

Do liberal norms matter?

A cross-regime experimental investigation of the normative explanation of the democratic peace in China and the Netherlands.

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Introduction

A persistent belief – widespread among political elites and political scientists – holds that democracy is good for peace. Political scientists speak of democratic peace theory. This theory asserts that liberal-democracies will not go to war with other liberal-democracies. This assertion is supported by a body of empirical research (see e.g. Babst 1964, Rummel 1983, Maoz and Abdolali 1989, Rummel 1997, Dafoe 2011).

A core element of this theory centers on the socialization of individuals with liberal norms. These norms supposedly nurture a peaceful attitude towards other democracies among individuals. This explains why authoritarian regimes are more inclined towards initiating war: their individuals are not imbued with liberal norms, or so the theory goes (Dixon 1993, Maoz and Russett 1993, Mintz and Geva 1993, Russett 1993, Geva and Hanson 1999, Dixon and Senese 2002, Rousseau 2005, Johns and Davies 2012, Tomz and Weeks 2013). This theory gives direct rise to clear prescription: socializing people with liberal norms is what a democratizing country needs to transform into a peaceful society and a peaceful player in world politics¹.

But is it true? In this article, I show that the literature on democratic peace theory offers insufficient empirical evidence to support the notion that liberal norms are the causal mechanism in explaining peace. My argument has two elements. First, empirical studies that have empirically tested the democratic peace theory have never actually measured whether liberal norms are present within liberal-democracies, and absent in autocracies. They typically use proxies that rely on heavily normative assumptions about the existence of liberal norms.

Second, these empirical studies have focused primarily on individuals living in liberal democracies ('democratic individuals'), excluding individuals of authoritarian regimes ('autocratic individuals'). Without a comparison with autocratic individuals, the data cannot tell us much if anything about the validity of the democratic peace theory. Unless we measure the actual presence of liberal norms within liberal-democracies *and* autocracies, and compare the influence these norms have on the support for war within these different regime-types, there is no evidence that liberal norms lead to more peaceful norms.

This is precisely what I will do in this article. I extend the analyses of earlier studies by measuring the level of liberal norms of individuals socialized within an autocratic regime (the People's Republic of China) and socialized within a liberal-democracy (The Netherlands) and compare their effect on the support for war. This comparison shows that 1) liberal norms are present among Chinese individuals, 2) liberal norms are not of influence on both populations' support for war but the threat of a conflict is, and 3) Dutch individuals seem to be more war-prone towards autocracies than more peaceful towards other democracies.

Democracy, war and liberal norms

Democratic peace theory seeks to explain two empirical phenomena: 1) that democracies hardly ever after go to war with each other (Babst 1964, Rummel 1983, Layne 1994), and 2) that democracies do go to war with non-democracies (Small and Singer 1976, Maoz and Abdolali 1989, Bremer 1992, Mansfield and Snyder 2005). Ergo, the search is for a mechanism that occurs between pairs of democracies, but not between any other dyad of regime-types.

Democratic peace theorists² agree that the domestic political system of liberal-democracies differs significantly from other regime-types and argue that some particularity of that political system "causes" peace between democracies. However, these authors cannot

conclusively agree what particularity that is exactly. Some argue, thereby positing different indicators, that the public can constrain violent behavior towards other democracies through democratic institutions, which make democratic decision-makers supposedly more risk averse, thereby assuming that the public is by nature peaceful (Morgan and Campbell 1991, Maoz and Russett 1993, Fearon 1994, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 1999, Schultz 1999, Gelpi and Griesdorf 2001, Huth and Allee 2002, Reiter and Tillman 2002, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2004, Rousseau 2005, Kaarbo 2012). However, this particular view cannot explain why wars still occur between democracies and non-democracies. Based on the assumption that a democratic audience is intrinsically peaceful and capable to restrain their more war prone leaders (which is also an assumption as such) war should not occur at all.

Others contend that that it is the nature of the internalized liberal-democratic norms at the micro-level that shapes the behavior of mass and elite in liberal-democratic societies, which makes them more peaceful towards other liberal-democracies, thereby assuming that these norms are actually present and at work in liberal-democratic societies (e.g. Doyle 1983a, Doyle 1983b, Doyle 1986, Dixon 1993, Maoz and Russett 1993, Mintz and Geva 1993, Owen 1994, Mousseau 1997, Van Belle 1997, Kahl 1998, Weart 1998, pp.77-78, 82-85, Geva and Hanson 1999, Dixon and Senese 2002, Rousseau 2005, Danilovic and Clare 2007, Johns and Davies 2012, Tomz and Weeks 2013). Furthermore is (often implicitly but sometimes even explicitly, see e.g. Maoz & Russett, 1993; Rousseau, 2005, pp. 27-28; Russett, 1993, p. 31) assumed that all regime-types other than liberal-democracies (in the literature often black-boxed as ‘nondemocracies’) will instill their individuals with norms of intolerant, violent behavior, ergo: individuals growing up within nondemocracies will not have liberal norms instilled.

