Political Competition and the Initiation of International Conflict: A New Perspective on the Institutional Foundations of Democratic Peace

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POLITICAL COMPETITION AND THE INITIATION OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT
A New Perspective on the Institutional Foundations of Democratic Peace

By BENJAMIN E. GOLDSMITH, DIMITRI SEMENOVICH, ARCOT SOWMYA, and GORANA GRGIC*

AN old adage asks, if a tree falls in a forest but nobody is there to hear, does it make a sound? We can ask, if a leader makes a serious foreign policy mistake but there is no critical opposition to point it out, will any political consequences follow? It may be that no one will be the wiser, and that there will be no impact on the leader's hold on power. At least, confident in his or her dominance of the political agenda, ex ante the leader may not expect serious consequences. Conversely, if there is a viable opposition aware of the mistake (witnessing the tree's fall), the leader will expect the opposition to make a critical sound, and to use the mistake for political advantage. We argue that a fundamental factor explaining the connection between states' internal political systems and their interstate conflict behavior is this strategic expectation of either dominance over the political agenda or vulnerability to opposition criticism. In particular, it provides a compelling explanation for the rarity of war between democratic states, the dyadic "democratic peace." While others have focused on political competition, especially in the

context of monadic[1] foreign conflict behavior,[2] we elaborate on the role of competition when specifically considering the regime type of the potential target state, and test a refined, dyadic theory. We present results for global data and extensive robustness tests considering recent challenges to the democratic-peace proposition.

Dyadic democratic peace is closely tied to Immanuel Kant's idea of a separate and enduring peace among liberal polities,[3] and is a major empirical finding in political science of the past several decades.[4] But important recent challenges focus on possibly spurious causal inference[5] or problems with statistical methods.[6] These are potent arguments that seem to raise previous criticisms about unfounded causal mechanisms or measurement error[7] to a new level of sophistication. Even if the democratic peace proposition survives these challenges, there remains little consensus about its theoretical foundations.[8] Lack of clarity over causal mechanisms also increases the scope for misuse in important policy applications, as noted by the theory's proponents and critics.[9]

Our approach, building on existing theory, examines the choice by one state to initiate conflict with another, and provides both strong empirical support for dyadic democratic peace and improved insight into its cause. Our central focus on the domestic implications of political competition is distinct from other dyadic theories. Although important theories highlight specific internal institutions' effects,[10] among the vast democratic peace literature few studies directly examine competing claims, disaggregating regimes into institutional components and assessing all simultaneously.[11] Because this is a crowded field of competing hypotheses, we seek to test rival expectations directly, but only in the context of conflict initiation.

A dyadic theory of democratic peace must explain not why a democratic state is less likely to go to war with any adversary, but why it is less likely to go to war with another democratic state. Empirical tests

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[1] Monadic theories consider the regime type of only one side in conflict, while dyadic theories consider the regime type of two sides.

[2] Baum and Potter 2015; Boehmer 2008; Goldsmith 2007; Schultz 1998.

[3] Doyle 2012, 206–16; Russett and Oneal 2001.

[4] Buhaug, Levy, and Urdal 2014, 139–40; Dafoe 2011, 247; Hayes 2011, 782–83.

[5] Gartzke 2007; Gibler 2012a; McDonald 2015; Mousseau 2013.

[6] Cranmer and Desmarais 2011; Erikson, Pinto, and Rader 2014.

[7] E.g., Farber and Gowa 1997; Gowa 1995; Layne 1994; Layne 2001.

[8] Arena and Nicoletti 2014, 391–93; Hegre 2014, 161–62; McDonald 2015, 557.

[9] Farber and Gowa 1995; Ish-Shalom 2013, 85–141; Layne 1994; Owen 2005.

[10] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Lake 1992.

[11] Exceptions include Huth and Allee 2002b; Morrow et al. 2008, 394–99; Reiter and Tillman 2002, 811–21. Ward and Gleditsch 1998 examine executive constraints and regime type in the monadic relationship between regime transitions and interstate conflict.

must specify the regime type of both initiator and target. We disaggregate regimes and examine the institutions of potential conflict initiators. We assume that political elites' and masses' perceptions are less nuanced than this institutional disaggregation, guided by commonly understood types of political systems and not focused on particular internal structures. We therefore emphasize target states' overall democratic or authoritarian nature. Our contribution lies not in a wholly new conceptualization of democratic peace, but in reconfiguring the role of political competition to cast it centrally in the strategic interactions between potential initiator and target states, allowing us to build on recent findings and consider how the target's regime type becomes important in this process.

Organized opposition with the potential to replace an incumbent is the essence of genuine political competition. We argue that incumbents are compelled by institutions of political competition to consider the domestic implications of foreign policy choices. Mindful of maintaining control of the political agenda, they consider foreign policy within the context of domestic political strategy, anticipating potentially damaging opposition criticism. Forestalling such criticism is among leaders' highest concerns in an environment of institutionalized competition. We argue that institutions providing high levels of political competition reduce the chance that a leader will initiate conflict with a democracy because of the anticipated difficulty of defending such a choice against the opposition's normative and material criticisms. Initiating conflict with an authoritarian regime is more easily defended as right, necessary, and winnable. The next section elaborates this logic, pointing to crucial distinctions between our approach and that of others. Our focus on initiation means our claims only relate to this crucial stage of interstate conflict.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND MILITARIZED INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

We suggest that existing institutional approaches overlook or underemphasize domestic political competition's strategic implications for a dyadic theory of democratic peace. Paul Huth and Todd Allee emphasize incumbents' accountability "to domestic political opposition," but focus on escalation of existing territorial disagreements, not initiation of any interstate conflict, and their causal logic is different from ours.[12] Kenneth Schultz presents a theory of monadic coercive diplomacy, emphasizing competition in democracies, but not extending the theory

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[12] Huth and Allee 2002b, 758.

to the potential adversary's regime type.[13] But a monadic theory is insufficient to fully explain dyadic democratic peace, and his logic rests on democracies' transparency to foreign adversaries, not on a leader's strategic concerns to forestall domestic criticism.

We further suggest that political competition is a near-necessary condition for well-known selectorate/public-goods[14] and audience-costs[15] explanations. Without a competitive environment that includes actors enabled to call attention to an incumbent's "mistakes" or climb-downs, the incumbent could dominate the political agenda, portraying her choices as reasonable, necessary, and/or successful. For a wide winning coalition—the key selectorate variable—to incentivize public goods provision, decision makers must sense the real possibility of being replaced by a competing party or group. But when competition is stifled, a wide winning coalition can be maintained because coalition members will not know, or be able to act on, information that public goods are not being provided as well as they could be.

Similarly, for audience costs—incurred by reneging on international threats[16]—to matter, there must be potential political consequences, such as those resulting from opposition eager to capitalize on the situation by framing and communicating such inconsistent behavior to the public.[17] Meaningful ability to influence the political agenda ultimately depends on political competition. Even when news media are relatively free, in the absence of strong opposition voices and counter-frames, they tend to take cues from incumbent elites using self-serving frames.[18]

A key logical point for our argument is that the opposite is not the case; neither a wide winning coalition nor the possibility of backing down in conflict is necessary. Even within smaller ruling groups, incumbents will be wary of making foreign policy mistakes when there is genuine, institutionalized political competition allowing for viable intraelite opposition. Backing down after issuing a threat is not the only kind of incumbent foreign policy crisis misstep that might lead to opposition criticism. Even when a leader does not make a threat, or when the leader makes a threat and follows through, these actions may be branded as "mistakes" by the opposition. If the leader cannot successfully defend the actions, in a competitive system there should be politically meaningful negative consequences.

[13] Schultz 1998.
[14] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999.
[15] Fearon 1994.
[16] Fearon 1994, 577.
[17] Potter and Baum 2014, 171–74.
[18] Chong and Druckman 2007; Entman 2004.

Our focus on strategic choice in the domestic realm sees competition as a matter of institutional structure, not as a matter of the strength or popularity of opposition forces at any given time. What is crucial is neither the number of parliamentary seats held by opposition parties today,[19] nor their current popularity in opinion polls, but rather their institutionalized potential to win seats or gain in the polls in the immediate future.[20] If we focus on the strength of opposition parties in the legislature, for example, we fail to capture key differences between genuinely low- and high-competition polities. Regimes with little genuine competition, on the one hand, won't have viable opposition parties, but stifled nongovernment parties may exist. Regimes with mid- to high-competition, on the other hand, will have some opposition representation, but this will rise and fall with parties' political fortunes. Measuring opposition strength by counting seats or gauging polls would be more appropriate for comparisons among high-competition or democratic states[21] because leaders in minority governments might be especially cautious, for example, but it is not the best way to address democratic peace theory, which seeks to explain differences across the range of regime types.[22]

Our theory hinges on the institutionalized potential for a current decision to bring future losses for the incumbent. No less than in foreign policy, in domestic politics leaders make strategic calculations about the potential consequences of current actions. A decision maker with high support will still behave strategically, we argue, avoiding decisions that might allow the opposition to seriously erode that support. While a decision maker with high support might feel freer to take some foreign policy risks, questions of war and peace are usually important enough to compel incumbents with strong institutionalized competition to think strategically about domestic political consequences, anticipating the possibility of lost support due to effective criticism of a bad mistake. By definition, institutionalized competition allows a currently small opposition to attempt to capture the political agenda by criticizing the government, and to expand its power and potentially unseat the government.

