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Testing Competing Institutional Explanations of the Democratic Peace: The Case of Dispute Duration

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Drawing upon two alternative versions of the institutional explanation for the democratic peace, we suggest competing hypotheses about the relationship between democratic political institutions and the length of dispute participation. One set of hypotheses originates in the argument that because of the bargaining arrangements internal to democratic states, disputes between democratic states will necessarily be drawn out, so that in the time that it takes to secure the domestic political base for war, diplomats have time to find nonwar solutions. A second set of hypotheses, derived from the selectorate argument about how institutions shape the behavior of leaders who want to remain in power, leads to the expectation that selection effects over which disputes to participate in make disputes between democracies shorter than disputes between pairs of other types of states. Using a Weibull survival model we analyze data on the length of Militarized Interstate Disputes during the period 1816 to 1992; we find clear support for the selectorate explanation. Two ancillary hypotheses from the selectorate argument are also tested and supported by the data.

Keywords democratic peace, dispute duration, institutions, power disparity

JEL Codes D2

Within the institutional approach to the democratic peace, two explanations have been advanced for the absence of war between democratic states. One version argues that the democratic peace is rooted in the nature of the bargaining arrangements that follow from political systems with diffused power. The other version of the institutional account focuses on the structurely induced incentives faced by leaders who want to retain political power. As these two perspectives lead to different expectations about key aspects of conflict behavior,
it is our intention to investigate empirically some key features that separate these two institutional explanations of the democratic peace. After presenting the arguments that compose these institutional explanations, we suggest hypotheses, describe the data we use to test the hypotheses, and present our tests. We also test two ancillary hypotheses. We conclude with some reflections on the implications of our results.

An Institutional Bargaining Explanation for the Democratic Peace

The impact of the bargaining arrangements that attend democratic institutions on foreign policy is best articulated by Maoz and Russett (1993) in their foundational paper on the democratic peace. They begin their argument by outlining a key feature of the nature of foreign policy in a democratic state: democratic leaders must necessarily mobilize internal political support for international challenges. As Russett (1993) elsewhere described this process:

Leaders [in democracies] must mobilize public opinion to obtain legitimacy for their actions. Bureaucracies, the legislature and private interest groups often incorporated in conceptualizations of the “state” must acquiesce. The nature and mix of institutions varies in different kinds of states... but it is complex. Popular support in a democracy can be built by rhetoric and exhortation, but not readily compelled.

This observation is not only plausible, but indeed has a time-honored place in descriptions of the vicissitudes of foreign policy in democratic states, particularly the United States. Consider Alexander George’s (1980, p. 234) description of the difficulty of achieving a consensus in foreign policy:

Democratic control of foreign policy is of course indispensable in the U.S. political system. But the forces of public opinion, Congress, the media, and powerful interest groups often make themselves felt in ways that seriously complicate the ability of the president and his advisers to pursue... policy objectives in a coherent consistent manner.

The consequence of this is straightforward. As put by Maoz and Russett (1993, p. 626; emphasis added):

due to the complexity of the democratic process and the requirement for securing a broad base of support for risky policies, democratic leaders are reluctant to wage wars, except in cases wherein war seems a necessity or when the war aims are seen as justifying the mobilization costs. The time required for a democratic state to prepare for war is far longer than for nondemocracies. Thus, in a conflict between democracies, by the time the two states are militarily ready for war, diplomats have the opportunity to find a nonmilitary solution to the conflict.

There is a direct implication of this statement: all else equal, the escalatory process in conflicts between democratic states is longer than it is between other types of states. This is

1This paper has had an immense impact on the study of the democratic peace. With 228 citations at the time of this writing, it is the most cited paper in Volume 87 of the American Political Science Review (http://www.webofscience.com/CIW.cgi). The argument was amplified by Russett (1993).

