated using Firth’s (1993) penalized maximum likelihood logistic regression. Since the base category includes non- personalist autocracies in addition to democracies, model 6 includes other regime-type indicators drawn from Geddes et al. (2014). These include whether side A in the dyad is a military regime, party regime, or monarchy, which renders democracy the base category in this model. In these models, the indicator for post-democratic personalist regime is consistently statistically significant at the 1 percent error level or higher. However, again the primary interest is comparing the conflict behavior of post-democratic regimes to other autocracies. The second two estimates in Figure 2 show the predicted probability of MID initiation between the post-democratic and other personalists variables from model 4. Here the predicted probability of MID initiation is .01 for post-democratic personalists versus .0046 for other personalists, which again suggests that post-democratic regimes are twice as likely to initiate a MID as otherwise similar autocracies. A Wald test from model 7 indicates that post-democratic personalists have a 1.47 times greater odds of initiating a MID than other personalists (p -value = .008). In other words, there is some evidence that the frequently observed excessive belligerence of personalist regimes is attributable to post-democratic personalists. Since post-democratic personalists have a stronger and more

Table 2. Democratic Breakdown, Personalism, and Militarized Interstate Disputes.

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Post-Democracy	0.782*** (0.167)	0.773*** (0.181)	1.048*** (0.180)	0.780*** (0.129)
Personalist				
Other Personalist	0.402*** (0.126)	0.435*** (0.142)	0.685*** (0.141)	0.358*** (0.084)
Other Post-Democracy	0.339* (0.196)	0.290 (0.200)	-0.0197 (0.187)	0.259** (0.106)
Military Regime			0.885*** (0.191)	
Party Regime			0.566*** (0.118)	
Monarchy			0.291 (0.189)	
Capabilities, Side A	3.333*** (1.017)	2.596*** (0.998)	3.392*** (1.101)	2.898*** (0.711)
Capabilities, Side B	5.630*** (1.041)	5.257*** (1.021)	5.555*** (1.033)	5.325*** (0.712)
Side A's Share of Dyadic Capabilities	0.456** (0.182)	0.664*** (0.210)	0.399** (0.187)	0.528*** (0.113)
Global S-Score	-0.156 (0.166)	-0.327** (0.145)	-0.152 (0.167)	-0.699*** (0.085)
Rivalry		1.984*** (0.154)		
Territorial Dispute		0.688*** (0.134)		
Civil War, Side A	0.628*** (0.138)	0.556*** (0.149)	0.608*** (0.134)	0.591*** (0.099)
Civil War, Side B	0.381*** (0.143)	0.267 (0.164)	0.331** (0.141)	0.308*** (0.113)
Major Power, Side A	-1.311*** (0.213)	-0.770*** (0.224)	-1.195*** (0.227)	-0.235** (0.115)
Major Power, Side B	-1.374*** (0.253)	-0.710*** (0.240)	-1.378*** (0.252)	-0.244** (0.124)
Regime Duration	0.002* (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
t	-0.122*** (0.0145)	-0.054*** (0.0174)	-0.125*** (0.015)	-0.111*** (0.013)
t ²	0.002*** (0.001)	< -0.001 (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
t ³	< -0.001 (< 0.001)	< 0.001 (< 0.001)	< -0.001 (< 0.001)	< -0.001 (< 0.001)
Constant	-3.075*** (0.237)	-4.234*** (0.242)	-3.288*** (0.234)	-2.374*** (0.116)
AIC	15,503	12,938	15,397	14,628
BIC	15,658	13,110	15,581	14,793
Observations	118,141	108,479	118,141	118,081

Robust standard errors in parentheses. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion; BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

consistent effect on MID initiation than either other personalists and post-democratic non-personalists, there is support for hypothesis 2.