For example, Japanese politics were dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for decades, but opposition socialists were not structurally prevented from using criticisms to attempt to shift the political agenda, or from gaining power by persuading voters. Indeed, the Japan

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[19] Baum and Potter 2015, 60.

[20] This is another difference between our approach and Huth and Allee 2002a and Huth and Allee 2002b, who point to opposition strength in parliament.

[21] E.g., Baum and Potter 2015, chap. 3; Reiter and Tillman 2002, 816.

[22] The Baum and Potter 2015, 68, analyses not restricted to democratic dyads include a control for dyadic democracy and don't examine dyadic democratic-peace effects for their key variables.

Socialist Party (and LDP defectors) did just that in 1993. Conversely, even though Russian politics since 2001 have seen considerable opposition-party participation in elections and in the legislature, they still face huge obstacles to affecting the political agenda set by Vladimir Putin, including great difficulty in criticizing foreign policy. These differences in institutionalized competition in a democracy and a nondemocracy are not well captured by a measure of current opposition strength.

While full democracy involves full measures of competition, participation, and constraint on the executive, these components of regime type can be distinguished conceptually; can exist in greater or lesser degrees across all regime types, in various combinations (though not with total independence); and therefore can and do form distinct bases of many theories of political systems. Institutional components vary to a politically meaningful extent within types of regimes, as shown in Table 1 (the data structure is discussed below). Illustrative examples include Zambia under Frederick Chiluba, which, after 1995, restricted participation to second-generation citizens, but had competitive elections and a constrained executive; Singapore since independence in 1965, characterized by mass participation and a moderately constrained executive, but severely limited competition; and 1990s pre-Putin Russia, which witnessed robust participation and competition, but a virtually unconstrained president. We next discuss implications of each of these aspects of regime type for conflict initiation against regimes ranging from democratic to authoritarian.

POLITICAL COMPETITION

Competition has enduring centrality for democratic theory: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote."[23] Political competition implies a viable opposition with inherent interest in identifying incumbents' mistakes, and crucially, concurrently and retrospectively pointing them out to voters or other key power brokers. A viable opposition promoting policy alternatives provides strong incentives for foreign policy decision makers to fear policy failure.[24]

Under institutions providing genuine political competition, leaders

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[23] Schumpter 1950, 269; also Schattschneider 1960, 13–16.
[24] Achen and Bartels 2004; Colaresci 2004. Related logic regarding defense spending was developed by Goldsmith 2007, 198–200, as was an analysis of conflict in Asia (Goldsmith 2014). Baum and Potter 2015, chap. 3, show that, controlling for dyadic democracy or examining only democratic dyads, multiparty democracies display greater monadic conflict restraint than two-party democracies, partly conditional on media access.

TABLE 1
REGIME TYPE, COMPONENTS, AND CRISIS INITIATIONS, 1951–2006 [a]

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
All States					
Polity Index$_A$	999612	0.2	7.5	−10.0	10.0
RegimeType$_A$	999612	10.2	7.5	0.0	20.0
Competition$_A$	965715	11.1	6.4	2.0	20.0
Constraint$_A$	965715	11.9	6.4	0.0	20.0
Participation$_A$	965715	14.8	4.4	2.5	20.0
Crisis Initiation$_A$	998019	0.0004	0.0205	0.0	1.0
Democracies (polity >= 6)					
Polity Index$_A$	371135	8.8	1.4	6.0	10.0
RegimeType$_A$	371135	18.8	1.4	16.0	20.0
Competition$_A$	370467	18.2	2.4	6.7	20.0
Constraint$_A$	370467	18.7	2.2	11.7	20.0
Participation$_A$	370467	16.6	3.7	2.5	20.0
Crisis Initiation$_A$	370533	0.0003	0.0181	0.0	1.0
Open Anocracies (polity >= 1 & polity <= 5)					
Polity Index$_A$	91700	3.6	1.4	1.0	5.0
RegimeType$_A$	91700	13.6	1.4	11.0	15.0
Competition$_A$	85089	13.1	2.9	6.0	20.0
Constraint$_A$	85089	13.0	3.3	8.3	20.0
Participation$_A$	85089	13.8	2.6	2.5	20.0
Crisis Initiation$_A$	91615	0.0005	0.0226	0.0	1.0
Closed Anocracies (polity >= −5 & polity <= 0)					
Polity Index$_A$	137398	−2.5	1.8	−5.0	0.0
RegimeType$_A$	137398	7.5	1.8	5.0	10.0
Competition$_A$	112050	7.8	2.8	2.0	16.0
Constraint$_A$	112050	7.5	3.0	0.0	16.7
Participation$_A$	112050	11.5	4.9	2.5	20.0
Crisis Initiation$_A$	136995	0.0003	0.0169	0.0	1.0
Autocracies (polity <= −6)					
Polity Index$_A$	399379	−7.7	1.2	−10.0	−6.0
Regime Type$_A$	399379	2.3	1.2	0.0	4.0
Competition$_A$	398109	5.1	1.7	2.0	9.3
Constraint$_A$	398109	6.4	3.5	0.0	13.3
Participation$_A$	398109	14.1	4.3	7.5	17.5
Crisis Initiation$_A$	398876	0.0005	0.0231	0.0	1.0

[a] Directed dyad years. Data shown for state A, potential initiator. Regime variables, 1950–2005; Crisis initiation, 1951–2006 (as in all analyses).

accordingly seek to make decisions defensible on grounds of moral
legitimacy, necessity, and costs—common bases of foreign policy dis-
approval[25]—at each stage of interstate conflict. Competition provides
incentives to avoid criticism that foreign policy choices are counter
to, or suboptimal for, both normative and material national interests.
Therefore, political competition should condition leaders' willingness
to go to war based on the legitimacy of the cause, the lack of alterna-
tives, and the relatively high chances of victory.

This logic leads to specific dyadic expectations based on the type of
potential target state. The target's regime type affects the legitimacy,
necessity, costs, and benefits of conflict. We argue that when initiating
conflicts, states with high levels of political competition are less likely to
target democracies for three reasons. First, because they are perceived in
norms of governance as more legitimate,[26] the normative argument for
militarized conflict would be harder to make. For example, Robert Johns
and Graeme Davies[27] and Michael Tomz and Jessica Weeks[28] show that
citizens in the UK and US are less likely to support (hypothetical) mili-
tary action against democracies than against otherwise comparable au-
tocracies.[29] We emphasize, however, that we are not assuming this norm
of democratic legitimacy is limited to publics in high-competition
states (or democracies). Recent experimental research shows that Chi-
nese citizens also "are significantly less likely to favor attacking a demo-
cratic opponent," for example.[30] It is also well-known that authoritarian
leaders often use institutions such as elections to provide an internally
legitimizing democratic façade to their rule. What is crucial for our
argument is not the existence of the norm alone, but the institutions of
competition that allow it to be politically mobilized through effective
opposition criticism. In addition, our moral argument applies not only
to appeals to domestic constituents, but also to the chances of defend-
ing the action internationally. Decision makers anticipating potential
opposition criticism will be wary of both domestic censure for illegiti-
mate use of force on normative grounds and of opposition criticism

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[25] Jentleson 1992; Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007.
[26] Russett and Oneal 2001, 77.
[27] Johns and Davies 2012.
[28] Tomz and Weeks 2013.
[29] Ours is not an elite-based argument, but is consistent with the Owen 1994, 124, and Owen 1997
argument in the assumption that often, "Illiberal leaders [in democracies] find they cannot persuade
the public to go to war [with a democracy], and moreover fear they will lose the next election if they
do go to war." We note that Owen must rely on opposition using institutions to mobilize the public to
produce this outcome. Thus the core causal mechanism does not rely solely on elite ideology.
[30] Suong, Desposato, and Gartzke 2016.

of international consequences such as economic sanctions, censure in international organizations, or reputational damage.

Second, there is evidence that democracies are more able to reach negotiated settlements with each other, avoiding conflict.[31] Not all high-competition polities will be fully democratic, but the greater the degree of institutionalized competition, the more likely elites will be socialized into practices of compromise in pursuit of power, a key factor hypothesized to facilitate interstate negotiation success. The possibility of a negotiated settlement that could have prevented the costs and pain of war would be a potent criticism against a leader's decision to fight and a deterrent to choosing force against a democracy. Thus an incumbent should be concerned about opposition criticism of the failure to negotiate a deal with a democratic adversary.

Third, the chances of success in war would be lower, other things equal, or the costs of victory higher. Democracies should be stronger wartime adversaries that fight more effectively,[32] spend more during war,[33] and are more likely to win.[34] A military defeat or even a very expensive effort that avoids defeat are unwanted outcomes if a leader seeks to deny the political opposition effective tools for criticism. Our logic implies that decision makers will anticipate this greater chance of defeat and the resulting criticism from the opposition and public, and avoid such conflicts.[35]

Qualitative evidence illustrating the causal dynamics behind the nonoccurrence of events that were otherwise (probabilistically) likely to occur, if not for a key variable of interest, is notoriously difficult to identify.[36] However, the Peru-Ecuador dyad provides relevant variance and some evidence consistent with our expectations. Peru historically has never initiated conflict (as coded in this article) with rival Ecuador when its levels of political competition were high and Ecuador was democratic.[37] But since their 1941 war, it has done so three times when its competition level was lower and Ecuador was democratic. In two of these instances, in 1981 and 1991, executive constraints were high. Most recently, in 1991, one year after Alberto

[31] Debs and Goemans 2010; Dixon and Senese 2002; Huth and Allee 2002b; Regan and Leng 2003; this is contested for territorial issues (Miller and Gibler 2011).