However plausible it might seem to assume liberal norms to be present among individuals in liberal-democracies, to argue that these norms are functioning as ‘a law of

nature' (Hayes 2012, p.775) seems to be at least tautological. If the super-structure of a regime indeed imposes particular political norms upon the individuals of a society that are subsequently of influence on the support for war is an empirical question (Hermann and Kegley 1995, p.19), rather than instrumentally assuming a whole population to be a homogenous mass. If studies of political norms and values have taught us anything, it is that within and between societies there is variance to be found when it comes to norms, values and attitudes (See for instance Almond and Verba 1963, pp.22-33, Pye 1972, Chilton 1987, Inglehart 1988, Putnam 1993, Jackman and Miller 1996, Seligson 2002, Inglehart 2003, Inglehart and Welzel 2003, Widmaier 2005, Sheaffer and Shenhav 2013).

This paper therefore focuses on this latter explanation, in the literature generally referred to as the 'normative explanation', and tests its mechanism, including an empirical test of its underlying assumptions. I will first discuss the theory *as posited by democratic peace theorists*, after which I will discuss the state of the art of the empirical tests of this explanation and then proceed to discuss my design that extends to these studies.

The normative explanation

The normative explanation posits that when liberal-democracies get in a severe interstate conflict, the societal norms of their political culture will prevent war. The theory is best presented by the words of its proponents:

“When two democracies confront one another in conflicts of interest, they are able effectively to apply democratic norms in their interaction, thereby preventing most conflicts from escalating to a militarized level, involving the threat, display, or use of military force, and-of course-from going to all-out war. However, when a democratic state confronts a nondemocratic one, it may be forced to adapt to the norms of international conduct of the latter lest it be exploited or eliminated by the

nondemocratic state that takes advantage of the inherent moderation of democracies. A conflict between nondemocracies would be dominated by the norm of forceful conduct and by both parties' efforts to resolve the conflict through a decisive outcome and elimination of the opponent. Thus, conflicts between nondemocracies are more likely to escalate into war than are conflicts between a democratic and nondemocratic state.” (Maoz and Russett 1993, p.625).

Although this explanation speaks about democracies – state-level -, when authors explain the actual mechanism it becomes clear that their explanation builds upon assumptions about people – micro-level - in society. To be precise: the normative explanation assumes that the superstructure of liberal-democracy socializes its individuals with liberal norms (Maoz and Russett 1993, Russett 1993, p.31, Weart 1998, pp.81-83, Rousseau 2005, pp.27-28): “Political conflicts in democracies are resolved through compromise rather than through elimination of opponents. This norm allows for an atmosphere of "live and let live" that results in a fundamental sense of stability at the personal, communal, and national level.” (Maoz and Russett 1993, p.625).

In particular is assumed that this socialization process is alike for mass and elite, liberal norms are shared by “all participants in the political process” (Russett 1993, p.31) of democracies, subsequently assuming that at least a critical mass of (if not all) democratic individuals will have these norms internalized, and that in particular the political decision-makers will have these norms imbued (Russett 1993, p.35, Rousseau 2005, p.27). In other words, democratic peace theorists assume that liberal norms are present among all individuals of a liberal-democracy, including the ones that decide.

At the same time, this mechanism is assumed *not* to exist in any other political regime (Maoz and Russett 1993, Russett 1993, p.35, Weart 1998, pp.81-83, Rousseau 2005, pp.27-28): “Political conflicts in nondemocratic regimes are more likely to be conducted and

resolved through violence and coercion. This norm creates an atmosphere of mistrust and fear within and outside the government”.

This assumed difference in political culture underpins the normative explanation of the democratic peace. It assumes that the socialization of individuals in a liberal democracy, *including the political elite*, is of crucial influence on the behavior between states that encounter each other at the brink of war, in particular because individuals within other regime-types, including their political elite, will lack these norms.

Thus, the argument of this paper is: to empirically support the theory of the normative explanation, tests should firstly focus on testing these underlying assumptions at micro-level and: 1) measure whether liberal norms are indeed present among individuals within liberal-democracies and absent among individuals within other regimes, 2) test whether these norms affect the support for war, and 3) compare these results between individuals of different regime-types. And so this paper does.