Lastly, this study is interested in the implications of the increased belligerence of post-democratic autocracies for the democratic peace. It is hypothesized that autocracies arising from democratic breakdown are more likely to initiate conflict against democracies than other autocracies, since their abandonment of democratic norms should make them likelier to perceive democracies as enemies. Three binary indicators are therefore created for whether the directed dyad is a post-democratic autocracy to democracy, another autocracy (i.e., one not formed through democratic breakdown) to democracy, and any autocracy to autocracy dyad. Reiter and Stam (2003) use a similar approach to demonstrate that personalists are more likely to initiate conflict against democracies than vice versa. The baseline is any directed dyad where state A is a democracy, since these observations should be more pacifistic on average. The focus is on the difference between (1) directed dyads where state A is a post-democratic regime and state B is a democracy and (2) directed dyads where state A is another autocracy (i.e., post-autocracy autocracy) and state B is a democracy.¹⁹ Moreover, it follows from the theory that post-democratic personalists should be likelier than other personalists to initiate conflict against democracies. Previous studies demonstrate that personalist regimes are belligerent toward democracies (Reiter and Stam, 2003). However, explanations offered for this relationship thus far focus exclusively on autocratic institutions. If the theory that institutional factors are but a partial explanation for autocratic belligerence has weight, then post-democratic personalists should initiate conflict against democracies more than other personalists. This proposition is tested by examining directed dyads where state A is a post-democratic personalist regime and state B is a democracy and directed dyads where state A is another personalist regime and state B is a democracy.²⁰

Looking at Table 3, we can see that the coefficient estimates for post-democracy/democracy dyads are larger than other autocracy–democracy dyads. Moreover, these differences are substantively large and statistically significant. The last two estimates in figure 2 are predicted probabilities derived from model 8. Post-democratic regimes have a .01 probability of initiating a MID against a democracy versus a .0062 probability for other autocratic regimes. Wald tests suggest that post-democratic have a 1.53 and 1.48 times greater odds of initiating MIDs against democracies than other autocracies in models 8 and 9, respectively. However, these differences are below conventional levels of statistical significance (p -value = .071 and .078, respectively). Stronger relationships are seen when examining the different propensities for post-democratic personalists and other personalists to initiate conflict against democracies in models 10 and 11. Wald tests indicate that post-democratic personalists have a 1.89 and 1.78 greater odds of initiating a conflict against democracies than other personalists (p = 0.032 and .059, respectively).

Robustness Checks

Several robustness checks, which are placed in the appendix for space considerations, are carried out. First, one limitation is that the research design makes several choices, such as using updated MID data and restricting to politically relevant dyads, that other

Table 3. Democratic Breakdown and Militarized Interstate Disputes against Democracies.

	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Post-Democracy/ Democracy Dyad	0.758*** (0.188)	0.726*** (0.209)		
Other Autocracy/ Democracy Dyad	0.330** (0.163)	0.323** (0.137)		
Autocracy/ Autocracy Dyad	0.247** (0.120)	0.211* (0.109)		
Post-Dem Personalist/ Democracy Dyad			1.031*** (0.215)	1.247*** (0.276)
Other Personalist/ Democracy Dyad			0.393* (0.232)	0.589** (0.241)
Other Autocracy/ Democracy Dyad			-0.217* (0.120)	-0.035 (0.105)
Capabilities, Side A	3.764*** (1.046)	2.993*** (1.027)	3.413*** (0.994)	2.680*** (0.996)
Capabilities, Side B	5.858*** (1.010)	5.435*** (0.977)	5.633*** (1.086)	5.381*** (1.004)
Side A's Share of Dyadic Capabilities	0.499*** (0.181)	0.709*** (0.208)	0.447** (0.180)	0.651*** (0.205)
Global S-Score	-0.122 (0.173)	-0.291** (0.147)	-0.117 (0.169)	-0.299** (0.144)
Rivalry		2.007*** (0.153)		2.029*** (0.156)
Territorial Dispute		0.650*** (0.134)		0.649*** (0.134)
Civil War, Side A	0.752*** (0.131)	0.668*** (0.140)	0.707*** (0.134)	0.625*** (0.143)
Civil War, Side B	0.389*** (0.143)	0.288* (0.160)	0.384*** (0.142)	0.270* (0.160)
Major Power, Side A	-1.253*** (0.216)	-0.724*** (0.227)	-1.346*** (0.209)	-0.808*** (0.220)
Major Power, Side B	-1.398*** (0.250)	-0.729*** (0.238)	-1.349*** (0.265)	-0.764*** (0.239)
Regime Duration	0.001 (0.001)	< 0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
t	-0.117*** (0.014)	-0.050*** (0.017)	-0.120*** (0.015)	-0.053*** (0.017)
t ¹	0.002*** (0.001)	< -0.001 (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	< -0.001 (0.001)
t ²	< -0.001 (< 0.001)	< 0.001 (< 0.001)	< -0.001 (< 0.001)	< 0.001 (< 0.001)
Constant	-3.188*** (0.239)	-4.332*** (0.251)	-2.951*** (0.233)	-4.168*** (0.240)
AIC	15,505	12,943	15,520	12,945
BIC	15,660	13,115	15,675	13,117
Observations	118,141	108,479	118,141	108,479