[32] Reiter and Stam 2002.

[33] Goldsmith 2007.

[34] Lake 1992.

[35] It is not necessary for our framework, nor do we assume, that members of the mass public will understand that democracies may be stronger adversaries in war. Elites' anticipation of defeat or greater costs is enough to motivate this causal mechanism.

[36] Achen and Snidal 1989, 161–63; Weeks 2014, 11. Our approach, examining a single case (Peru-Ecuador dyad) over time, is consistent with Gerring's recommendations for this class of situation (Gerring 2012, 287).

[37] We categorize high competition, constraint, and participation (and democracy) as greater than 16 on our 0–20 scales explained below.

Fujimori came to power, Peru initiated the Pachacútec Incident.[38] David Mares writes that although democratic Ecuador was interested in pursuing its territorial dispute, it "needed Peru to initiate the fighting." Ecuador's expectations that Fujimori would prefer negotiation to war were dashed due to the Peruvian leader's "unwillingness to compromise on fundamental points . . . . In early 1991 Ecuador asked privately that Peru abandon the Pachacútec outpost. Peru's initial threats and subsequent refusal to abide by the agreement to mutually withdraw forces dramatically increased tensions and spiraled into the [Cenepa] war in 1995. In 1992 Fujimori presented another indication of his refusal to bargain on major points when he closed Congress. . . ."[39] By our theory, had Peru's institutions of political competition been stronger, Fujimori would have been more likely to negotiate than go to war with a neighboring democracy.

States with high competition will not avoid targeting authoritarian regimes, however, because the effect of each factor will be lower or non-existent. Conflict with such regimes will be more readily justified and defended on moral-legitimacy grounds because they infringe citizens' civil and political rights, and because authoritarian leaders do not have (free) popular electoral consent. Indeed, inaction might be criticized. During the Cold War, for example, the party in opposition could criticize the US president's policy as "soft on communism," as Republicans such as Richard Nixon did to the Democratic administration of Harry Truman.[40]

International censure can be moderated by the argument that the fight is with the target's dictator, not its people. Lower transparency and accountability make verifiable compromise and good-faith negotiation less likely. In addition, because authoritarian targets are not transparent, successful conflict outcomes may seem more likely due to poor understanding of their capabilities. Even when armies are large and well-equipped, there may be doubts about loyalty and fighting effectiveness.[41] And if authoritarian leaders are assumed able to maintain power in spite of military defeat, leaders in high-competition states may also see them as less likely to "try hard" to win.[42]

[38] Herz and Nogueira 2002.
[39] Mares 1996, 117–18.
[40] Ambrose 1987, 186.
[41] Reiter and Stam 2002.
[42] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, 794; Goldsmith 2007; Lake 1992.

—H1. The chance of a state initiating militarized interstate conflict will be decreasing in its level of political competition, conditional on the adversary's level of democracy.

CONSTRAINTS ON THE EXECUTIVE

Most political systems that are not fully autocratic place some constraints on executive leaders such as prime ministers or presidents. Often these involve separated or shared powers across branches of government.[43] Laws typically must be approved by both legislature and executive, and legislatures can investigate and sanction executives. Rule of law constrains heads of state and government. Civil and political rights, including freedoms of speech and the press, are constraints on executive power, allowing society to monitor the executive. At least two strands of institutional argument point to constraints on executive decision makers as key to the effect of regime type on international conflict behavior.

Schultz argues that democracies have greater credibility in interstate crisis bargaining. There are "constraints on the government's ability to conceal or misrepresent relevant information in a crisis."[44] This transparency makes it difficult for democracies to bluff in crises and easier for potential adversaries to accurately gauge their capabilities and resolve.

Schultz's approach focuses on monadic conflict behavior in that it does not make distinctions based on the adversary's regime type, and thus is not specifically a theory of dyadic democratic peace. Neither does it fit neatly into just one of our institutional boxes, drawing on elements of competition as well as institutions of transparency that constrain governments.[45] Schultz recognizes the conceptual distinction between "publicity and competition" and notes that his approach combines these two aspects of democracy.[46] Among the institutions he highlights are "[r]ules safeguarding media freedoms" and "information gathering that is central to the legislative process," such as the investigative and deliberative activities of legislative committees.[47] He distinguishes between "institutions promoting accountability and competition" and

[43] Montesquieu 1949 [1748].

[44] Schultz 2001, 231–32.

[45] We believe we accurately capture Schultz's logic. The transparency of politics gives democracy its informational advantage. "The political process in democratic countries resembles an open debate in which the government must share the stage with its domestic adversaries. The resulting interaction generates public information about the desirability of different policy choices and the government's domestic political incentives. In nondemocratic systems, by contrast, arguments over public policy—and especially foreign policy—tend to take place in private; their public aspect more closely resembles a monologue than a debate" (Schultz 2001, 232).

[46] Schultz 2001, 58.

[47] Schultz 2001, 60, 64.

institutions' "informational properties," finding support for the latter but not the former.[48]

David Lake's constraint-based argument with dyadic implications emphasizes leaders' ability to extract rents from society. He argues that democracies exhibit less expansionism due to "societal constraints on state rent seeking," which reduce leaders' incentives for territorial expansion. He argues that states with higher constraints on rent seeking are less likely to initiate conflict, especially against democracies, due to the common lack of expansionism. Lake points to constraints against government secrecy: "[T]o control the state, individuals must first monitor its performance and acquire information on the strategies it is pursuing. . . . The higher the costs of acquiring information regarding state performance, the greater latitude state officials possess to engage in rent-seeking behavior."[49]

These theories are logically distinct from ours and should be accounted for in the analysis. We test a dyadic[50] hypothesis about institutional constraints on the executive.

—H2. The chance of a state initiating militarized interstate conflict will be decreasing in its level of executive constraints, conditional on the adversary's level of democracy.

Political Participation

Institutions of participation regulate by whom leader(s) are selected and who may aspire to executive or legislative office. Robert Dahl characterized political participation as "the proportion of the population entitled to participate in a more or less equal plane in controlling and contesting the conduct of government."[51] It is not simply the idea of wide suffrage, since elections can be rigged or otherwise fail to provide genuine ability to sanction the leader. In essence, political participation indicates whether the one, few, or many hold ultimate, meaningful sovereignty in a political system.

Kant's "republican" peace emphasized accountability of leaders to a public that "would have to resolve to bring the hardships of war upon themselves."[52] He anticipated an "active" citizenry whose will republican leaders would take into account (although these are far from the

[48] Schultz 1999, 233.
[49] Lake 1992, 25–26.
[50] All hypotheses and tests are directed-dyadic, explained below.
[51] Dahl 1971, 4.
[52] Kant 2006 [1795], 75.
[53] It is not our intention to oversimplify or reduce Kant's foundation for perpetual peace to one or another factor. As Doyle 2012, 216, argues, in Kant's conception "only together . . . liberal institutions

only provisions of Kant's theory).[53] More recent structural theory of democratic peace also emphasizes the differential burdens borne by subjects and leaders.[54] Meaningful mass participation in choosing and removing leaders inhibits conflict initiation because "in a democracy, those who would bear the costs of war are the ones who decide whether it shall be fought. . . . The regular occurrence of elections is obviously important in this process. It is the mechanism that forces government to consider the will of the people."[55] Dan Reiter and Erik Tillman find monadic support for the contention that, among stable democracies, "greater public participation in choosing leaders is associated with a lower inclination to initiate international disputes."[56]

It is also plausible to connect participation to selectorate theory. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and associates define the selectorate as those who "have a government-granted say in the selection of leaders," which also gives them "the opportunity to become a member of a winning coalition." The winning coalition is "a subset of the selectorate of sufficient size such that the subset's support endows the leadership with political power over the remainder of the selectorate [and] the disenfranchised."

The logic of selectorate peace hinges on the tendency of democratic states (with large selectorates and winning coalitions, by definition) to "spend resources on effective public policy" or "public goods," including national security. Leaders with society-wide selectorates and winning coalitions approaching half of the population understand their political survival is tied to provision of such goods, and avoid engaging in international conflict with democracies that would also "try hard" to win.[57]

However, some dyadic implications are unclear. Bueno de Mesquita et al. appear agnostic regarding states with wide winning coalitions *initiating* militarized conflict with democracies, stating "war . . . between democracies is unlikely, though disputes are not."[58] But elsewhere, Bueno de Mesquita, Michael Koch, and Randolph Siverson argue that "democracies require a substantially higher ex-ante probability of victory than do autocracies before engaging in either disputes or wars."[59]

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liberal ideas, and the transnational ties that follow . . . plausibly connect . . . with sustained liberal peace." We interpret Kant's approach to liberal institutions as most closely tied to political participation of active citizens, and place less emphasis on institutionalized executive constraints or political competition.