2Note that while Maoz and Russett present their argument in terms of conflict we have shifted to the use of the word dispute. We do not intend to engage in a sleight of hand in doing so. When Maoz and Russett talk about conflict it is as part of an escalatory process of war mobilization, and
so because other pairings of political system types do not share the deliberative, consultative characteristics of democratic politics, and hence the escalatory process presumably will be shorter. Consequently, the time between the onset of a serious dispute and its termination should be greater when states share democratic political institutions because of the attendant joint necessity of creating a policy consensus. Note that the argument set forward by Maoz and Russett is based upon the difficult and cumbersome bargaining processes of democratic states that inescapably draw out the time required to mobilize for war, and not on any putative propensity for democratic states to negotiate more readily than other states.3 Standing against this, however, are other institutional explanations.

The Selectorate Account of the Democratic Peace

The bargaining explanation above suggests that democracies are particularly slow at getting things done because of the pull and haul of democratic politics. The audience cost (Fearon, 1994; Partell & Palmer, 1999; Schultz, 2001) argument and the selectorate account (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, 2003) offer different institutional explanations of the democratic peace, explanations that lead to predictions about the duration of conflicts that are opposite from those of the bargaining explanation. That means that it is possible to conduct critical tests to sort out which of these explanations is more consistent with the evidence.

The audience cost argument suggests that once democratic leaders threaten to use force, if the other side does not back down, the democratic leader faces stiff political costs if he or she fails to follow through on the threat. Therefore, once a threat is made, either the rival will back down quickly in the face of the credible threat or the democrat will move swiftly to carry out the threat and avoid the prospective high audience costs. Likewise, if a threat is leveled against a democratic state, its leader will either back down or negotiate quickly or, if the leader counters the threat with a threat, the dispute will resolve quickly by either being settled or escalating to war.

In the selectorate account, leaders are motivated primarily by the desire to gain or retain political power. This is assumed to be true regardless of the institutional structure of the political system in which they operate. The institutions of the political system, however, influence key choices made by leaders, including choices that are relevant to the duration of disputes. In the selectorate account all political systems are characterized as containing two basic institutions: the selectorate and the winning coalition. The selectorate is the set of people with a say in choosing leaders and, what is more important, the set of people from whom the winning coalition is drawn. The winning coalition is the set of people whose support is essential in order for a leader to retain office. A challenger gains office if the incumbent no longer has the support of a sufficiently large winning coalition, with “sufficiently large” being determined by the type of government and, if the challenger is supported by a coalition, at least equal to the minimal support level required.

militarized interstate disputes are certainly part of such a process. Also, note that the conflict data used by Maoz and Russett in their own tests is, in fact, the same militarized interstate disputes data set we use here. It is, of course, possible that the initial stages of a conflict may easily take place without any idea of militarization, which may follow later or never. However, it is not likely that the process of war mobilization—the process to which Maoz and Russett particularly refer—actually takes place without a conflict having become militarized in some way. Put differently, it is difficult to believe that the process of war mobilization to which they refer can take place in a democratic state without a conflict having become militarized.

3This is not to say that democratic states are thought to lack such an inclination generally, but only that such an inclination is extraneous to the argument advanced by Maoz and Russett with respect to the effect of democratic political institutions on bargaining arrangements within governments. For an insightful empirical examination of democratic dispute settlement, see Dixon (1994).
Loosely speaking, democracies are political systems in which the winning coalition is large and is drawn from a large selectorate. Nondemocracies require only a small winning coalition that can be drawn from a large selectorate, as in a rigged-election system, or from a small selectorate, as in a military junta or a monarchy. Because selectorate size and coalition size are continuous, the selectorate theory does not require such a gross typology of regimes, so the above is best understood as a simplified representation rather than as a full characterization of the theory’s approach to different types of regimes.

Given such institutions, leaders will have varying incentives to use revenues to allocate resources between public goods that benefit all and private goods that only benefit members of the winning coalition. Specifically, in seeking to maintain themselves in power, leaders of regimes that require only a small coalition find it more efficient to spend disproportionately on private goods that enrich their coalition and promote a long tenure in office. Those who rule with the support of a large coalition, such as democrats, find it more efficient to improve their political survival prospects through the disproportionate allocation of public goods rather than private goods.

