

The Danger Of Democratizing Incoherently: Statistical Evidence From The 1990s

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Abstract: Much of the statistical evidence linking democratization, institutional strength, and war is restricted to the pre-Cold and Cold War epochs, largely marked by imperialistic ambitions on the global North, anti-colonial resentment in the South and a clash of ideologies between the East and the West, all of which fuelled wars. While wars were frequent and ubiquitous, democracy and democratizing states were scarce, proliferating only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Focusing on militarized disputes (as against full-scale wars) and on the immediate post-Cold War period packed with 'third wave' democratization cases, this paper extends the temporal scope of extant institutional analyses of democratizing states' conflict propensities.

Keywords: democratization, institutional strength, conflicts

Responding to numerous criticisms of their prominent research linking democratization and inter-state war, and denting the much celebrated democratic peace theory, Mansfield and Snyder (2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2007; see also Snyder 2000; 2004) recently refined their thesis and empirical evaluative design. Their newer research differentiates democratic transitioning states in terms of institutional strength and projects incompletely democratizing states with weak institutions as being more belligerent than completely democratizing states with strong political institutions. The various institutional constraints (including separation of powers, uncensored media outlets, free and fair elections, and political accountability) that engender discreet foreign policies and a separate peace among democracies similarly yield lower levels of belligerency for transitional processes culminating in coherent democracy (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 300–301). But a recent empirical evaluation by Narang and Nelson (2009) finds almost no evidence for Mansfield and Snyder's thesis linking institutional strength differences and variations in democratizers' war propensities.

To contribute towards clarifying the current controversy on democratization and war, this article undertakes empirical evaluations of the effects of institutional strength on variations in the conflict propensities of democratizing states. Mansfield and Snyder's and Narang and Nelson's contradictory evidence

regarding the effect of institutional strength on democratization and war emerges from a time span (1816–1992) that is obviously extensive, but largely excludes the post-Cold War era. The period assessed by both pairs of scholars was dominated by imperialistic ambitions in the global North, anti-colonial resentment in the South, and Cold War antipathies between the West and the East, all of which fuelled wars. Conversely, democracy was in short supply until the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States (US) proactively embarked on spreading democracy (Salih 2001, 4). Indeed, the world witnessed a surge in (third wave) democratization at the close of the twentieth century (Huntington 1991).

Despite acknowledging the 1990s as a 'decade of...democratization', Mansfield and Snyder (2002, 297) exclude most of it from their analysis, ostensibly owing to limitations imposed by their data on wars derived from Small and Singer (quoted in Mansfield and Snyder, 2002, 311). Employing similar democratization measures utilized by Mansfield and Snyder and Narang and Nelson, this article executes a chi-square test involving comparative frequency counts of complete and incomplete democratic transitioners that participated in militarized inter-state disputes (MIDs) and those that did not engage in MIDs at the close of the twentieth century (specifically 1989–1999). The test finds slightly more

evidence in support of Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis, relative to Narang and Nelson's antithesis. By policy implication, the findings marginally endorse Mansfield and Snyder's (2007) proposal for sequential democratization – which prioritizes the strengthening of state political institutions prior to mass competitive elections – to mitigate incentives for civil and inter-state conflict engagements. Structured into two main sections, what follows theoretically reviews and empirically re-evaluates the effect of institutional strength on variations in democratizing states' MID propensities.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH AND DEMOCRATIZERS' CONFLICT PROCLIVITIES

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Mansfield and Snyder (1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997) mounted one of the most prominent arguments against unqualified acceptance of the democratic peace theory, which by then, had almost become empirical law (Levy 1988, 662). The authors backed democracy as a panacea to the problem of wars but warned that, the path to democracy is loaded with dangers of war (1995a, 5). Thus, mature democracies promoting peace through democratization should be wary of heightened risks of wars as autocracies initiate the transition to democracy (1995b, 80). In explaining why democratization increases belligerency, Mansfield and Snyder accentuated fierce political rivalry between 'old elites' from the pre-existing autocratic regime and 'new elites' demanding democratic change. To salvage their threatened positions, both sets of elites adopt mass mobilization strategies, typically involving belligerent nationalist appeals (1995a, 7). Rival nationalist mobilizations on both sides of the political divide perilously induce civil tensions which could escalate to civil conflicts and (diversionary and/or opportunistic) international wars once rival groups become radicalised.