Earlier empirical work into the normative explanation

Although the normative explanation is often offered as ‘conventional wisdom’ because it feels like a plausible explanation for those growing up within liberal-democracies, only a small body of empirical work has put the normative explanation to the test for the micro-level. There has been studies at state-level (see e.g. Dixon 1993, Maoz and Russett 1993, Mousseau 1997, Dixon and Senese 2002), however, these studies have used the ratings of Freedom House and/or Polity IV as proxies for the explanatory variable of liberal norms. In other words: they have assumed that within liberal-democracies liberal norms are present, and that their results must have come forth of those norms.

Maoz and Russett (1993), most cited until today and generally considered to have performed the ‘most sophisticated test of the normative explanation’ (Rousseau 2005: 202),

improved on those designs by using a proxy that tried to account for the effect of the assumed liberal norms within a democracy; they used a measure of regime-stability and the number of political deaths. However, this proxy has a tautological aspect in it self: it assumes that when liberal norms are present, more regime-stability and less political violence will occur. This proxy seems still too far away from the actual presence of liberal norms.

That could be remedied by testing at micro-level, because it can actually test the existence of liberal norms among individuals, and furthermore scrutinize their influence on the support for war, related to regime-type. Few scholars have done so and used experiments to test the normative explanation at micro-level. Mintz and Geva (1993) exposed student populations of the United States (US) and Israel, supplemented by an US nonstudent/adult population to a decision-making scenario in which the explanatory factor regime type was manipulated. Their results indicated these individuals were indeed less inclined to go to war with democracies than with autocracies and furthermore perceived a war with a democracy as a policy mistake of their political leaders. Geva and Hanson (1999) conducted a similar experiment on a student population and a nonstudent/adult population in the US. They manipulated the perception of regime type in relation to the perception of cultural similarity between two countries and found that a perception of cultural similarity leads to individuals assigning their adversary a democratic status, similar to their own. On top of that, these democratic individuals were less likely to support an attack if they perceived the other country as a democracy.

Rousseau (2005) used a laboratory experiment to test the causal mechanism of the normative explanation with a US student population that was exposed to a decision-making scenario in which regime-type, military power and the political position of the domestic political leadership were manipulated. The results indicated that also these democratic individuals were less likely to use force against another democracy than against an autocracy.

Johns and Davies (2012) have used a survey experiment to reach a representative sample of the UK and the US. The explanatory factors of regime-type, religion and the possible collateral damage of the conflict were manipulated. Their results indicated that the democratic public was more likely to support an attack on a dictator's regime than an attack on a democracy.

Tomz and Weeks (2013) also used a survey-experiment for a representative sample in the UK and the US. These samples were exposed to a decision-making scenario in which the regime-type, military alliances and military power was manipulated. With panel interviews, operationalized by survey questionnaires, more information about the possible mediators of the effect of democracy was tested. The results indicated that their samples were less likely to attack when the other country was a democracy. Moreover, Tomz and Weeks found evidence that these democratic individuals had a greater moral reluctance to attack a democracy over an attack on an autocracy.

These studies at micro-level indeed support the theoretical claim that democratic individuals do not support an attack on another democracy. However, we still miss empirical information to determine 1) if it is indeed an effect of existing liberal norms, and 2) if this mechanism is absent within autocratic states. These studies, however laudable and significant, are based on the assumption that liberal norms are present, without empirically testing whether or not this assumption is correct. The level of liberal norms was not measured, so that we are unable to determine whether or not the results can be related to these norms.

Next to that, these studies were conducted in liberal-democracies only, without comparing with individuals living in an autocracy. The theory of the normative explanation posits an assumed *difference* between democratic and autocratic individuals: 1) in the presence of liberal norms, and 2) in their peacefulness towards other states, liberal-democracies to be precise.

The innovation of this article over the earlier work is that it considers the variance of the independent variable of regime-type, (or: the assume presence or absence of liberal norms, to be precise). Following previous research, it uses a decision-making experiment to offer an improved test for the micro-level, by comparing the liberal norms and their consequences for the willingness to agree to the use of force between individuals of a democracy on the one hand and individuals of an autocracy on the other. To control for the assumption that liberal norms exist (or not, depending on the political system), it measures the endorsement of liberal norms using a questionnaire based on established measures of societal norms for individuals of a democracy and an autocracy.

Research design

This research investigates whether support for war differs when the opposing country is a democracy or an autocracy, and studies in particular if there is a difference in this support when individuals are born and raised within a liberal-democracy or within an autocracy. It furthermore measures whether there is indeed a significant difference in the level of liberal norms between ‘democratic individuals’ and ‘autocratic individuals’ and moreover whether or not these norms are affecting the above mentioned support for war against different regime-types.