With this brief sketch of the selectorate theory in mind, we turn now to its implications for the duration of disputes and war. The selectorate theory (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, pp. 800–801) demonstrates theoretically that democracies require a substantially higher ex ante probability of victory than do autocracies before engaging in either disputes or wars. This means that when a democracy participates in a dispute or a war, there is considerably less uncertainty about the outcome than when a dispute is begun by an autocracy. As Rubenstein (1982) demonstrated in a general context, in the absence of uncertainty, negotiations would resolve instantaneously. Threats and fighting are means of conveying information about capabilities, resolve, and other elements that influence the outcomes of disputes. Such maneuvering is meaningless if the two sides already know the resolve and capabilities of their adversary. The selectorate account argues that selection effects in disputes arise from two factors: democrats are reluctant to participate in disputes or wars if they are not confident of success, and, to bolster their prospects for success, they try harder than autocrats by increasing their spending on the dispute or war more than autocrats.

Uncertainty over victory or defeat is a key factor that keeps conflicts going, prolonging their duration (Wittman, 1979; Fearon, 1995). Uncertainty about how a dispute will unfold is minimized, according to this selection effect argument, when both parties to the dispute are democracies because the prospective loser is as selective about conflict participation as is the initiator. With one democrat having a high probability of victory and the other a high probability of defeat, the urge by the prospective loser to negotiate and cut losses is especially strong. Since both sides know this, the inefficiencies of conflict and war are avoided and the issues are likely to be settled fairly quickly. When, however, one protagonist is an autocracy, there is greater opportunity for the prolongation of the dispute or the period

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4For a full account of the theory, including formal proofs and empirical tests in both a comparative and an international context, see Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003).

5The selectorate model is concerned with changes in levels of effort between states with large and small W. The argument, with supporting data, is presented at length in Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2004). A less complete discussion of this is presented in Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003, pp. 252–258, but especially p. 254). The selectorate account of effort (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2004) identifies two conditions under which small coalition and large coalition leaders make equal effort. First, when confronting extremely weak adversaries, as in many wars of colonization and imperial expansion, the risk of defeat and deposition is so low that no extra effort is needed regardless of regime type. Second, in those rare instances (such as the latter stages of the Second World War, but not at the outset) when it is clear ex ante that defeat will be tantamount to deposition by the foreign adversary, then all regime types try hard. In the multitude of conflicts that fall between these bounds, large coalition leaders are expected to make a larger marginal effort than are small coalition leaders.
leading to the escalation to war. This is so because autocrats are not particularly selective; they are willing to fight even when their prospects of victory are relatively poor (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003, 2004). From this we can infer that disputes prior to the outbreak of war between two democracies are shorter than disputes involving at least one autocracy.

Below we report tests indicating that the institutional bargaining expectations are not sustained empirically. Instead, the expectations that follow from the selectorate account or the audience cost theory are supported by the evidence. After describing the data we use, we test the alternative hypotheses about the effect of jointly democratic political institutions on the length of dispute durations. Specifically, we, of course, are interested in testing whether disputes between democratic states are longer or shorter than they are among other types of states.

The Data

The disputes in our analysis took place between 1816 and 1992 and are reported in the Militarized Interstate Dispute data set (Jones, Bremer, & Singer, 1996). These disputes involved conflicts in which at least one state acted toward another state in a manner that threatened the use of force, displayed force, used force, or resulted in war. The cases we use are only those of the initial two participants in a dispute; that is, states that joined the dispute after it began were not included. For disputes involving more than two initial participant states, we treat the dyads separately. The data we use for our analysis are of three kinds. First, the dependent variable we use is the length of a dyad’s participation in a dispute as measured in days; we call this variable duration. We use the entrance and exit dates of each state in the dispute to calculate the number of days that each dyad was involved in the dispute. Even in following these procedures closely, we recognize that in the case of multilateral disputes there is the possibility of error in determining the length of a dyad’s dispute. To assess this possibility we will also consider only those disputes that were dyadic from beginning to end, since here the possibility of error in estimating duration is removed.