Robust standard errors in parentheses. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion; BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

recent studies do not. While these decisions are theoretically motivated, they could entail that the results are an artifact of researcher discretion. To partially mitigate this concern, the analysis is carried out by replicating one recent study on autocracy and war (Weeks, 2012). This analysis—which is restricted to the 1946 to 2001 time period, uses a sample of all dyads, uses a different measure of personalism, and contains different covariates—replicates a previous study and its design choices with the sole addition of the post-democratic regime variables. Second, it is possible that unobserved factors contribute to both democratic breakdown and conflict initiation. A placebo test is therefore included to account for potential unobserved or unmodeled heterogeneity. Third, it is possible that the post-democratic propensity to attack democracies is driven by MIDs targeting the United States. This analysis is therefore replicated after excluding observations where state B in the dyad is the United States. And, fourth, one concern is whether the results are applicable to severe MIDs, since the dependent variable includes incidents, such as the threat of force, below the threshold of conflict. Since the relevance of these results would be questionable if they were not applicable to serious interstate confrontation, the results are replicated after restricting to MIDs that involve the use of force.²¹

Conclusion

The democratic peace theory is one of the most significant findings in International Relations. Although the fact that democracies rarely, if ever, fight one another apparently lends support to the idea that the diffusion of democracies will stabilize world order, this article challenges that assumption. This study theorizes, empirically tests, and finds support for the argument that autocracies formed through democratic breakdown are more belligerent than other autocracies. Democratization can therefore increase international hostility when democracy is not highly consolidated and risks reversion, a possibility that is more likely for new and underdeveloped democracies (Przeworski et al., 2000). Some evidence further suggests that coups disproportionately afflict democracies (Bell, 2016), indicating the potential for democratic breakdown and thus the formation of regimes that become more aggressive than their pre-democratic autocratic ones. Moreover, this article finds evidence that post-democratic regimes are likelier to initiate conflict against democracies. This finding is most relevant for the democratic peace theory, which pertains to dyadic relationships, since it suggests that currently democratic dyads can become even more conflictual than other autocracy-to-democracy dyads when one of the states collapses into autocracy.

These findings also have special relevance given the oft-noticed global rise in populism and authoritarianism, which could presage a wave of democratic backsliding. Although this study does not examine the effects that democratic backsliding short of complete democratic breakdown has on conflict initiation, one policy implication is that greater resources should be expended to ensure that existing democracies do not lapse into autocracy. Democracy stabilization may prove a more effective means for avoiding war than democracy promotion. Recent evidence demonstrates that democratic audiences apply consistent audience costs to leaders even in polarized contexts, such as during the Trump presidency in the United States (Evers et al., 2019). Such findings reinforce the need for a policy of democracy stabilization, since democracy can effectively

constrain leaders who might behave more aggressively than even other autocrats should they suspend democracy. Moreover, democracy stabilization is a task that is unlikely to leave us for the foreseeable future. Gutinsky (2018: 638) records six democratic waves since WWII, and the most recent two—the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring—that happened this century. Not only does this mean that new democracies have recently entered into the system, but the frequency of democratic waves suggests that we can expect similar waves in the future. Since fledgling democracies are more fragile, it is imperative to divert resources to those states where democracy does successfully take hold; democratic collapse in these countries has the potential to render them more internationally aggressive had they never democratized.