Case selection and populations

Following the standard logic of earlier studies, the two cases are selected on the independent variable *regime-type* (there by initially assuming a presence or absence of *liberal norms*). The Netherlands is selected as a democracy and China is selected as an autocracy for this research. The Netherlands is an established liberal-democracy since the universal suffrage in 1919 and is rated highest by Freedom House and Polity IV on freedom, political and civic liberties

already for many generations. According to the normative explanation the presence and influence of liberal norms on its individuals can be expected. The Dutch individuals that are born and raised within a democracy are, following the normative explanation, assumed to be socialized with liberal democratic norms. Conversely, the single-party autocratic China is rated very low on freedom, political and civic liberties by the same measures. Following the normative explanation, it could theoretically be expected that the individuals of China are not socialized with liberal norms, nor that these will be of influence.

Within each country a student population is used. Student populations are sufficient to establish the absence or presence of liberal norms and to perform a innovative empirical test that compares between the internalized political norms of individuals of two different political societies. The normative explanation explicitly expects that liberal norms are socialized within a whole population. 'If an effect is assumed to be the same across a whole population, then any convenience sample should produce an unbiased estimate of that effect which could be generalized to another group of that population' (Druckman *et al.* 2011, p.46). That is the case for this research: political norms are, following the normative explanation, assumed to be present within the whole society. The use of a student population should therefore not matter to understand the effect of liberal norms, whereas these should be present (or not, in the Chinese case) among all members of the society. Furthermore, it has been convincingly shown that the use of student populations for the evaluation of theoretical assumptions has generated results that are robust when replicated with nonstudents (Morton and Williams 2010, pp.331-347, Druckman *et al.* 2011, pp.41-57). Considering that this study builds on earlier empirical work that has used student populations as well, and considering the fact that this research performs a *first* test among individuals of an autocracy, the use of students is sufficient. Furthermore, there is also a more practical reason: conducting an experiment in

relation to the political system can be a sensitive topic within China. Using students is one of the more accessible options to go for.

To ensure that a comparison can be made between individuals of a democracy and individuals of an autocracy, the participants that were born and raised in the Netherlands are treated as the democratic experimental group and the participants that were born and raised in China are treated as the autocratic experimental group.

Research instrument

The aim of this study is to try to detect a mechanism that underlies the support for war, which is assumed to be caused by regime-type. That can be done within an experimental setting, because it can isolate the effect of a specific factor (Druckman and Kam 2011, p.44). An experimental design allows for control and isolation of particular independent variables and thereby to come to causal inference. Moreover, the possibility to randomly assign participants to the manipulations of the experiment supports the search for causal inference (Druckman et al. 2011: 5).

The experimental design for this research tests whether the information about regime, the perception of threat, liberal norms and individually-based attitudes affect the decision-making of democratic and autocratic individuals towards the use of force in international relations. The experiment is operationalized with a decision-making scenario³, in which two fictitious countries are entangled in a territorial clash that, after several diplomatic attempts, gets seriously out of hand and is at the brink of war. The participants are asked to advise their government about the next step towards the other country: to attack in a pre-emptive strike or to make another attempt to negotiate.

Each group was exposed to the same experiment and within each experiment participants are randomly assigned to one of the treatments. The scenario varies the

information about the regime type of the opposing country, which creates two treatment-groups. The treatment-factor *Democracy* is operationalized by describing the democratic nature of the government of the other country, with civil liberties and rights, without mentioning democracy directly. The treatment-factor *Autocracy* is operationalized describing the autocratic nature of the government of the other country, with limited and uncertain civil rights, without mentioning autocracy directly.

The two hypothetical countries are literally described as similar as possible, and in this description there are no real differences in military power, economic development and thriving economic situation, available natural resources, population size and geographical. The choice for hypothetical countries in combination with a similar description of system level factors is specifically meant to reduce the chance that a participant will consider the system level factors of his own country as guiding decision-making. By describing the system level factors similarly for both hypothetical countries, the participants must be able to focus solely on the direct treatments of the regime of the other country and perceive the direct threat of the conflict, without assuming other explanatory factors to be relevant for the hypothetical conflict at hand.

The test requires that the threat of the conflict is perceived as real and credible by the participants. Therefore, the perception of the threat of the conflict is measured after the decision-making task, by asking the participants to assess the likeliness of the other country's attack on a 4-point Likert scale. Participants that indicate a possible attack of the other country to be (very) unlikely are coded as having a low threat perception and the participants that indicate to have expected the other country to attack to be (very) likely are coded to have a high threat perception.

The decision-making task is also followed by a survey questionnaire which conducts sociodemographics for gender, country of birth and lifelong individualship. The level of

liberal norms is measured by the level of tolerance towards other democratic individuals, the feeling of interpersonal trust and the feeling of stability in live, as assumed by earlier studies into the normative explanation (e.g. Maoz and Russett 1993: 625). These three items together form the measure for liberal norms⁴.