Second, the principal independent variable, democratic dyad, indicates a dyad composed of democratic states on opposite sides in a dispute. This is coded 1 if both states on opposite sides in a dispute are democratic and 0 otherwise. How do we determine if a state is democratic? Like many other studies (Morrow, Siverson, & Tabares, 1998; Senese, 1997), we code a state as democratic if it had a score of 6 or greater when its Polity III (Jaggers & Gurr, 1995) autocracy score is subtracted from its democracy score for the year in which the dispute began. Finally, since any statistical relationship between the length of dispute and the type of states in a dyad might be caused by some third variable not included in the basic analysis, we also consider the effects of two possibly confounding control variables as alternative factors that could account for the differences in dispute length. Below we

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6 All but 16 of the disputes in the data set were terminated by the end of 1992. As we explain below, in our analyses these then-ongoing cases are treated as censored.
7 While many of the variables we use have their origin in the Correlates of War Project (Singer, 1972), we have drawn them from Bennett and Stam’s (2000) EUGene. For a description of these data, see that source and Jones, Bremer, and Singer (1996).
8 Since there does not appear to be a firmly established convention with respect to the cut points on the Polity scale to determine democracy, as a check on the robustness of our results we moved the cut point for democracy to 7 or greater. The results do not change in any appreciable manner. Moving the cut point to 5 or more slightly weakens the overall relationship shown in columns 1 and 2 of Table 1. We also replicated our analyses, substituting Bueno de Mesquita et al.’s (2003) operational definition of coalition size. The results remain robust or are even somewhat stronger with this alternative indicator.
identify these factors and explain the reasoning behind including them and the method of their measurement.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis we report below is initially confined to measuring the duration of disputes, but we do so in a way that is sensitive to the fact that we are fundamentally interested in the length of the escalatory period in a dispute. Since the initial hypothesis is about the failure of disputes involving democratic dyads to become wars, the appropriate comparison is that between the duration of the dyadic disputes that do not become war and the length of the prewar period of those that do. This means we are not interested in the length of a dispute after it becomes a war. Hence our dependent variable is the length of time between (1) the onset of a dispute and its end if the dispute did not become a war, or (2) the date of the beginning of the dispute and beginning of the war, if it escalated that far. Since democratic states do not fight wars against each other, including the length of wars in duration would mis-specify the hypothesized relationship. As we quoted earlier, recall Maoz and Russett’s contention that, “The time required for a democratic state to prepare for war is far longer than for nondemocracies,” noting the emphasis on war preparation.

**Democratic Dyads and Dispute Duration**

Across the disputes, what is the variation in dispute duration by dyad type? Table 1 shows that when compared to dyads composed of either two nondemocratic states or a democratic state and a nondemocratic state, the average dispute duration time of democratic dyads is markedly shorter. This is true for both sets of dyadic disputes we consider. Not including the 16 disputes still underway when the data set was compiled, democratic dyads have disputes that on average last for 51.4 days in purely dyadic contests, while the average length for purely dyadic disputes involving at least one autocratic participant is 99.6 days. The difference between the democratic dyads and mixed or purely autocratic dyads is statistically significant ($t = -2.26$, $p = 0.01$). For all disputes, the comparable means are 63.8 and 129.8. The $t$-statistic for the difference in means is $-2.43$ ($p = 0.01$). Substituting dyadic democracies based on coalition size, we find comparable results. Because the data in Table 1 are clearly skewed, we also compared the medians across the dyad types. The Mann-Whitney test produces results similar to the $t$ test. These results, of course, stand in direct contrast to the institutionalist bargaining argument but are in line with the audience

### TABLE 1  Mean dispute duration in days by dyad and dispute type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Mean duration</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic vs. democratic All disputes          66.4          110.7             99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic disputes       51.4          108.2             82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic vs. nondemocratic All disputes        119.4         233.8            991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic disputes       119.4         233.8            991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondemocratic vs. nondemocratic All disputes      135.1          280.1            1044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic disputes       135.1          280.1            1044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
costs and selectorate accounts. Nonetheless, the foregoing analysis omits information on the disputes that were continuing when the data were collected and does not include any control variables.

To include this information, and also obtain a sharper estimate of the effect of democratic dyad involvement, we turn to an alternative type of analysis. The length of a dispute is the kind of variable for which the class of statistical models known as survival analysis was specifically developed. We will not review the properties of these models here since there is a readily available literature in the area of international conflict that presents both useful explanations of the models and a number of applications. Additionally, in survival models the 16 continuing disputes are treated as censored, which means that the analysis will include information about their known length at the time the data set was compiled. After exploratory analysis we used a Weibull model for our analyses.