Critics of Mansfield and Snyder's initial works (Thompson and Tucker 1997a; 1997b; Ward and Gleditsch 1998; 2000) inspired Mansfield and Snyder (2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2007) to specify 'institutional strength' as a major intervening variable between democratization and the incentives and opportunities for war that arise from populist nationalist appeals during the transitional process: the stronger a democratizer's political institutions, the greater their capacity to regulate mass political competition and to sanction reckless elites engaging in war-yielding nationalist prestige strategies; the weaker the institutions, the weaker their ability to regulate and sanction, inducing both strong incentives for elite externalizations and opportunities for foreign enemy invasions.

For Mansfield and Snyder (2002, 301), political institutions are typically weak in newly democratizing states and strong in established transitioners; implying, levels of institutional strength correspond to degrees of democratization. During the early phase of democratization (from autocracy to anocracy), political institutions are marred by a number of shortcomings that affect their capacity to regulate electoral politics and sanction elite radicalism: voting rights are restricted; political parties are fragmented, disorganized, and cannot effectively aggregate and articulate

popular interests; bureaucracies are corrupt; the legislature and judiciary are not veritably independent from the executive; and media outlets are prone to political manipulation. In such 'incoherent' or 'incomplete' democratic conditions, the ability of average voters to influence political leadership and policy outcomes is constrained.

The weakness of democratic institutions in incomplete democratizers enables political elites 'to avoid full public accountability' (2002, 301), and by extension, engenders domestic and international conflict engagements as elites resort to belligerent nationalism to mobilize political support. Conversely, during the advanced phase of democratization (culminating in full-fledged democracy), political institutions are stronger and mirror those of mature democracies, where: 'the average voter who would suffer from reckless, nationalist policies has more chance to obtain accurate information about those risks and punish reckless politicians through the ballot box', thereby helping to forestall belligerency. Upon executing statistical tests of the relevance of political institutions to the democratization – war linkage, Mansfield and Snyder (2002; 2005a) find positive evidence for the hypothesis that:

Incomplete democratizers with weak institutions are more likely to initiate and engage in external wars than complete democratizers and other regime types, whether stable or transitioning

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Several renowned International Relations scholars, including Samuel Huntington, Fareed Zakaria, Thomas Carothers, Joshua Cohen, Allan Stam and Cindy Skach, have explicitly endorsed Mansfield and Snyder's (2005a, back cover) latter thesis as a foreign policy instructive text on democratizing for peace in a safe and less risky manner. In the wake of these endorsements, Mansfield and Snyder (2008), Collier (2009), McFaul (2010); Cederman et al. (2010), Cederman et al. (2013) have assessed and found a connection between democratization and civil warfare which was previously only implied in Mansfield and Snyder's theoretical arguments. Also, several case studies verifying the empirical utility of Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis have found at least some evidence for the thesis, at both the inter-state (e.g. Montgomery and Pettyjohn 2010; Lind 2011; Siroky and Aprasidze 2011) and intra-state warfare levels (e.g. Cederman et al. 2013, 391; Smith 2014).

However, theoretical and empirical objections to Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis have also emerged, specifically with regards to democratizers' international war proclivities. For instance, Clare (2007) re-theorises institutional strength as a function of the institutional balance of power/legacies between old authoritarian regimes seeking political resurgence and the new democratic elite propelling democratic change. In newly democratizing states, the institutional balance of power favours remnants of *ancien régimes* and state institutions are too weak to insulate incumbent democratizing state leaders from autocratic takeover threats.