To control for the possible influence of pre-dispositions on foreign policy-making the position of participants on the hawk-dove dimension is measured. This dimension is often used to indicate whether individuals are more inclined to use force (a hawk) or to cooperate (a dove) to solve conflict situations (Bar-Tal *et al.* 1994, D'Agostino 1995). Braumoeller (1997) has shown that in the former Soviet countries liberal norms started to develop similar to the norms in the established democracies, but that these were not (yet) of influence on a moderation of hawkish behavior. In other words: if the normative explanation is right, being a hawk or dove should not matter in a democracy when it comes to the support for war⁵.

Procedure

In 2012 the experiment was conducted. The democratic experimental group consisted of 167 freshmen students of Political Science at Leiden University in the Netherlands, of whom 87 were male and 80 were female. These 167 participants were all born and raised in the Netherlands or another established Western democracy⁶. The autocratic experimental group existed of 187 undergraduate students of the Communication University of China (CUC) in Beijing, China. This group consisted of 65 males and 122 females, who were all born and raised in China⁷. The participants of both experimental groups were between the ages of 17 and 26 years old. These participants were asked at the end of their class whether they would like to volunteer to participate in a research. At the time, it was stressed that the survey was conducted completely anonymously, with no ways to connect the answers to participants. For the students who decided to participate, a paper-and-pencil-experiment was conducted. The

Dutch and Chinese participants were exposed to the same experiment, however in their native language: Dutch and Mandarin Chinese, respectively. After the experiment, the students were debriefed about the aim of this research.

Within each experimental group the participants are randomly assigned to one of the two treatments of the regime-type. For the Dutch experimental group 86 participants were exposed to the democracy-treatment, and 81 have been exposed to the autocracy-treatment. In the Chinese experimental group 95 participants were exposed to the democracy-treatment and 94 to the autocracy-treatment.

The threat-perception check showed that 134 participants perceived the threat as non-severe and 155 as severe. Although the scenario was created with the intention to describe a highly threatening conflict, it was not perceived by all participants as such. It is therefore important to consider the perceived severity of the threat as an additional explanatory factor. An important condition to be able to do so was to determine whether or not threat perception was affected by the treatment of the regime-type as democracy or autocracy, but it was not ($t(352) = 1.177, ns$) and therefore is used as an additional independent variable.

Within the multivariate analysis, liberal norms are included as a dichotomous variable, using the median (3.67) as a cut-off point to determine the low vs. high level of liberal norms. Within this analysis, hawkishness is also included as a dichotomous variable, with the median (3.33) as a cut-off point to determine the doves and the hawks.

Data Analysis

Threat, Regime and Country

What is the influence of threat and regime-type on democratic individuals and autocratic individuals and is there a difference? Figure 1 shows the frequencies (in percentages) of participants that decided to attack. When we take a look only at the Dutch experimental group

we see an interesting aspect of the perception of threat, which seems to matter significantly. If the threat is perceived as severe, the Dutch group is about 7 times more likely to attack a democracy than when the threat is not perceived as severe ($\chi^2 = 9.675$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = .343$). However, if the other country is an autocracy, then the Dutch group is almost 15 times more likely to support an attack ($\chi^2 = 16.139$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .458$), which seems to indicate that regime does matter for this democratic experimental group. However, when the difference in the frequency of attack (when the threat is perceived as severe) is compared between the wish to attack an autocracy over a democracy, no significant difference is found ($\chi^2 = 3.573$, *ns*). It seems that although the regime type seems to have some (but non-significant) influence on the democratic group, the threat perception of the conflict offers an explanation for the decision to attack any regime; under high threat, the Dutch group is almost 11 times more likely to support an attack, no matter the regime of the opposing country ($\chi^2 = 28.139$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .42$).

[Figure 1 about here]

Only about a quarter of the Chinese participants is willing to attack the aggressor, whereas about three quarters of this group wants to attempt to resume negotiations. Moreover, the threat perception seems to be the main explanatory factor of why the autocratic group would support an attack. Participants of the Chinese group are about 3.5 times more likely to support an attack on any regime when the threat is severe ($\chi^2 = 8.406$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = .21$). Furthermore, regime type does not seem to matter much for the decision of the Chinese participants to support an attack ($\chi^2 = 1.141$, *ns*).

The first conclusion is that for both experimental groups, within their groups, the threat of the conflict is an important explanatory factor to support an attack. The normative explanation also expects to see a difference between groups in the decision to attack between the democratic individuals and the autocratic individuals, but only in the case of the other

country being a democracy. The results suggest that this expectation is not corroborated. First of all, the results show that the participants of the democratic experimental group, when under severe threat, are also willing to attack *no matter the regime*, just as the participants of the autocratic experimental group. Moreover, the participants of the democratic experimental group are just as likely to support an attack on a democracy if they feel their country is under severe threat as the participants of the autocratic experimental group do. Even more, the Dutch participants are almost twice more likely to attack when they feel severe threat than the Chinese participants ($\chi^2 = 5.219$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .16$). Furthermore, the participants of the democratic experimental group are almost 3 times more likely to support an attack on an autocracy, when under severe threat, than the participants of the autocratic experimental group ($\chi^2 = 6.436$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .17$).