Column 1 of Table 2 reports the results. Although the table reports both the coefficient and the hazard ratio for this analysis and those that follow, an examination of the hazard ratios, as we explain, provides a straightforward interpretation. The coefficient for the bivariate relationship between duration and democratic dyad with no controls is .40, with a standard error of .10. The hazard ratio is 1.498, indicating that disputes between democratic states have a 49 percent higher hazard than disputes between other types of states; more precisely, it means that at any moment in time a dispute between democratic states is 49 percent more likely to end than a dispute between other types of states. The results for the disputes which involved only one dyad are reported in column 3 and are comparable to those presented in column 1.

It is now appropriate to ask a further question: If democratic dyads have shorter disputes than other kinds of dyads, are there plausible alternative explanations for this other than the fact that the states share democratic political institutions; that is, is the relationship spurious? In considering this question we need to be mindful of the recent admonitions of Ray (2003) about exactly what is involved in looking for possible confounding factors when controls are introduced into an analysis. Ray’s argument, buttressed with a frightening number of examples, is that too often controls are introduced without sufficiently considering their theoretical or empirical justification. More generally, Ray cautions us to distinguish between confounding variables, intervening variables, and additional independent variables. In the present instance, the pertinent question is whether or not there are factors not in the analysis that might plausibly be considered as causing variation in both democratic dyads and the length of disputes.

The distance between states may have an effect on dispute time and may also be associated with the joint democracy of a dyad. Communication between contiguous states, for instance, should be easier and could thereby facilitate negotiation, thus making a contribution to shortening the dispute. Many democracies are geographically proximate to each other, particularly in Europe, so the effects of contiguity might be masked by democratic dyad. We measure this with a variable, distance, which is the 6-point scale usually referred to as contiguity. We call it distance to highlight the fact that increasing values on this

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9 Among these are the following: Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995), Bennett and Stam (1996), Clark and Hart (1998), and Werner (1999). In particular, see Bennett’s (1999) excellent general discussion of these models.

10 Initially we used the Cox proportional hazards model for our analysis, but the standard diagnostics indicated that it was not fully appropriate for the data. Visual inspection of Kaplan-Meier survival curves pointed to the use of the Weibull, since the hazard decreased with time. A comparison of the log likelihoods of results from the Weibull and the nested exponential model, a frequently explored alternative to the Weibull, provided clear-cut results in favor of the former. However, it is worth noting that despite the appropriateness of the Weibull, all three models we explored produced similar results.
variable indicate that the states in question are farther apart. To ensure clarity in interpretation, we subtract 1 from the standard 6-point scale so that its maximum is 5 and its minimum is 0. This facilitates interpretation when we examine the total effect of geographic distance for democracies as evaluated by the sum of the coefficients for democratic dyad, distance, and distance * democratic dyad. For nondemocratic dyads, the coefficient for distance alone captures the effect of geographic remoteness. For democracies, democratic dyad by itself captures the impact of geographic contiguity on the duration of conflict. We expect disputes to be shorter when they involve a democratic dyad whether the disputants are geographically proximate or distant.

We also consider whether the states in a dyad are allied with each other. We do this for two related reasons. First, Bueno de Mesquita (1981, pp. 150–154) has advanced the argument that although allies are more likely to quarrel with each other than could be expected on the basis of chance, their policy affinity makes it relatively easy to resolve the dispute, even in the cases of those conflicts that escalate to war. Put simply, if states are close together politically they may quarrel, but not over too much; hence settling the dispute should be easier than under other circumstances. His data on international wars are consistent with this.