[54] Russett and Oneal 2001, 53–58.
[55] Russett and Oneal 2001, 273–74.
[56] Reiter and Tillman 2002, 823–24.
[57] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, 42, 51.
[58] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, 243–45.
[59] Bueno de Mesquita, Koch, and Siverson 2004, 258; see also Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, 801–802.

Our dyadic hypothesis assumes this selectivity reduces the incidence of high-participation states' conflict initiation with democracies, and in the robustness tests we consider the special case of conflict initiation "when the odds of military victory are not overwhelming."[60]

> —H3. The chance of a state initiating militarized interstate conflict will be decreasing in its level of political participation, conditional on the adversary's level of democracy.

It is unlikely that each institutional argument is equally important, but neither are they mutually exclusive, such that if one is right another must be wrong. Nevertheless, they might be tested against each other to assess which better accounts for dyadic democratic peace at the initiation stage of conflict. If political competition is the most fundamental or essential institution, then its inverse association with conflict initiation against a target democracy will be the most robust and of greatest magnitude. We emphasize that we seek to test the contribution of fundamental institutional aspects of regime type to conflict initiation. We interpret existing theories insofar as they might apply to initiation, but we do not claim to test other implications of these theories (nor of ours).

Research Design

We first check whether dyadic democratic peace is evident and survived recent challenges in our setup using probit regression on conflict initiation in annual time-series cross-sectional data for the years 1950–2006.[61] We then test the hypotheses. Our research design includes using directed dyads that distinguish initiators and targets of conflict,[62] controlling for confounders, and extensive robustness tests.

Measures of Political Institutions

Although we primarily use the Polity IV data set, (1) our institutional indices are not the indices provided by Polity, but original constructs combining specific Polity variables in line with our hypotheses, and (2) our robustness tests include alternative indicators for competition

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[60] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2004, 364.

[61] This time period is appropriate because data for some institutional variables for earlier periods might be less reliable (and contain more missing values). Layne 1994 and Layne 2001 based some of his critique of democratic peace on supposedly selective and biased coding of pre-1945 cases. Given the variables we want to include, there are also data constraints. The trade data begin in 1950, and the international governmental organization data end in 2005. This constrains us to 1951–2006 for the dependent variable with a one-year lead.

[62] Reiter and Stam 2003.

and participation from different data sets. Although we are cognizant of critiques of Polity,[63] it provides a rich set of indicators developed to encode distinct aspects of political regimes, which makes it the most appropriate data set for our purposes. While critiques are usually directed at the complex way in which the overall Polity regime index is aggregated, to test our hypotheses we use the six elements of the Polity data set to construct distinct indicators for political competition, political participation, and executive constraints. Each component is an equally weighted average of two Polity elements. We rescale competition, constraint, participation, and regime type to range from 0 to 20 for ease of comparison. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics. Further details, along with replication files for the analysis, are available in the supplementary material.[64]

We emphasize that these components are our original constructs from Polity data, developed with an eye to theoretical appropriateness, and distinct from the Polity project's three concept variables. We find the Polity concept variables to be theoretically inappropriate for our approach because they combine elements that straddle across our components. For example, the concept variable *polcomp* includes competitiveness of participation, and also the regulation of participation, which, as discussed below, we connect to our idea of political participation. *Polcomp* excludes the competitiveness of executive recruitment, which is an important aspect of our idea of political competition.[65] We additionally emphasize that our results depend neither on the coding of our three components, nor on the Polity data set itself, as the robustness tests show.

POLITICAL COMPETITION

Competition combines competitiveness of executive recruitment (*xrcomp* in the Polity data set) and competitiveness of participation (*parcomp*). Competitiveness of executive recruitment ranges from no formal rules for leader selection to regulated selection, such as hereditary monarchy or military appointment, through dual and transitional arrangements, to election, including "competitive elections matching two or more major parties or candidates" in which either the public or elected assembly votes. Competitiveness of participation indicates "the extent to which

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[63] Treier and Jackman 2008; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010.

[64] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[65] In addition, the Polity concept *exrec* includes three indicators, with regulation of chief executive recruitment among them, which for our theory should be included as a measure not of participation but of executive constraint, representing legislative and judicial (or other institutional) oversight. The Polity concept *exconst* actually contains only one indicator, executive constraint.

alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena." It ranges from unregulated (no possibility of competitive participation due to the absence of "civil interaction"), repressed (no political opposition), suppressed, factional, and transitional, to competitive, which indicates "relatively stable and enduring, secular political groups which regularly compete for political influence at the national level" with voluntary transfers of power to competing groups.[66]

EXECUTIVE CONSTRAINT

Regulation of chief executive recruitment (*xrreg*) and executive constraints (*xconst*) comprise our *constraint* component. Regulation of chief executive recruitment measures "the extent to which a polity has institutionalized procedures for transferring executive power." These are coded as unregulated (for example, coups d'état), designational/ transitional (elites choose the leader without formal rules), or regulated, occurring through explicit rules, including genuine elections but also hereditary succession. Executive constraints measures "the extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives" by accountability groups, and usually means constraints imposed by legislatures and judiciaries, but can also be party structures in single-party regimes or elite councils. It ranges from unlimited authority, slight to moderate limitation, substantial limitations, and executive parity or subordination, in which "[A]ccountability groups have effective authority equal to or greater than the executive in most areas of activity."[67]

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Participation comprises openness of executive recruitment (*xropen*) and regulation of participation (*parreg*). Openness of executive recruitment indicates "the extent that all the politically active population has an opportunity, in principle, to attain the position through a regularized process." It ranges from unregulated to closed, dual-executive designation (hereditary succession for one executive and selection of a chief minister by elites), and open, for situations of "elite designation, competitive election, or transitional arrangements between designation and election." Regulation of participation indicates whether there are "binding rules on when, whether, and how political preferences are expressed," and ranges from unregulated, to multiple-identity (polarized groupings),

[66] Descriptions based on the Polity manual (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2012, 21–22, 26–27).
[67] Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2012, 20–21, 24–25.

sectarian ("intense factionalism and government favoritism"), restricted (exclusion of some groups or factions), and regulated, which indicates no group is "regularly excluded from the political process."[68]

REGIME TYPE

The Polity index (*polity2*) measures the regime type of state B. It ranges from −10 for fully authoritarian to +10 for fully democratic states (as noted, we rescale this to 0 to 20).

To test our hypotheses, which imply interactive effects between political institutions of state A, the potential initiator, and regime type of state B, the potential target, we use multiplicative interaction terms. We include all three component variables for state A, the regime type of state B, and their products, allowing us to assess each of the interactive relationships while controlling for the other two. If we did not include all component variables simultaneously, they could proxy overall regime type. An interaction between regime characteristics of states A and B is appropriate for directed dyads and is also more precise[69] than the "weak-link" indicators used in many studies and critiques of democratic peace.[70]

We have two levels of robustness tests. The first deals with general criticism of the democratic peace. For these, we address issues of spuriousness raised by Erik Gartzke,[71] Douglas Gibler,[72] and Patrick McDonald,[73] as well as methodological concerns about dependencies in dyadic data.[74] The second level deals with our analysis of *competition*, *constraint*, and *participation*, addressing concerns of multicollinearity, employing alternative data sets and measures, and assessing potential nonlinearities. We do not claim full tests of other scholars' theories, but only tests of the degree to which they provide an alternative to our theory about interstate conflict initiation. We draw no inferences about conflict escalation, or monadic effects, for example.

MEASURES OF INTERSTATE CONFLICT INITIATION

Our primary source of international conflict data is the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data set.[75] In these data, "a foreign policy crisis

[68] Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2012, 22, 25–26.
[69] Goldsmith, Chalup, and Quinlan 2008, 748–49.
[70] E.g., McDonald 2015; Russett and Oneal 2001.
[71] Gartzke 2007.
[72] Gibler 2012a.
[73] McDonald 2015.
[74] E.g., Cranmer and Desmarais 2011; Erikson, Pinto, and Rader 2014; Poast 2010; Ward, Siverson, and Cao 2007.
[75] Wilkenfeld and Brecher 2010, 13–14.

refs to the specific act, event or situational change which leads de-
cision makers to perceive a threat to basic values, time pressure for
response and heightened probability of involvement in military hostili-
ties." The initiator or "triggering entity" is the source of this perceived
military threat. Crisis initiation by state A against state B in a given year
is coded 1, dropping all subsequent contiguous crisis years from the data
and coding remaining noncrisis years 0,[76] with a one-year lead (values
for 1951–2001 are paired with data for 1950–2000 for the independent
variables) to address concerns of reverse causation.

Although we believe ICB is the best data set with global coverage over
a substantial time-series coding interstate conflict initiation, as a further
robustness test we run models using the Militarized Interstate Dispute
(MID) data set.[77] Based on its characteristics, we prefer ICB. Because the
results using each are similar, we discuss the data sets in more detail in
the supplementary material.[78]

CONTROL VARIABLES

We include a number of variables that may be related to both regime
type and conflict to guard against confounders (above and beyond our
first-level robustness tests). In addition, we run our models both ex-
cluding and including these variables to ensure they do not drive the
results.[79] Most are commonly used in quantitative studies of interna-
tional conflict.