It seems that the expected peacefulness of participants of the democratic experimental group towards democracies does not find any support. The democratic participants turned out to be just as likely to attack, if not more so, as the participants of the autocratic group. Moreover, regime type as explanatory factor did have some influence and indeed only for the Dutch participants, but the effect was marginal and, more importantly, it was not the knowledge about the democratic nature that made these participants more peaceful, it was the knowledge about the autocratic nature of the opponent that made this democratic group more war-prone. This is a finding that could only be exposed by the comparison with a group of autocratic individuals.

Liberal norms

The key-assumption of the normative explanation is that democratic individuals have internalized liberal norms, in comparison with autocratic individuals who are assumed to lack these norms. Furthermore, it is expected that the democratic individuals' decision to not attack

a democracy, even when the threat is high, is a causal effect of the internalized liberal norms. Conversely, it is expected that even when the autocratic individuals do endorse liberal norms, these will be of no consequence for their decision to attack or not.

The Chinese experimental group has a mean of 3.47 on a scale of 1 to 5, which does not seem as low as expected by the normative explanation, considering it is only just below the overall median of 3.67. Apparently these autocratic individuals do endorse liberal norms to a certain extent. The mean of the Dutch experimental group is 3.84, which seems to be somewhat low, according to expectations. A t-test confirms a significant difference for the means of both groups, however with a small effect size ($t(341.9) = 2.292, p < .001, r = .20$). So, the Chinese participants do not lack liberal norms, and although they do have significant difference in the average level of liberal norms, that effect is rather small.

Knowing that, to a certain extent, both experimental groups have a certain level of liberal norms, the question is whether these norms had any relation to their decision to attack or not, in particular for the democratic experimental group towards another democracy. Figure 2 shows the frequencies (in percentages) of the participants that decided to attack, distinguished by the experimental group, the treatment of regime type, and the level of liberal norms. At first glance, the liberal norms only seem to be of relevance within the democratic experimental group. The variance of the level of democratic norms within the democratic experimental group shows a relationship with the decision to support an attack on a specific regime type. The participants of the Dutch group who endorsed a high level of liberal norms were about 4.5 times more likely to attack an autocracy over a democracy ($\chi^2 = 9.304, p < .01, \text{Cramer's } V = .296$). This finding supports findings of earlier studies, that the democratic experimental group would be more war-prone towards autocracies than peaceful towards democracies. An additional test to see whether there is an association between threat perception of a specific regime and the level of liberal norms, shows that the Dutch

participants with a high level of liberal norms indeed perceive an autocracy about 2.5 times more threatening than a democracy ($\chi^2 = 5.763$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .228$). Moreover, the democratic participants who endorsed a high level of liberal norms were 4 times less likely to support an attack on a democracy than democratic participants who had a low level of liberal norms ($\chi^2 = 6.183$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .276$). The autocratic experimental group, however, does not seem to have any relationship between the level of liberal norms, decision to support an attack, and one of the explanatory factors (threat and/or regime type).

[Figure 2 about here]

The Dutch group was influenced by the level of liberal norms in their decision to attack or not, the Chinese group not although they did show a modest level of liberal norms. The difference between the average level of liberal norms between both groups was significant, but small: .37 on a 5 point scale, which is contradicting the expectations of the normative explanation.

To understand what the role of liberal norms is within the context of this experiment, and other possible factors as well, its influence must be considered within a multivariate model that considers all explanatory factors similarly.

Other explanatory factors at the micro-level

The normative explanation expects internalized liberal norms of democratic individuals to overrule any other possible explanatory factor at the micro-level, which means that gender or hawkishness would not be expected to be of influence for the democratic individuals. For the autocratic individuals, who are supposed to lack these norms, these individual factors might influence their behavior when it comes to the use of force. To estimate the possible influence of hawkishness, the mean level of hawkishness is calculated. The Chinese participants turned

out to be more hawkish ($M = 3.80$) while the Dutch participants seemed to be much more dovish ($M = 2.83$). These means are significantly different from each other, as is supported by an independent t-test with a strong effect size ($t(346.6) = -13.408, p < .001, r = .58$). When the relationship between hawks' and doves' decision to attack, the regime type of the other country, and the experimental group, are considered, the results in figure 3 show that it is only within the democratic experimental group that hawkishness seems to have an effect. Dutch hawks among the participants are about 2.4 times more likely to attack than Dutch doves ($\chi^2 = 5.852, p < .05, \text{Cramer's } V = .192$). Within the autocratic experimental group there is no effect of the hawkishness. A comparison between the experimental groups shows that the Dutch hawks are almost 4 times more likely than Chinese hawks to attack an autocracy ($\chi^2 = 8.154, p < .01, \text{Cramer's } V = .284$). These results contradict the expectations that democratic individuals will not be influenced by their position on the Dove-Hawk dimension to support an attack.