Accordingly, contrary to Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis, Clare (2007, 260) expects incumbents in newly/incompletely democratizing states with weak

institutions to be less likely to initiate foreign wars, due to their heightened domestic vulnerability – an expectation for which he finds quantitative empirical corroboration (p. 274). Rather than initiating foreign wars, another study (Alcañiz 2012) has shown that the new democratic elite in democratizing states have strong incentives to cooperate in multilateral security and to develop positive international reputations, as a democratic regime consolidation strategy against (autocratic) reversals. This motivation to cooperate is evidenced by new democratic regimes' unparalleled swiftness – relative to older democracies and all autocracies – in ratifying international security treaties on arms control, nuclear non-proliferation, and disarmament (Alcañiz 2012, 306). A few other objections to Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis problematize the authors' operationalization and *polity*-based scalar measures of regime change, ultimately challenging the linkage between democratization, institutional strength, and (inter-state) war as a product of 'concept stretching' (e.g. Bogaards 2010, 485; Bernard, Bayer, and Orsun 2014, 1).

Of all the objections to Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis, perhaps the most prominent is by Narang and Nelson (2009, 357) who assess Mansfield and Snyder's (2002a; 2005a) newer hypothesis, but do not find substantial corroborative evidence despite employing similar concept measurements and analysing the same temporal scope (1816–1992) as the authors. Rather, the assessment suggests 'a dearth of observations where incomplete democratizers with weak institutions participated in war' (Narang and Nelson 2009, 357). Hence, Narang and Nelson (2009, 368) posit that: incomplete democratizers with weak institutions are no more likely to go to war than other types of states.

Critically, however, both Mansfield and Snyder's thesis and Narang and Nelson's antithesis are based mainly on evidence from the pre-contemporary period characterised by aggressive colonial expansionism by empires in the global North, anticolonial insurgencies in the South, and Cold War antipathies between the West and the East. Put differently, both hypotheses relate to analyses of imperial and ideological wars, some of which were fought in proxy, as was the case between the US and the USSR in Korea (1950–1953), Vietnam (1955–1975) and Afghanistan (1979–1989). Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the US assumed a proactive posture towards spreading democracy world-wide (Salih 2001, 4), motivated by idealist calculations that global democracy would induce global peace and prosperity (Sheehan 2005, 32).

With several states, especially those in the Southern hemisphere, having opened-up to liberal competitive politics in the third wave (Huntington 1991), the post-Cold War period is presumably composed of more democratic and emerging democratic states than the pre-Cold War era. Accordingly, the post-Cold War period allows for a more scrupulous evaluation of the relationship between democratization, institutional strength, and conflict proclivity. Given the current empirical divide between Mansfield and Snyder on the one hand and Narang and Nelson on the other, a statistical re-evaluation focusing on the more analytically-relevant post-Cold War period is imperative.

EMPIRICAL EVALUATION: MEASUREMENTS AND FREQUENCY OBSERVATIONS

In executing the re-evaluation, I focus on lower-scale conflicts (MIDs), as against full-scale wars against which extant analyses test the conflict propensities of democratizing states. Why? Integrating rival theoretical frameworks underlying Mansfield and Snyder's thesis and Narang and Nelson's antithesis, a logical explanation emerges: Since institutions are weak and ineffectual in budding democratizers (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 301), such transitioners are prone to imploding, as suggested in state failure literature (cited in Narang and Nelson 2009, 360). Domestic weakness and state failure latently imply subdued capacities to engage in full-scale wars abroad. However, at the same time, democratizing regime elites harbour strong incentives to seek foreign policy victories and procure prestige to boost political survival domestically (Mansfield and Snyder 1995a, 33; 1995b, 93). If incompletely democratizing regimes stand to benefit from inside-out diversionary behaviour, but are too weak to fight wars, then they are ostensibly likely to engage in MIDs as a less hazardous path to bellicose foreign policy victory and the prestige exuded thereof. Therefore, focus on MIDs in measuring democratizer belligerency is more consistent with the diversionary logic in democratization and war theory and checks against the exclusion of non-major powers with limited war capabilities.