Second, there is evidence that democratic states tend to ally with each other more than they would by chance (Siverson & Emmons, 1991). As a consequence of these two observations, democratic dyads may be more likely to be in an alliance and may thereby find it easier and faster to settle their differences. To tap this, we include a measure of whether the

### TABLE 2

Weibull analysis of dispute duration for democratic dyads with (standard errors) and [hazard ratios]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All disputes</th>
<th>Dyadic disputes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic dyad</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.49]</td>
<td>[1.96]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0.04**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.04]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.23]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance * dem. dyad</td>
<td>−0.12**</td>
<td>−0.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.89]</td>
<td>[0.83]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally * dem. dyad</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td>(.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.96]</td>
<td>[0.64]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−2.05**</td>
<td>−2.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>13.15**</td>
<td>41.88**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>2,132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10; **p < .01.
Dispute Duration and Democratic Peace

states were allied. *Alliance* is coded 1 if an alliance of any type exists between the states in a dyad, and 0 otherwise. As with *contiguity*, we also construct the interaction term for *alliance* and *democratic dyad* with the coefficient for *alliance* by itself capturing the effect of alliances on nondemocratic dyads and the sum of the coefficients for *alliance*, *democratic dyad*, and the interaction term capturing the effect on duration for allied democratic dyads.

Columns 2 and 4 in Table 2 report the results of the estimate of the relationship between dispute duration and joint democracy when we include the control variables for distance and alliance. Recall that the distance variable indicates greater distance the larger its value and that it takes the value of zero when states are contiguous, meaning they share a border or are within 12 miles of each other by water. The alliance variable indicates the presence of an alliance when its value is 1 rather than 0.

The first thing we note is that the duration of all disputes between contiguous democratic dyads (*distance* = 0, *democratic dyad* = 1) is exceptionally short. The hazard ratio of 1.96 indicates that the prospects that a dispute between a democratic dyad will end in the next period is nearly double the probability for a nondemocratic dyad. Further, the probability that conflict between distant democratic dyads will end more quickly than for distant nondemocratic pairs is also highly significant (that is, the sum of *democratic dyad* + *distance* + *distance* * * *democratic dyad* supports the contention that the probability the dispute will end soon is greater than if the pair were not both democracies; $\chi^2 = 16.25$, $p < .001$) even though distance, in general, tends to shorten dispute length. We find even stronger support when we examine only dyadic disputes. These results support the idea that disputes between democratic dyads, regardless of distance, are of shorter duration than disputes not involving two democracies.

The results based on the control for alliance lead to similar results. Allies tend to be involved in significantly shorter disputes than are nonallied antagonists regardless of their regime type. However, for democratic dyads, duration, on average, is substantially shorter than for nondemocratic dyads. Thus, the sum of the coefficients for *democratic dyad* + *alliance* + *alliance* * * *democratic dyad* strongly supports the expectation that democratic dyads sustain disputes for a far shorter time than other combinations of antagonists even when controlling for the influence of alliances ($\chi^2 = 17.765$, $p < .001$).

The above results indicate that the selectorate model affords an explanation of the democratic peace that is more in accord with the data than the prominent institutional approach offered by Maoz and Russett. In addition to withstanding that initial test, the selectorate model is also capable of generating hypotheses that offer a still sharper explanation of the short length of disputes between democratic states. Accordingly, we present two additional hypotheses that we believe have not been previously considered but are directly implied by the selectorate model. The first of these predicts the effects of power disparity within a democratic dyad on the length of the dispute, and the second considers the length of dispute between democratic states when the issue is territory. Both of these are directly implied by the selection processes at the heart of the selectorate model.

Ancillary Hypothesis

The selectorate explanation of the democratic peace (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999), as noted earlier, indicates that democrats are only willing to fight if they are confident of victory. That is, a democratic leader engaged in a dispute seeks to minimize uncertainty about the outcome both by selecting disputes in which his or her nation is militarily advantaged and by preparing to make an exceptional extra effort in the event a war ensues. According to the selectorate logic, autocrats turn out to be less constrained to avoid the risk of defeat
TABLE 3 Weibull analysis of dispute duration by dispute type of democratic dyads with power differences and territorial issues with (standard errors) and [hazard ratios]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All disputes</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dyadic disputes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model (5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic dyad</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>0.54*</td>
<td>0.58*</td>
<td>0.85**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.52]</td>
<td>[1.72]</td>
<td>[1.78]</td>
<td>[2.34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power disparity</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.06]</td>
<td>[0.97]</td>
<td>[0.82]</td>
<td>[0.96]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic power disparity</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.96]</td>
<td>[1.38]</td>
<td>[1.50]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dist * dem</td>
<td>−0.14**</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>(0.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance * dem dyad</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
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<td>−0.49*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.92]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.62]</td>
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<td>−2.08**</td>
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<td>−2.18**</td>
<td>−1.95**</td>
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<td>−2.07**</td>
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<td>(X^2)</td>
<td>13.86</td>
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<td>(N)</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>1,633</td>
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\(^{*}p < .05; \^{**}p < .01.\)