The Dutch participants show a clear difference between men and women: the Dutch male participants are about 3.7 times more likely to decide to attack than the Dutch female participants ($\chi^2 = 11.837, p \leq .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .273$). For the Chinese group, no significant difference is found ($\chi^2 = 3.192, ns$). These results show that the micro-level factor gender is of influence, but only for the democratic experimental group. This also counters the expectation that other micro-level factors cannot influence the support for an attack among democratic individuals.

[Figure 3 about here]

For both experimental groups the perception of threat is overwhelmingly the main explanatory factor. Regime type does seem to have a marginal effect only within the democratic experimental group but also seems to be conditional on the perception of threat.

Also the variance of the endorsement of liberal norms seems to have an effect, but only within the democratic experimental group, similar to the way in which the other individually based explanatory factors of hawkishness and gender only show variance within this group. For the autocratic experimental group variance of these factors is indeed found, but these factors did not show any significant relation with the decision to attack or not.

Multivariate test

A multivariate logistic regression supports these findings. The explanatory factors *experimental group, threat, regime type, liberal norms, gender and hawkishness*, and a control for possible interaction effects (which allow for comparison between experimental groups) are considered within the model⁸. Table 1 shows the results of the logistic regression.

[Table 1 about here]

The logistic model provides a better fit to the data than the intercept-only model with 5.3%, which is probably due to the skewed nature of the dependent variable. Most importantly, the findings of the earlier descriptive analyses are supported by the regression model. The explanatory factor threat is highly significant with an odds ratio of 9.91, and is therefore the strongest explanatory factor for the whole sample of democratic and autocratic individuals together. The interaction effect of country and threat is not significant which indicates that there is no difference between the democratic experimental group and the autocratic experimental group for the perception of threat. The knowledge about the regime type, the endorsement of liberal norms and being socialized within a specific society does not show to be a significant indicator for a decision to use force. Neither within the experimental groups, nor between the experimental groups.

Like the finding described above, the individual level explanatory factors gender and being a Dutch hawk show to be significant indicators. The men from both experimental groups are significantly more likely to attack than the women. And also the Dutch hawks are significantly more likely to attack than the Dutch doves, but also than Chinese doves *and* hawks. None of the other factors are significant. Considering the whole logistic model, the explanatory factors for the decision to use force within international relations turn out to be threat and gender for both experimental groups, and a hawkish position for the Dutch experimental group.

Concluding discussion

Democratic peace theory posits that individuals of liberal-democracies are socialized with liberal norms that nurture a peaceful attitude towards other democracies. Furthermore it postulates that individuals in autocracies lack this socialization process and will consequently be more war prone towards all regime-types. Previous studies into this mechanism at micro-level found that democratic individuals are indeed more peaceful towards democracies during an interstate conflict. However, these studies have focused their research on democratic individuals only, and moreover have assumed the presence of liberal norms rather than measuring these. This research extends to those studies by measuring the level of liberal norms among democratic and autocratic individuals and compare the effect these norms have on the support for war within an experimental setting.

Indeed, the democratic experimental group showed to be more peaceful towards other democracies, just like previous studies showed. However, the comparative perspective brought a new insight: because the autocratic citizens were overall more peaceful towards all regime-types the comparison showed that actually the democratic participants were not more peaceful towards other democracies, but rather more war-prone towards autocracies. These

findings are important in the light of theoretical refinement, and show that we cannot simply assume autocratic individuals to be war prone, as democratic peace theory does (Maoz and Russett 1993, Russett 1993, p.35, Weart 1998, pp.81-83, Rousseau 2005, pp.27-28).

Secondly, the measuring of liberal norms showed that also autocratic individuals possess a level of liberal norms. The average of the autocratic group was indeed significantly lower than the democratic group, but the difference was small and had a small effect size. Most important contribution of this measurement is that liberal norms cannot be assumed to be absent within autocracies, as democratic peace theory does. Moreover, liberal norms showed to have only an effect within the democratic group: those with a higher level of liberal norms were more inclined to attack an autocracy over a democracy. Within the autocratic group, the level of liberal norms did not have any influence on the support for war.