We control for state A's dependence on trade with B, because inter-
national trade dependence may reduce conflict likelihood and is also
related to regime type.[80] Dependence is the portion of state A's GDP
represented by exports to and imports from B.[81] We control for both
geographic contiguity on land or across less than twenty-five miles of
water, and the natural log of the distance between capital cities, because
proximity increases the chance of conflict and because regime types
cluster geographically.[82] Both geographic controls are included because
states sharing borders might have great distances between capitals,
while states with closer capitals might not share a border.[83]

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[76] Thus we focus only on initiation. Neither new crises initiated for a directed dyad during wars or
other ongoing crises are included (ICB intrawar crises).
[77] Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2004.
[78] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.
[79] Achen 2005.
[80] Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2000.
[81] We use Correlates of War (COW) trade data (Barbieri and Keshk 2012) and GDP data from
Gleditsch 2002 and World Bank 2016, all converted to constant 2005 US dollars. Further details are
in the supplementary material; Goldsmith et al. 2017b.
[82] Gibler 2012a.
[83] Data generated with EUGene (Bennett and Stam 2000).

We include indicators for military capabilities of states A and B. Capabilities are related to conflict, while regime type is also related to military spending.[84] We use each state's composite index of national capabilities from the Correlates of War (COW) project. Alliance ties reflect security interests, but also vary systematically with regime type;[85] our control uses Gibler's alliance data.[86] We control for the number of joint international governmental organization (IGO) memberships for a dyad.[87] Nondemocracies tend to have fewer IGO memberships, while joint IGO memberships reduce interstate conflict.[88] The final control is for internal conflict in either state. Although less common in studies of international conflict, intrastate conflict is related to interstate conflict, such as interventions into another's civil war,[89] and also to regime type.[90] Data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program[91] are coded 0 for no conflict, 1 for conflict incurring at least twenty-five deaths annually, and 2 for one thousand or more.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Our primary analysis uses probit models with robust standard errors corrected for clustering on directed dyads. Directed dyads are appropriate because they identify initiator and target for each conflict.[92] Each pair of states for each year is included twice. For example, in 1979 Afghanistan is labelled state A and the USSR state B in one observation, with no conflict initiation by Afghanistan against the USSR. In another observation the USSR is state A and Afghanistan state B, and a conflict initiation is coded to represent the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The data have a binary outcome (conflict initiation) and are time-series cross-sectional, therefore we include a variable for the number of years since the last conflict initiation for each directed dyad (peaceyears), and its squared and cubed terms, accounting for time dependence.[93]

We first estimate models using regime type for states A and B, to establish whether we detect an overall dyadic democratic peace effect. Then we consider recent challenges of spuriousness or inadequate statistical methods. We next estimate the relationships of our three

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[84] Fordham and Walker 2005; Goldsmith 2007.
[85] Lai and Reiter 2000.
[86] Gibler 2009. We use a weighted sum of alliance commitments for the dyad: mutual defense pacts weighted 1.0, neutrality pacts 0.5, nonaggression agreements 0.25, and ententes 0.125.
[87] Data from Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004.
[88] Dorussen and Ward 2008.
[89] Gleditsch 2007.
[90] Davenport 2007.
[91] Themnér and Wallenstein 2011.
[92] Reiter and Stam 2003.
[93] Carter and Signorino 2010.

institutional components with initiation. As noted, an important feature of our analysis is the inclusion of all components of regime type in each model. This is the approach of James Morrow and associates when addressing criticism of previous analysis of the selectorate model.[94]

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

REGIME TYPE

First we demonstrate that dyadic democratic peace emerges strongly in our setup. When the regime type of the potential initiator is interacted with that of the potential target, the likelihood of conflict initiation is reduced as the democracy level of each rises. The interaction term $\text{RegimeType}_A \times \text{RegimeType}_B$ is negative and significant in models 1 and 2 (Table 2), regardless of inclusion of controls. Contiguity, distance, and the peace-year terms are retained because we consider these essential to a meaningful specification (but none of the key results changes if these are dropped).

Binary outcome models like probit present difficulties for interpreting interactions. We use Monte Carlo simulations and graphical presentation to assess their significance and magnitude.[95] Figure 1(a) shows change in the probability of ICB crisis initiation given movement in state A's regime type from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean (a first difference), for all values of state B's regime type.[96] This equates to a shift up the scale from 1.6 to 16.2, roughly the distance between Uzbekistan (almost fully authoritarian) and Indonesia (almost fully democratic) in 2001, or Mexico's transition, 1976–98. These estimates are for relatively "dangerous" dyads to simulate realistic conflict scenarios. Specifically, we consider dyads in which the states are contiguous, and the other covariates' values are held at their 80th percentile in the direction of greater likelihood of conflict (for example, because military capabilities are positively associated with the chance of conflict, these variables are set at the level for a state that has greater capabilities than 79 percent of other states).

The graphs present estimated effects and 95 percent confidence intervals. Consistent with democratic peace, more democracy in the potential initiator makes initiation against a state at or above midrange regime type less likely (Figure 1(a)). The decrease in probability when the target

[94] Morrow et al. 2008. Including the aggregate regime-type measure (Clarke and Stone 2008) is redundant when concurrently including all regime-type elements.
[95] Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006.
[96] Simulations include the controls, guarding against exaggerating magnitude or significance.

TABLE 2
INITIATIONS OF INTERSTATE CRISES, 1951–2006[a]

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	coef.	s.e.	p	coef.	s.e.	p	coef.	s.e.	p	coef.	s.e.	p
$RegimeType_A$	0.022	0.01	0.00	0.033	0.01	0.00						
$RegimeType_A \times RegimeType_B$	−0.003	0.00	0.00	−0.004	0.00	0.00						
$Competition_A$							0.025	0.02	0.11	0.019	0.02	0.21
$Competition_A \times RegimeType_B$							−0.005	0.00	0.00	−0.004	0.00	0.00
$Constraints_A$							0.004	0.01	0.77	0.022	0.01	0.15
$Constraint_A \times RegimeType_B$							0.001	0.00	0.30	−0.000	0.00	1.00
$Participation_A$							−0.015	0.01	0.14	−0.003	0.01	0.79
$Participation_A \times RegimeType_B$							0.001	0.00	0.21	0.001	0.00	0.15
$RegimeType_B$	0.026	0.00	0.00	0.037	0.01	0.00	0.021	0.01	0.07	0.033	0.01	0.00
$ln(TradeDependence_A)$	0.003	0.00	0.15				0.002	0.00	0.19			
$IntraStateConflict_A$	0.216	0.03	0.00				0.232	0.03	0.00			
$IntraStateConflict_B$	0.109	0.04	0.00				0.119	0.04	0.00			
Alliance	0.080	0.05	0.10				0.081	0.05	0.10			
JointIGOs	0.006	0.00	0.01				0.005	0.00	0.01			
$Capability_A$	5.151	0.44	0.00				5.232	0.45	0.00			
$Capability_B$	4.706	0.51	0.00				4.757	0.52	0.00			
Contiguity	0.811	0.07	0.00	1.123	0.08	0.00	0.805	0.07	0.00	1.125	0.08	0.00
$ln(Distance)$	−0.214	0.03	0.00	−0.146	0.03	0.00	−0.221	0.03	0.00	−0.145	0.03	0.00
PeaceYears	−0.051	0.01	0.00	−0.037	0.01	0.00	−0.050	0.01	0.00	−0.036	0.01	0.00
PeaceYears^2	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.001	0.00	0.00
PeaceYears^3	−0.000	0.00	0.01	−0.000	0.00	0.03	−0.000	0.00	0.01	−0.000	0.00	0.05
Constant	−1.923	0.26	0.00	−2.447	0.26	0.00	−1.760	0.27	0.00	−2.567	0.28	0.00
N	785264			997912			761664			964064		
Wald chi^2	1617.41		0.00	1302.24		0.00	1733.88		0.00	1248.45		0.00
AIC	4264.33			5589.56			4122.41			5419.19		