in disputes than are democrats. Therefore, when two autocrats confront each other, the distribution of power (as a proxy for the probability of victory or defeat) is less consequential in determining how long each side confronts the other. But when democrats face one another, the distribution of power should play an important role in shaping how long the dispute goes on. Both democrats have the same a priori requirement of a near-certainty of victory before being willing to fight, but it is exceedingly unlikely that each thinks his or her country enjoys that great a military advantage. Rather, the one who believes that the chances of success are not acceptably high is likely to sue quickly for peace. Because democrats use their power as a selection criterion determining their resolve to fight or to negotiate in disputes, conflicts between democrats are likely to be shortened as the power discrepancy becomes larger. Thus, we hypothesize that democratic disputes will be shortened as a function of power disparities but the duration of autocratic disputes will be unaffected by power disparities.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\)The logic behind this hypothesis is formally presented in Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003 (pp. 236–241, and especially pp. 243–244).
To test this hypothesis we create two new variables. First, we create a variable to measure the power disparity in a dyad. Using the COW composite capability scores for each nation, we divide the absolute difference of their capabilities by their sum. We next multiply this variable by democratic dyad. We expect the interaction of these two variables, which we term democratic power disparity, to have a coefficient and hazard ratio indicating that the relative brevity of democratic disputes may be in part attributed to sharper power differentials between these types of states than is the case in the larger population. We investigate the effect of power disparity in four analyses, mirroring the structure of Table 2. Column 1 in Table 3 shows the effects of democratic dyads, power disparity, and the interaction of the two on dispute duration. Column 3 is equivalent but only for dyadic disputes. Columns 3 and 4 include the variables for distance and alliance from Table 2, columns 3 and 4, as controls to assess the separate effects of power disparity on conflict duration as a function of regime type.

The results in Table 3 strongly support the contention that a high degree of power disparity significantly shortens disputes between democratic dyads, but fails to have a significant impact on the duration of disputes in which at least one antagonist is not a democracy. In fact, the four $\chi^2$ values ($N = 2,132$) for the sum of democratic dyad + power disparity + power disparity * democratic dyad across the four columns of Table 3 are 8.10 ($p = 0.004$), 9.17 ($p = 0.003$), 8.07 ($p = 0.005$), and 16.92 ($p = 0.000$). Furthermore, in each case, power disparity by itself is insignificant, supporting the claim that for nondemocratic dyads power differences are not terribly important in shaping the duration of disputes.

Conclusion

Explanations of the democratic peace include two contending institutional accounts. One, a bargaining theory focusing on the pull and haul internal to democratic government, leads to the expectation that disputes involving democracies last longer than nondemocratic disputes. The other, based on the selectorate theory and on arguments about audience costs, leads to the expectation that disputes involving democracies are shorter than non-democratic disputes. The evidence strongly supports the selectorate account and, implicitly, the audience costs account which is more difficult to test empirically. The results are consistently supportive whether we examine basic differences in mean or median durations or we undertake more sophisticated survival analyses and include relevant control variables. The selectorate account, in addition, leads to an hypothesis about the effect that the disparity in power between disputants has on conflict durations as a function of regime type. Here the selectorate theory implies for democratic dyads shorter dispute duration when power disparity increases. This is also borne out by the evidence. Of course, there are other models capable of generating the same results as the selectorate theory and we cannot claim that this is in any sense a critical test of the theory. But it is a critical test of the bargaining account insofar as that theory fails to find support in the evidence from disputes.

The evidence here calls into question the widely held view that democracy leads to a prolonged deliberative process and, perhaps, even to inefficient decision making. Whether democracy has these consequences or not, selection effects over the disputes in which democracies are prepared to engage support the expectation of shorter rather than longer conflicts when democracies are involved.

References