These results show how important it is to indeed measure liberal norms and not simply assume these to be present or absent. Furthermore, these findings raise many questions that further research might be inspired by. If these results would hold when the experiment would be replicated for different samples of democratic and autocratic individuals, in other words: if democratic individuals show in new studies also to be triggered by autocracy to become more war prone, in particular when they endorse liberal norms more highly, we might have found more evidence for the argument that Western political rhetoric has molded democratic peace theory into a self-fulfilling prophecy, as was argued by several authors (Ish-Shalom 2006, Risse-Kappen 1995, Houghton 2007, Houghton 2009).

Another important extension to earlier studies is that this research has controlled for the threat of the conflict, after all, if a threat is not perceived as severe, why would anyone want to attack any other country? The results of that test showed actually more variance than initially anticipated, in other words: it had to be considered within the analyses of the data. Because a test showed that there was no relation between the perception of threat and the

treatment of regime-type, perception of threat was taken into consideration as an independent variable. And threat matters, strongly. Within a multivariate test of all theorized indicators, perception of threat shows to be the most important indicator why democratic and autocratic individuals alike support war. It was actually so strong that the effect of regime-type and liberal norms that showed in the descriptive results, was faded out.

The multivariate analysis also shows that individual features of the Dutch participants have significant influence on the decision to attack, including the level of liberal norms. This connects with studies of political psychology that argue that individual traits, pre-dispositions and characteristics are of influence on (elite) decision-making behavior (Owen 1994, Hermann and Kegley 1995, Farnham 2003, Keller 2005). However, the same individual features show not to have the same importance for the Chinese participants. Although there is variance to be found among the Chinese participants, it does not affect their decision-making. Intuitively, it could be suggested that the nature of Chinese society, with its focus on the community rather than the individual, might have been of influence. Conversely, the individualistic nature of Dutch society might have been of influence as well. These insights offer new research perspectives to study the influence of individual characteristics cross-regime.

The results of this study are indicating that we need to deepen our understanding of how the micro-foundations of democratic peace theory are build. Basically, this research shows that we should be prudent with assuming *a priori* that liberal norms could not exist among individuals living in other regime-types. Although democratic peace theory posits that the superstructure of a regime socializes its individuals with specific norms (ergo: liberal norms within liberal-democracies, and a lack of those within other regime-types), these results of this research does not support that assumption. Even more, the actual presence of a modest level of liberal norms among autocratic individuals shows that the assumption that the

superstructure creates these norms is exaggerated. That also works in the other direction: the authoritarian norms of zero-sum politics that is assumed to grow among autocratic audiences is not supported. That is also evidence that democratic peace theory needs to be reconsidered.

Reason that we have ignored the micro-level perspective of autocracies might be that we also have assumed that the micro-level perspective does not matter in autocracies. However, recent empirical findings have shown that autocratic audiences are of influence on foreign policy decisionmaking of the autocratic elite (Weeks 2012), just like the empirical evidence that points at variance in conflict initiation, due to internal differences (Peceny *et al.* 2002, Weeks 2008, Weeks 2012). Reason to continue research into explanations for the democratic peace cross-regime.

Notes

¹ See for a discussion how democratic peace theory leads to conventional wisdom in foreign policy making: Ish-Shalom (2006, 2015).

² There is of course a strand of literature that argues that the relationship between democracy and peace is spurious and due to collinearity of democracy with other explanatory factors. These authors claim that the regime-type of states does not matter in the power politics between states, but system level factors -such as common interests, military alliances, strategic interests, geographical proximity, economic interdependence, the Cold War, capitalism, modernization- do Waltz (1967), Weede (1984, 1992), Bremer (1993), Dixon (1993, 1994), Farber and Gowa (1995, 1997), Gleditsch (1995), Kacowicz (1995), Thompson (1996), Gowa (1999, 2011), Rosato (2003, 2005), Gat (2005), James, Park and Choi (2006), Gibler (2007), Gibler and Hutchison (2013).

³ Inspired by Geva and Hanson (1999). For the scenario, see appendix 1.

⁴ For a more precise discussion of the measure, see appendix 2

⁵ For a more precise discussion of the measure, see appendix 3.

⁶ Of the total sample of the group of 172 participants, 5 were not born and raised in an established liberal democracy, and were therefore excluded from the sample.

⁷ Of the total sample of the group of 189 participants, 2 were not born and raised in China, and were therefore excluded from the sample.

⁸ Diagnostics show some concerns about multi-collinearity, which was to be expected due to the interaction effects taken into the model. A residual analysis shows that there are few more outliers than would be desirable, but an inspection of the cases shows that these outliers are substantial, and not due to data errors. Considering the nature of the samples and the many explanatory factors, it is to be expected to have a few outliers. Therefore these cases were retained within this model.

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