This article also advances our understanding of authoritarian belligerence. Research on autocracy and conflict almost exclusively focuses on institutions. Yet, as this study shows, other factors also help explain conflict initiation: autocratic leaders selected through democratic breakdown, who are more likely to harbor impatience with democratic norms, are especially aggressive. This does not mean that institutional variation does not matter. While previous research finds that personalists are the most aggressive regimes (Peceny and Butler, 2004; Weeks, 2008, 2012), this study indicates that this finding holds most strongly for post-democratic personalists; other personalist regimes are not more conflictual than other autocratic regimes. Contrary to previous studies (Peceny and Butler, 2004), this finding suggests that personalist belligerence does not support exclusively institutional theories of autocratic belligerence at the expense of normative ones. Institutional and non-institutional factors can jointly contribute to autocratic aggression. Given that the democratic peace is reasoned to hold due to institutional and normative factors, research into autocratic belligerence might advance by taking normative commitments, nationalism, and other non-institutional factors into consideration.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Or, in the case of non-statistical critiques of the democratic peace, there are convincing conceptual and case-specific rebuttals (Kinsella, 2005).
2. Or they lack a domestic audience that can punish the leader, although the domestic audience is based on regime institutions (Weeks, 2012; Slater, 2003; see discussion below). This is the inverse of the institutional constraints argument for the democratic peace, which holds that the limited ability to pursue unilateral action constrains democratic executives (Maoz and Russett, 1993: 626).

3. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) similarly use selectorate theory to explain the democratic peace. Since leader survival in states with large winning coalitions (e.g., democracies) hinges on policy success, democracies shift more resources in war efforts and thereby become unappealing targets.
4. Conversely, the audience costs explanation for democratic peace is that strong domestic audiences in democracies better enable them to signal intentions and credibly commit to foreign policy actions, thereby reducing the security dilemma between democracies (Fearon, 1994).
5. Following Boix et al. (2013: 1529), this study defines democracy as a regime that “has competitive elections and has enfranchised a majority of the male population” and autocracy as a regime that fails to meet either of these requirements.
6. Doyle (1986: 1152–1154) details Schumpeter’s contribution to democratic peace theory. Outside the province of democratic peace theory, the idea that moral norms are important to prudent action dates at least to Thucydides (see Monoson and Loriaux, 1998).
7. Shannon and Keller (2007) find evidence that leader perceptions influence the willingness to violate international norms. This study departs in focusing on the selection of leaders willing to break norms into office.
8. Some scholars argue against this “spillover” logic, since it this would be expected to influence state behavior at the monadic level (Gartzke and Weisiger, 2014).
9. Smith (1991: 20) refers to this as the “situational” theory of nationalism, which he contrasts with the primordial theory; the theory here is consistent with both the situationalist view and the intermediate ethno-symbolist perspective that Smith outlines.
10. Narang and Nelson (2009: 358) call Mansfield and Snyder’s argument “a version of the diversionary war hypothesis.”
11. This possibility is ruled out empirically in the placebo test described below.
12. Although Laqueur (1996) does not make the point explicitly, there are plenty of regimes that share “family resemblances” to historical fascism and thus are appropriately aggregated into the concept (see Collier and Mahon, 1993; Wittgenstein, 1973; also Laqueur’s, 1996 discussion of neo-fascism).
13. Several studies find that democratization predicts paramilitary formation, which is more common in poorly consolidated democracies that either autocracies or full democracies (see Carey and Mitchell, 2017).
14. The construction of other states as “enemies” or “friends” is referred to as also being perceptual (i.e., the belief that another state is friend or foe), following a growing literature that integrates constructivist and psychological explanations for international behavior (e.g., Hymans, 2010; Lebow, 2008).
15. Mansfield and Snyder (1995: 306) frequently note that nationalist conflict should mostly affect relations between neighbors.
16. Although the democratic peace does not pertain solely to politically relevant dyads, there is strong evidence that the democratic peace is regionally clustered (Crescenzi and Enterline, 1999).
17. Forty-three states are coded as post-democracies for at least one year ($n = 11,593$), and 130 are coded as other autocracies ($n = 43,615$) for at least one year.
18. Twenty-five states are coded as post-democratic personalists ($n = 4143$), 48 as other personalists ($n = 8965$), and 33 as post-democratic non-personalists ($n = 7118$) for at least one year.
19. $N = 7086$, 21,997, and 76,006 for post-democracy/democracy dyad, other autocracy/democracy dyad, and autocracy/autocracy dyad, respectively.
20. Also included is a variable for whether state A is another autocracy and state B is a democracy, which leaves autocracy-autocracy and democracy-democracy directed dyads as the baseline.

Results are not sensitive to altering the baseline (e.g., leaving democracy-democracy dyads as the baseline). $N = 2454$ and 4840 for post-democratic personalist/democracy dyad and other personalist/democracy dyad, respectively.

21. MIDs include the threat of force, the display of force, the use of force, and interstate war. In this robustness check, only the latter two are coded positively.

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