Two popular dyadic MID datasets covering a broad time span (1816 – 2001) have been generated from the Correlates of War (COW) MID database; one by Maoz (v. 2.0, 2008) and the other by Bennett and Stam using the EUGene software (v. 3.2, 2008). However, unlike Bennett and Stam (2008), Maoz (2008) conducts additional historical research to verify dyadic interactions, and does not assume interactions for all possible dyadic combinations in multilateral disputes. Additional research eliminates non-valid dyads and distortions to records of actual dyads. Thus, Maoz's dyadic MID dataset is used to gauge democratizers' belligerency (MIDPART) – coded '1' for MID participations and '0' for non-participations – over the immediate post-Cold War period under study.

This article adopts an aggregative evaluative design, examining both democratizers that saw conflict and democratizers that did not, whilst controlling for non-normality in frequency distributions. Covering all states in the *Polity IV* index (Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers 2014), the aggregative design measures democratization over (five-year) periods ending with each year covered in the study (1989–1999), before gauging MID (non-)involvement in the end year of the measurement interval. Mansfield and Snyder (2002, 315) and Narang and Nelson (2009, 361) generate specific measures for institutional strength using 'Domconcentration', which captures the extent to which state power is centrally concentrated.

More critically, 'Domconcentration' is inconsistent with Mansfield and Snyder's (2002, 301) theoretical arguments emphasizing democratizer belligerency as a function of weak institutional constraints from ineffective political parties, non-independent legislatures and judiciaries, and corrupt media outlets. A more consistent evaluation of institutional efficacy ought to restrict itself to measuring the independency and

transparency of institutions that check executive authority. One of the component indices of the *Polity* index (constraints on the chief executive) inherently measures institutional autonomy. Thus, institutional strength measures (strong or weak) are herein logically deduced from degrees of democratic regime change (complete or incomplete) in country-year cases earlier coded as democratizing under *DEMZ*. Put differently, completely democratizing states are also concurrently considered to harbour strong institutions, while incompletely democratizing states are considered to possess weak institutions. A dichotomous variable, *INCOMDEZ*, is created to capture the different levels of democratization (institutional strength), coded 1 for incomplete democratic regime changes from autocratic scores to anocratic scores and 0 for complete changes from either autocratic or anocratic scores to coherent democratic scores.

The evaluative data was coded and entered on SPSS (version 19), and a chi-square test for independence/relatedness between degrees of democratization (institutional strength) and inter-state belligerency (MID involvement) was executed computationally via the 'crosstabs' procedure on SPSS. As elaborated below, SPSS outputs of frequency observations of all democratizers (N = 355: 111 MID-engaged + 244 MID-unengaged) over the immediate post-Cold War period suggest at least some empirical evidence for Mansfield and Snyder's (2002; 2005a; 2005b) newer thesis linking institutional strength to democratizers' varying conflict proclivities.

Per the frequency outputs, 213 of all 355 democratizers were incompletely democratizing as against 142 completely democratizing states. Interacting degrees of democratization and MID-involvement, incomplete democratizers outnumber complete democratizers both at the level of MID-involvement and non-involvement as shown in table 1 below. A superficial reading of incomplete democratizers' numerical domination of jointly observed frequencies might suggest no evidence for Mansfield and Snyder's thesis relative to Narang and Nelson's antithesis.

		democratizer involved in MID?		Total
		0 no	1 yes	
incomplete democratizer?	Count	99	43	142
	% within incomplete democratizer?	69.7%	30.3%	100.0%
	% within democratizer involved in MID?	40.6%	38.7%	40.0%
	% of Total	27.9%	12.1%	40.0%
	Count	145	68	213
	% within incomplete democratizer?	68.1%	31.9%	100.0%
1 yes (incomplete)	% within democratizer involved in MID?	59.4%	61.3%	60.0%
	% of Total	40.8%	19.2%	60.0%
	Count	244	111	355
Total	% within incomplete democratizer?	68.7%	31.3%	100.0%
	% within democratizer involved in MID?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	68.7%	31.3%	100.0%

Table 1: incomplete democratizer? * democratizer involved in MID? Crosstabulation

Observed frequencies of all combinations between degrees of democratization and MID involvement for all democratizers, 1989 – 1999