[a] Probit regression coefficients (coef.) with robust standard errors (s.e.) clustered on directed dyads, and p–values. State A is the crisis initiator, and state B is the target. Crisis initiation measured in year t (1951–2006), other variables in year t–1.
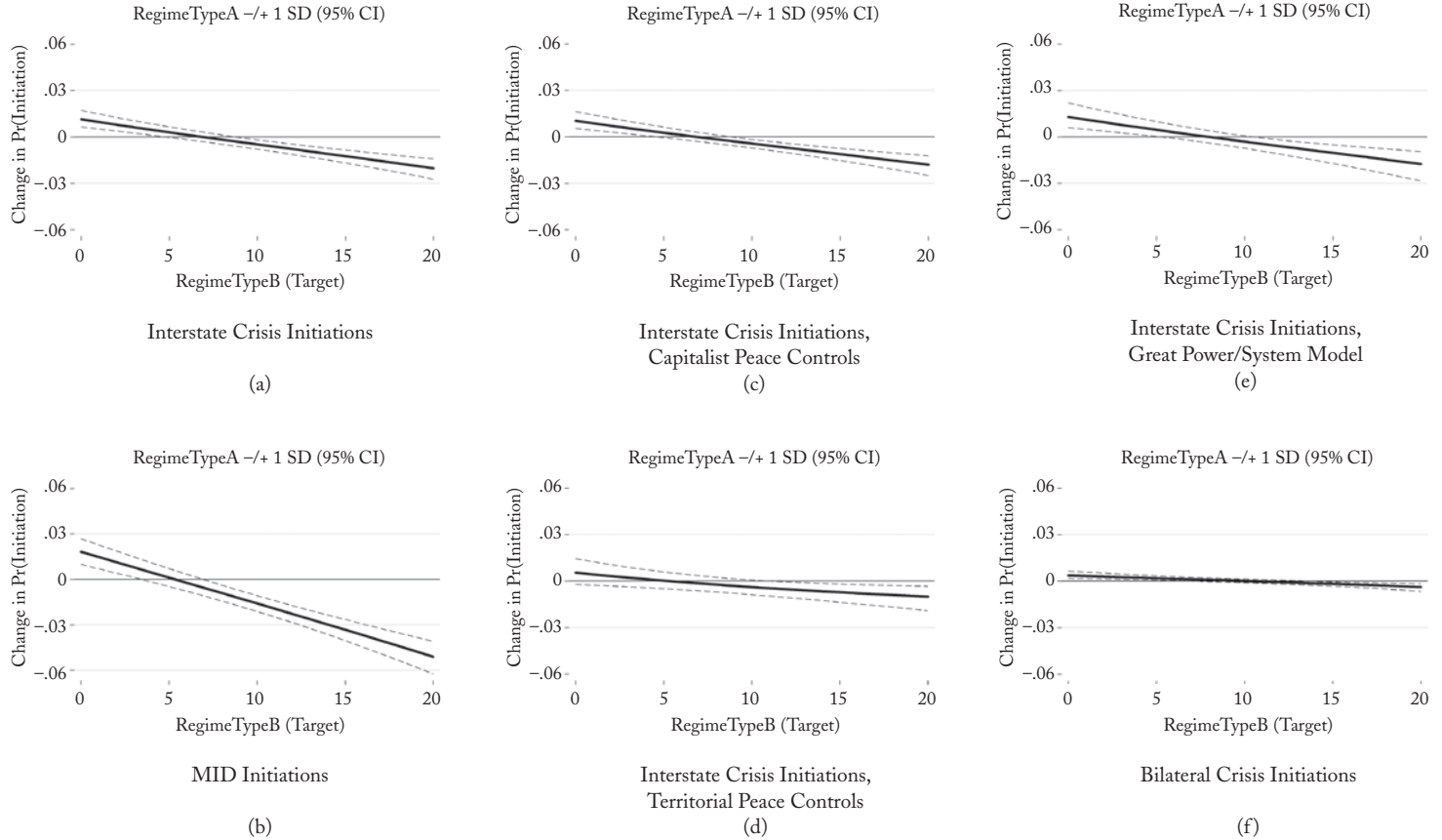
FIGURE 1

MARGINAL EFFECT OF INITIATOR DEMOCRACY AS TARGET REGIME TYPE CHANGES: CONTIGUOUS STATES AT RISK OF CONFLICT

approaches full democracy is around −.02, which is substantial given the average likelihood of ICB crisis initiation among contiguous dyads in the data set is only .011. The association is of similarly high significance and somewhat greater magnitude when MID initiations are considered (Figure 1(b)).

As noted, important challenges have emerged to dyadic democratic peace. Three arguments focus on spuriousness. Gartzke argues that there is a "capitalist peace" and in his models, the democratic peace indicators are often insignificant.[97] Gibler proposes a "territorial peace" in which states first settle territorial conflicts, then democratize.[98] Most recently, McDonald proposes that both democratization and peace are caused by great-power spheres of influence and contingencies of the international system.[99]

A line of methodological critique also exists. Several studies note that dyadic data oversimplify interstate relations, which might be better characterized by a network of dependencies.[100] If so, imposing a dyadic data structure would violate statistical assumptions of independent observations, potentially distorting results.

The remaining results in Figure 1 present robustness tests addressing these concerns and are detailed in the supplementary material.[101] We include controls for the capitalist peace. Economic interdependencies, more common for democracies, may drive the apparent democratic peace. Gartzke's indicators have been criticized for considerable nonrandom missing data and other issues.[102] We use several indicators for trade openness, trade dependence, and economic development. Neither interaction terms (Figure 1(c)) nor weak-link specifications change our findings.

Gibler argues that democratic peace among neighboring states is an artifact of territorial peace; once states settle border disputes they are more likely to democratize and remain at peace.[103] We include eleven variables from the replication data set from his book.[104] The democratic peace results are similar (Figure 1(d)) and the magnitude of the association is smaller, likely due to the large number of added variables (some of which raise endogeneity concerns).

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[97] Gartzke 2007. We focus on Gartzke's critique because Mousseau's (e.g., 2013) is more heavily criticized on theoretical and analytical foundations (e.g., Schneider 2014, 175–176).

[98] Gibler 2012a.

[99] McDonald 2015.

[100] Recently, Cranmer and Desmarais 2011; Erikson, Pinto, and Rader 2014.

[101] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[102] Dafoe 2011, 252–59.

[103] Gibler 2012a.

[104] Gibler 2012b.

McDonald argues democratic peace is a product of "great powers, hierarchy, and endogenous regimes."[105] He asserts that while for some periods democracies might not fight each other, both peace and regime-type result from great-power politics such as bargains over spheres of influence. We follow his analysis by controlling for all alliance ties to great powers, dropping all dyads containing claimed disproportionately influential democratic (United Kingdom, France, and Germany) and nondemocratic (East Germany) powers, and dropping all democracies emerging post–Cold War. While the approach of excluding entire periods or classes of states seems flawed, assuming rather than testing causation, our results (Figure 1(e)) clearly support the existence of democratic peace at the conflict-initiation stage regardless. They are equally robust for the Cold War period only (detailed in the supplementary material),[106] contradicting McDonald's claim that "there is no democratic peace during the Cold War" due to supposedly equally pacific autocratic dyads.[107] Joanne Gowa, interestingly, makes the opposite claim, that democratic peace does not apply post–Cold War, but our results are consistent for the post–1991 period, as well.[108]

We take two approaches in addressing methodological concerns about nonindependence of observations. To avoid "apply[ing] dyadic data to multilateral wars,"[109] we remove all crises with more than two actors. This leaves ninety-eight (23 percent) of 423 initiations. The result in Figure 1(f) shows that democratic peace does not depend on analysis of multilateral disputes as if they were dyadic. Although the magnitude is smaller, this result is not surprising given most conflicts are removed, and the confidence band is nevertheless tight. This solution is straightforward, but it is possible that dependencies not already captured by our controls, temporal cubic polynomial, and clustered standard errors, still exist for some bilateral conflicts or for nonconflict years. It is also preferable to include all conflict for which democratic peace is relevant.

Thus we also run network models. Following Skyler Cranmer and Bruce Desmarais, we implement Temporal Exponential Random

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[105] McDonald 2015.

[106] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[107] McDonald 2015, 584. McDonald also proposes dropping all states joining a conflict after its first initiation. We object to this as too blunt an instrument, excluding, for example, the United States as a participant in the Korean War. Nevertheless, we run the model including only bilateral conflicts (Figure 1(f)), which of course do not have joiners; the results remain very similar, with somewhat reduced magnitude; Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[108] Gowa 2011; see also Gowa 1999; Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[109] Poast 2010, 404, n. 2.

Graph Models (TERGMs).[110] These produce similar strongly supportive results for democratic peace (see the supplementary material),[111] while accounting for unmeasured dependencies in the dyadic data. A disadvantage is that this network analysis requires a complete graph (fully connected network) in which no node lacks an edge with any other in any iteration (year) of the longitudinal analysis. There are only twenty-two states that remain in the data out of roughly 145 in the probit models for any given year. We believe the combination of the bilateral-crisis and TERGM results shows the findings are robust to concerns about unmeasured dependencies.[112]

INSTITUTIONS

We now turn to our hypotheses regarding the causes of democratic peace. Hypothesis 1, that the chance of a state initiating conflict decreases when it has a higher level of political competition and the potential target has a higher level of democracy, finds strong support. Models 3 and 4 of Table 1 show the interaction term Competition$_A$ × RegimeType$_B$, which has a negative and highly significant coefficient. The simulation in row 1, column 1, of Figure 2, confirms this and suggests the magnitude. While holding other variables at dangerous values, the drop in the likelihood of conflict initiation for a movement in *competition* from one standard deviation below the mean to one above is comparable to, indeed of somewhat greater magnitude than, that for the change in overall democracy (Figure 1). Movement from low to high competition reduces the probability of conflict initiation against a democracy by about −.03.

In contrast, there is no evidence that executive constraints dampen conflict with democracies. The coefficient in Table 1 models 3 and 4 is inconsistent and not significant. The interaction when other variables are held at dangerous values shows a positive association with conflict initiation against democratic targets, and the confidence band does not include the zero-effect line for target regimes of roughly twelve or higher in the graph in row 1, column 2, of Figure 2. There is no support for hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3, regarding political participation, similarly finds no support. Neither the coefficients, nor the simulations in row 1, column 3, of Figure 2 provide evidence of a significant (or negative)

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[110] Cranmer and Desmarais 2011.

[111] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.

[112] It is also the case that hypothesis 1 is supported when the spuriousness and methodological checks in Figure 1 are applied to models with all components and their interactions; Goldsmith et al. 2017b.
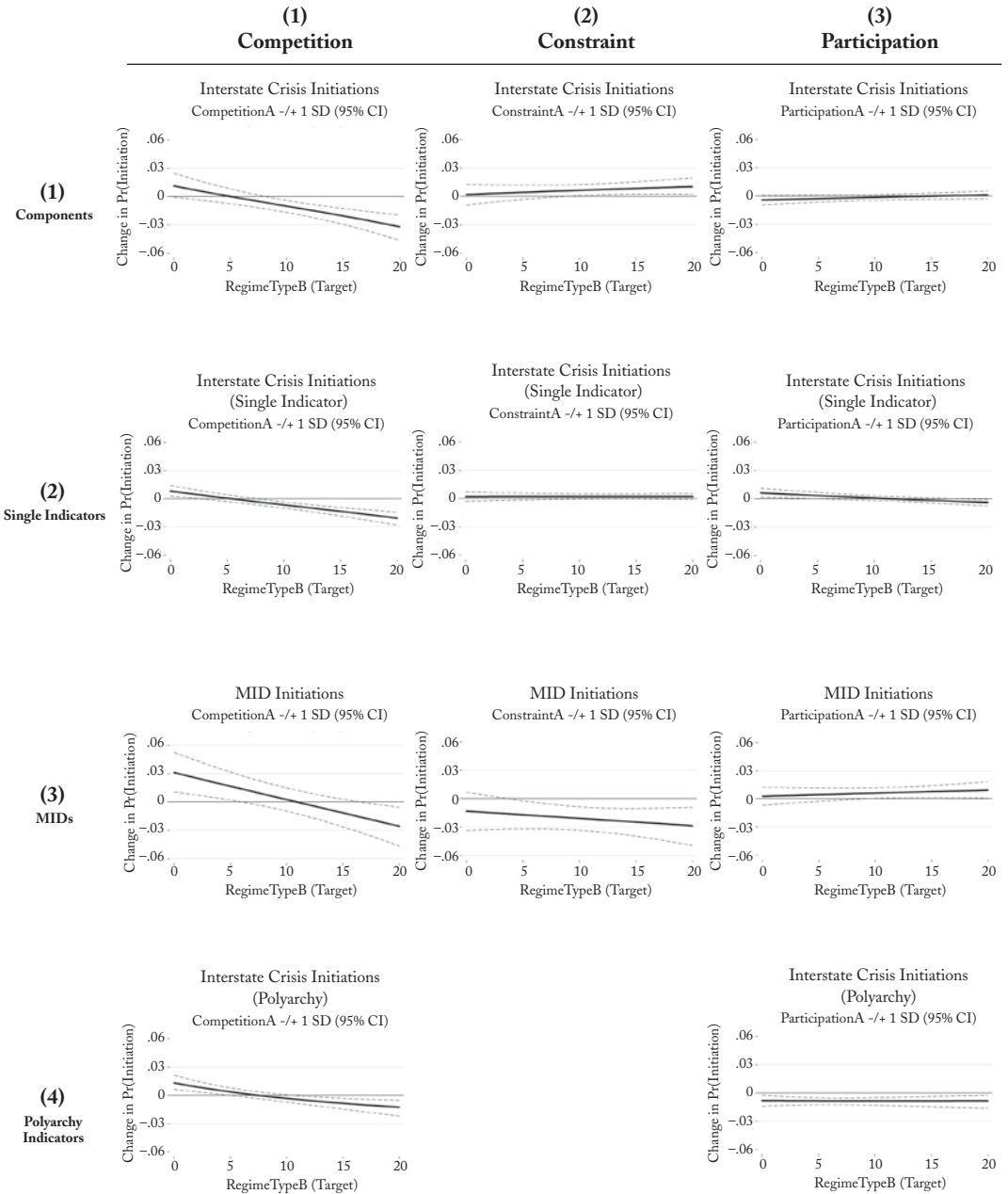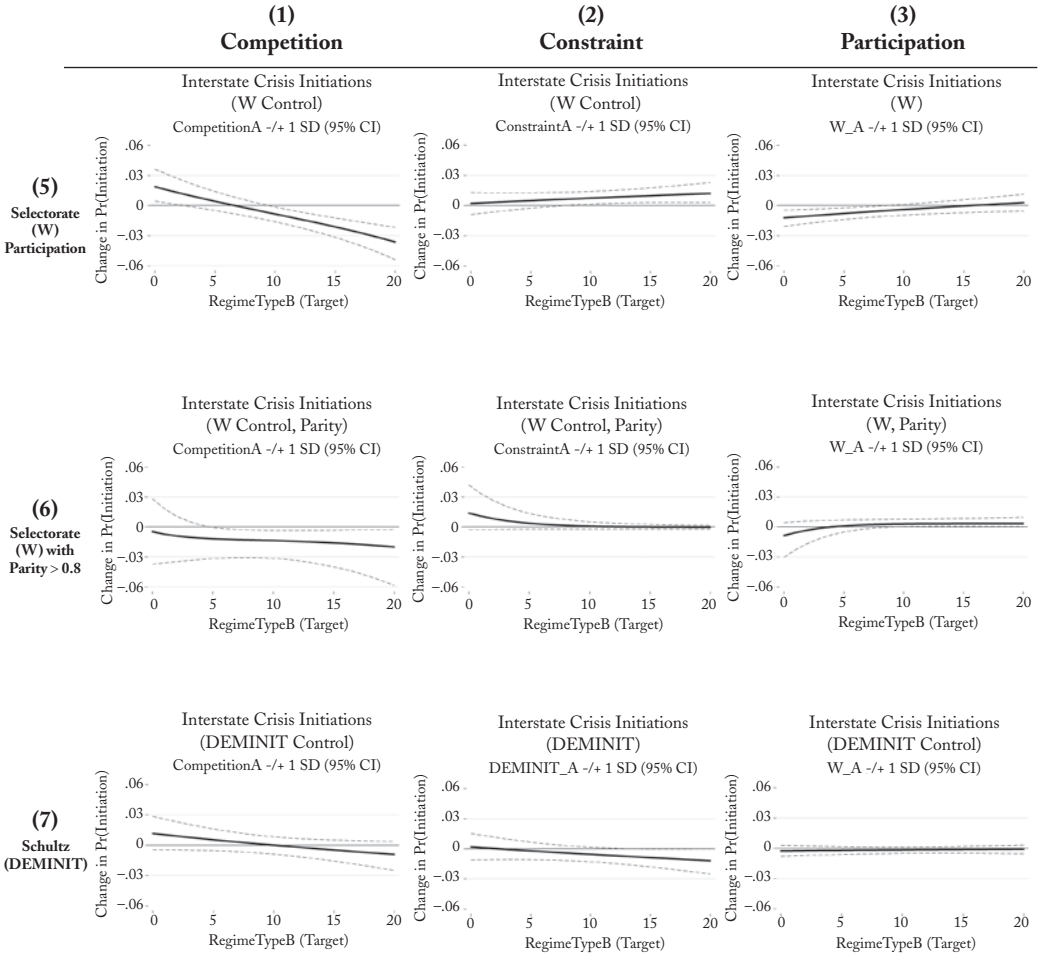
FIGURE 2
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF STATE A REGIME COMPONENTS ON CONFLICT
PROBABILITY AS STATE B REGIME TYPE CHANGES

	(1) Competition	(2) Constraint	(3) Participation

(5) Selectorate (W) Participation

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W Control) — CompetitionA -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W Control) — ConstraintA -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W) — W_A -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

(6) Selectorate (W) with Parity > 0.8

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W Control, Parity) — CompetitionA -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W Control, Parity) — ConstraintA -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (W, Parity) — W_A -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

(7) Schultz (DEMINIT)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (DEMINIT Control) — CompetitionA -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (DEMINIT) — DEMINIT_A -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

Interstate Crisis Initiations (DEMINIT Control) — W_A -/+ 1 SD (95% CI)

relationship with conflict initiation for the interaction term Participation$_A$ × RegimeType$_B$.

These results for the models that we believe most appropriately specified lend strong support for the key role of political competition in dyadic democratic peace. Further supporting evidence is provided by the overall appropriateness of model specification. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) statistic balances goodness of fit with model complexity. Model 3 in Table 1 has a lower AIC value than model 1, indicating a better specification even though it is less parsimonious.

We now turn to the second-level robustness tests and briefly discuss implications of each. Full details are in the supplementary materials,

including further tests: a full factorial model,[113] models using state B's component variables instead of its overall regime type interacted with those of state A, and a model extending the temporal domain to 2010 with some imputed values, none of which alters our main findings.

In row 2 of Figure 2, we substitute the three least correlated single indicators from the Polity data set as measures of competition, constraint, and participation, to make sure the results are not skewed by multicollinearity. It is self-evident and acknowledged in the literature that conceptually distinct regime components are nevertheless likely to have close empirical association.[114] The single indicators, *competitiveness of participation*, *regulation of participation*, and *regulation of chief executive recruitment*, are less correlated, and in a regression model have variance inflation factors (VIFs) well below ten, the usual threshold for multicollinearity problems. As a further check, we run the models while dropping all state A full democracies, which greatly reduces collinearity while focusing on cases in which high competition is unlikely to be accompanied with equally high participation or constraint, and vice versa. The results are again consistent. Our findings regarding political competition are robust to potential multicollinearity. Executive constraints appear unrelated to conflict initiation, while there is at best weak support for the association of participation with lower initiation against a democracy. The results regarding political competition also hold if the three more correlated single indicators are used. This establishes that *neither competitiveness of participation* nor *competitiveness of executive recruitment* alone is driving our results: either measure of political competition produces essentially similar findings, raising confidence against concerns about collinearity and measurement error.