However, a closer comparative scrutiny of the joint frequencies reveals that the proportion of incomplete democratizers involved in MIDs (61.3%) is slightly greater than that of incomplete democratizers not involved in MIDs (59.4%). Attention also needs to be paid to the distribution of complete democratizers at the levels of MID participation/non-participation for corroborative evidence of greater conflict disinclination. If incipiently democratizing states are indeed plagued by greater conflict propensities as suggested by Mansfield and Snyder, then it logically follows that coherently democratizing states would display more aversion to MIDs. Consistent with this logical expectation, joint frequency observations in table 1 reveal that a slim majority of complete democratizers (40.6%) shunned MIDs relative to the proportion of MID-involved complete democratizers (38.7%).

The proportional dominance of i) incomplete democratizers in MIDs as against incomplete democratizers not in MIDs, and ii) complete democratizers not in MIDs compared to complete democratizers in MIDs, yield some evidence for a possible linkage between degrees of democratization and variations in democratizers' conflict proclivities. Critically, however, the slender differences between the jointly observed proportions at the two levels of democratization (< 2% at each level) imply the evidence linking institutional strength and democratizers' MID participations is frail. Reported through tables 2 and 3 below, a chi-square test for independence/association between institutional strength and MID participation exudes no statistically significant association, further accentuating the weakness of frequency observation-based evidence linking different levels of democratization to differences in the conflict behaviour of democratic transitioning states.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.107 ^a	1	.744		
Continuity Correction ^b	.044	1	.833		
Likelihood Ratio	.107	1	.743		
Fisher's Exact Test				.815	.418
Linear-by-Linear Association	.107	1	.744		
N of Valid Cases	355				

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 44.40.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Chi-Square tests for independence/association between degrees of democratization and MID involvement for all democratizers, 1989 – 1999

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.017
	Cramer's V	.017
N of Valid Cases	355	

Table 3: Symmetric Measures

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Size of the Effect of differences in democratization degrees on differences in democratizing States' MID Propensities, 1989 - 1999

As note 'a' in table 2 indicates, the assumption of minimum expected frequencies, which should be 5 for any cell in a chi-square contingency table (Pallant 2010, 219), is not violated here. All cells have expected sizes that are by far greater than 5. Since the present chi-square test is applied on a (2 by 2) contingency table examining two variables with two categories each, instead of using the Pearson Chi-Square value (0.107) in table 2 to ascertain statistical relatedness/independence between democratization degrees and MID involvement, the 'Continuity Correction' value (0.044) is used. The latter value rectifies overestimations of the Pearson Chi-Square value in 2 by 2 tables (Pallant 2010, 219). The corrected value has an associated significance level ($P = 0.833$) which is larger than the standard alpha value of statistical significance (0.05), implying no statistically significant relationship between democratization degrees and MID proclivities. Per the Phi correlation coefficient in table 3 (suitable for assessing the degree of interaction between categorical variables in 2 by 2 tables), the effect size of different democratization degrees on variations in MID propensities is 0.017, which is extremely small, based on standard thresholds of 0.01 for small effect, 0.30 for medium effect, and 0.50 for large effect.

Conclusively, this study's chi-square test for association (with Yates Continuity Correction) between degrees of democratic transition and variations in democratizers' MID propensities unveils no significant association, $\chi^2 (1, n = 355) = 0.04$, $P = 0.83$, $\Phi = 0.02$. Nevertheless, frequency observations indicate at least some evidence linking institutional strength to democratizers' foreign conflict behaviour. Though weak, the evidence bears support for Mansfield and Snyder's newer thesis (as against Narang and Nelson's antithesis) linking institutional strength and democratizers' varying war proclivities.

By policy implication, both democracy-building strategies of aspiring democracies and democracy-spreading strategies of advanced democracies should strive to strengthen weak political institutions prior to mass competitive elections. Strengthening state institutions as recommended by Mansfield and Snyder (2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2007) would leverage coherent democratization and induce institutional or structural constraints on diversionary (MID) incentives as understood within the democratic peace theoretical framework.

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