Next we use a different dependent variable, MIDs. The results (Figure 2, row 3) are similar to those in row 1. Competition's negative and significant association with initiation against more democratic states does not depend on use of ICB data. But hypothesis 2 also possibly finds some support.

Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman among others have noted potential measurement error in the overall Polity index of regime type.[115] Examining the roles of its subcomponents, as we do, is important. Another important check is to see if our findings hold with different data.

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[113] A full factorial design involves all possible interactions ($2^4 - 1 = 15$) among Competition$_A$, Constraint$_A$, Participation$_A$, and RegimeType$_B$. While we believe this is theoretically inappropriate for our research design (Kam and Franzese 2007), such models support our results. See also note 90.

[114] Clarke and Stone 2008.

[115] Treier and Jackman 2008.

In the fourth row, we use a completely different data set[116] based on Dahl's concept of polyarchy, deriving regime classifications based on the degrees of contestation and inclusiveness.[117] These correspond to the concepts of competition and participation, and allow us to conduct robustness tests for hypotheses 1 and 3, but not 2. The results clearly support hypothesis 1 regarding competition, but do not support hypothesis 3. Although results for constraint and participation are inconsistent in the robustness checks, it is interesting that in this instance there appears to be support for a monadic association of greater participation with a lower likelihood of initiation, regardless of target regime type.

Next we substitute Bueno de Mesquita and associates' indicator for winning coalition size, W, for participation in the fifth and sixth rows. Neither analysis of all directed dyads, nor those with higher power parity ("when the odds of military victory are not overwhelming") produces support for hypotheses 2 or 3. Support remains for hypothesis 1, somewhat less strongly in row 6, which seems an inappropriate specification.

Row 7 presents a model substituting Schultz's democratic initiator (DEMINIT) indicator for constraint.[118] It is negative but insignificant, while competition remains negative but also insignificant. This model can also be considered poorly specified, because it suffers from high multicollinearity (VIFs for DEMINIT and political competition and their interactions with regime type B range from twenty-two through fifty-two). When DEMINIT is instead substituted for our measure of competition, multicollinearity is reduced (VIFs below fifteen) and the results again support hypothesis 1 if DEMINIT is considered to represent competition while controlling for *constraint* and *participation*.

Last, our theory (and others') assumes linearity, but the interaction of regime types might involve considerable nonlinear complexity. We use a semiparametric estimation technique, generalized additive models (GAMs), to assess whether relaxing probit's smoothing assumptions allows different patterns to emerge, potentially contradicting our hypotheses.[119] Nathaniel Beck and Simon Jackman suggested the use of GAMs to study democratic peace.[120] There is a close connection with kernel methods, popularized in machine learning and proposed as a tool for analysis in political science.[121]

[116] Vanhanen 2000.
[117] Dahl 1971.
[118] Schultz 2001.
[119] Ezekiel 1924; Hastie and Tibshirani 1990.
[120] Beck and Jackman 1998, 617–22.
[121] Hainmueller and Hazlett 201.

The GAM models do allow some nonlinear dynamics to emerge, but the interaction between *competition* in state A and B's *regime type* remains negative, retaining a fairly smooth downward slope even as the smoothing function is greatly relaxed; there is no support for hypotheses 2 or 3. Thus none of our robustness tests leads us to doubt our core finding in support of hypothesis 1.

To what extent does this apparent "political-competition peace" correspond to a "democratic peace"? One way to assess this is to compare the graphs in Figure 1 (especially (a)) with those for political competition in Figure 2 (especially row 1). Political competition appears to drive the democratic peace, with a functional form very similar to that of regime type, but as noted, often a greater magnitude. We can also use categorical democracy measures as referents. The marginal effects for political competition in Figure 2 specifically are based on movement from about 3.9 to 16.4 on the 0 to 20 scale. How does such a change correspond to states' categorization as democracies?

We consider three authoritative regime-type indicators that adopt categorical rather than indexed coding. For our low-competition value, more than 97 percent of regimes are coded nondemocratic by José Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Vreeland's widely used indicator,[122] while 80 percent of regimes with our high-competition value are coded democratic. If we assess movement from the modal values of *competition* in the nondemocracies to that in the democracies (from 8.333333 to 20), the marginal effect plot (see the supplementary material)[123] is almost identical to that in Figure 2, row 1. In addition, based on democracy indicators from Carles Boix, Michael Miller, and Sebastian Rosato[124] and Michael Wahman, Jan Teorell, and Axel Hadenius,[125] respectively, 99 percent and 100 percent of states with our low-competition value are coded as nondemocracy. Corresponding proportions of democracies for states with our high-competition values are 80 percent and 60 percent. Considering our regime type indicator, which is simply the Polity scale rescaled to 0 to 20, we can find the mean regime type values that correspond to these political competition values. On average, the movement in political competition corresponds to a movement in regime type from around 5.3 to 16.2, which is movement from near-authoritarian to fully democratic if the common Polity

[122] Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010.
[123] Goldsmith et al. 2017b.
[124] Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013.
[125] Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius 2013.

cut points of −6 and 6 are used.[126] Thus we are confident the marginal effects shown correspond to not only a political-competition peace, but also to a democratic one. In an important sense, however, this is beside the point. If the key driver of the lack of conflict is institutions of political competition, it is important to know that high-competition polities are less likely to initiate against democracies even if they themselves are not fully democratic based on other criteria.

Conclusion

The dyadic democratic peace is alive and well, in spite of recent challenges, and institutions of political competition are more centrally associated with it than previous theories expect. Better understanding its causal mechanisms is acknowledged even by the theory's critics to be crucial not only for proper policy prescriptions, but also because "the contention that democratic states behave differently toward each other than toward non-democracies cuts to the heart of the international relations theory debate about the relative salience of second-image (domestic politics) and of third-image (systemic structure) explanations of international political outcomes."[127]

We have presented logically coherent, explicitly dyadic, theory, and compelling quantitative evidence that political competition plays a key role in the observed dyadic democratic peace. Indeed it appears to be the driving factor. We argue that high competition polities are unlikely to target democracies because of the relative difficulty of defending such a conflict as right, necessary, and winnable. Barring (implausibly) strong selection effects, if democracies rarely come to the brink of violent conflict, this should be a large part of the explanation of why they rarely are involved in escalations to large-scale violence or war. Our results do not depend on a particular measure of competition, nor on use of the Polity data. Our contribution is limited, but significant, and the results are exceptionally robust. While other democratic peace theories have of course considered political competition, usually in conjunction with other factors, no other dyadic approach gives it the central emphasis that we do, or provides the dyadic logic that we quite explicitly do.

[126] More comprehensive data on the distribution of regime types using these four measures across the range of values of political competition are provided in the supplementary material; Goldsmith et al. 2017b.
[127] Layne 1994, 5.

We account for recent concerns about spuriousness and unmeasured dependencies. We show strong and consistent empirical correspondence between the association of political competition with conflict initiation and that of regime type overall, while other regime components (constraint and participation) are inconsistent and far from such correspondence. The plausible conclusion is that political competition drives dyadic democratic peace at the conflict-initiation stage. Political competition is a more consistent and potent predictor of dyadic peace at the conflict-initiation stage than a number of variables favored by other theories (although we do not claim to directly test all implications of these theories).

These findings are consistent with some arguments in the audience-costs literature focusing on the indeterminate effects of audience costs, due to, for example, poor citizen information about the issue at stake,[128] a leader's effective explanation for backing down,[129] low salience for foreign policy in general,[130] or the ability of autocrats to also generate audience costs.[131] Our logic places audience costs in a more politically contingent context. But a sole focus on the costs of backing down from a threat is too narrow to provide an explanation for democratic peace. Backing down is costly when a viable opposition can make it so. When and for which issues this might happen is challenging to specify or measure, but what we believe is the more fundamental factor at work, the genuinely competitive institutional environment, is easier to identify and leads to our parsimonious expectations. It allows the potential for audience costs and other types of behavior-consequence combinations for incumbents, but based on contexts allowing serious opposition criticism of foreign policy that can be effectively portrayed as wrong, unnecessary, and/or too costly.

In addition, we point to two possible connections to normative explanations of democratic peace to break down the institutional-normative conceptual barrier. The institutional explanation that we advance may also be the most closely related to norms of compromise and nonviolent conflict resolution. First, institutions of political competition may help imbue political leaders with normative expectations of negotiated compromise,[132] which they then translate to their international interactions

[128] Potter and Baum 2010. Baum and Potter 2015 emphasize conditioning factors of media access and press freedom on the magnitude of the pacific nature of multiparty democracies when compared to two-party democracies. Such a finding is potentially consistent with ours, but we leave to subsequent research assessment of whether considering these might further refine our findings.

[129] Levendusky and Horowitz 2012.

[130] Slantchev 2006.

[131] Weeks 2008.

[132] Maoz and Russett 1993.

with leaders they know to work in similar systems. Second, leaders must make a normative argument for war when they face serious political competition, to the extent that an immoral or "wrong" war would leave them politically vulnerable due to citizens' preferences and/or elites' fears of international costs imposed due to norm violation. Norm-based explanations of democratic peace may be conditional on institutions of political competition.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887116000307.

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