

Elites, Voters, and Democracies at War*

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Abstract

Most theories of democracies and crisis bargaining assume that leaders deal directly with a public audience rather than elites in their own state. Yet bargains with elites are essential features of democratic politics. We develop a model in which democratic elites can cue a rationally ignorant voting public by opposing a leader's war effort, while leaders can act strategically by making side-payments to accommodate key elites and keep these cues from reaching the public. When side payments are possible, there exist conditions under which democratic leaders devote less effort to the war than autocrats and choose their targets less selectively. This elite-centered logic of democracy at war emerges not despite but because of the threat of political accountability. Explicitly theorizing elite bargaining and leaders' strategic behavior can reconcile democratic advantage arguments with critiques from political behavior and autocratic accountability.

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Since the end of the Cold War, scholars and observers of international relations have been keenly interested in when and how democracies fight wars. A major research agenda coalesced around the distinctive and ostensibly advantageous nature of democratic political institutions in crisis bargaining and coercive diplomacy (Fearon, 1994; Schultz, 2001), as well as war selection and war-fighting (Buono de Mesquita et al., 2003; Lake, 1992; Reiter and Stam, 2002). Though they differ in many respects, the logics of these arguments generally rely on a direct relationship between leaders and voters, who can use the sanctioning power of the ballot box to induce their leaders to defend the national interest.

Yet we know, both intuitively and from a long line of research, that even in democracies elites dominate the foreign policy arena. Most voters pay little attention to the everyday details of foreign policy, relying instead on cues from elites to help them form opinions and judge leaders' performance (Berinsky, 2009; Zaller, 1992). Democratic leaders, in turn, are strategic, and can seek the endorsement of crucial elites before deploying troops (Saunders, 2015), or before backing down in international crises (Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012). Even in the face of declining popular support for ongoing wars, compromises with military or legislative elites can allow leaders to continue fighting, as both George W. Bush and Barack Obama discovered when they enlisted the political support of skeptical elite figures before the "surges" in Iraq and Afghanistan (Feaver, 2011). This is not surprising; elite politicking, facilitated by side payments, compromise, and logrolling, fuels democratic politics. With few exceptions, however, these features of democratic politics have been largely ignored by theorists of democracy and war (for partial exceptions, see Snyder 1991 and Schultz 2001).¹

¹Notably, the literature on international cooperation has been more open to considering elite influence and side-payments, as illustrated by the older literature on two-level games (Mayer, 1992; Putnam, 1988).

What does elite bargaining mean for the relationship between democracy and war? We propose an answer to this question by developing a theory that focuses on political dynamics at the elite level within democracies. While many elites in democracies represent or serve citizens, they are also autonomous actors with their own preferences and opportunities to make strategic moves independent of the voters. Cabinet members, generals and admirals, legislators at the head of critical committees, and even visible co-partisans may all have individual policy preferences that diverge from the leader, as well as the ability to cue the public. Bargains with this potentially separate audience, which shapes leaders' accountability, alter expectations about how democracies fight. Elites are somewhat beholden to voters, but they can also send important cues about which policies to support and to oppose. Thus although public accountability remains possible, elite bargaining offers an alternative logic by which to understand the politics of democracies at war.

We analyze a game-theoretic model in which democratic elites can cue a rationally ignorant voting public via opposition to a leader's bargaining position (e.g., her war aims) or war-fighting strategy, which activates processes of *ex post* evaluation and accountability associated with the familiar public accountability logic. But leaders are strategic, and they can make side payments to accommodate critical elites, keeping damaging cues from reaching the public and preventing voters from using new information when choosing whether to retain the incumbent. We explore the implications of this second logic of democracies at war, based on intra-elite bargaining, where leaders can endogenously shape the public's ability to hold them accountable. In this account, elite politics is not a perversion of democracy, as many arguments claim, but a feature, in the spirit of "minimalist" theories of democracy in which voters elect representatives and then let them make policy largely out of public view

(e.g., Fearon, 1999; Przeworski, 1999; Schumpeter, 1942).

This elite-centered logic of democracies at war helps address ongoing debates about the “democratic advantage” (Schultz and Weingast, 2003). Many recent studies have found few significant differences in the conflict behavior of some democracies and autocracies (e.g., Baum and Potter, 2015; Downes and Sechser, 2012; Lyall, 2010; Talmadge, 2015; Weeks, 2008), sometimes arguing that autocracies can expand their zone of accountability, acting more like democracies in times of war (see especially Weeks, 2012; Weiss, 2013). In a similar vein, we identify conditions under which the two logics of democracy at war operate, showing that democrats can restrict their own zones of accountability and behave more like autocrats. Democracies retain a distinctive public accountability logic, but introducing the intermediate role of elites helps account for the rarity of public accountability on foreign policy.

We first analyze a baseline model including only a leader and median voter, reproducing in a spare environment several common relationships between political accountability and war. We then analyze a fully specified model with an elite audience member that the leader can strategically manage, shrinking the size of the democratic audience by short-circuiting direct public accountability. Securing elite support, however, requires resources that cannot be devoted to the war effort. Contrary to prominent theories of domestic politics and war, we show that the most accountable leaders do not necessarily devote the greatest effort to the conflicts in which they participate, nor do they show greater selectivity over “wars of choice.” Most notably, their failure to make large war efforts or shy away from conflicts with long odds stems directly from voters’ incentive to replace them for demonstrated foreign policy incompetence. The threat of replacement and the ability to manage the elite cues

that trigger accountability can result in leaders underperforming in war and publics failing to hold them accountable in observational data.

The Democratic Advantage and Its Critics

There has been intense interest in democratic distinctiveness in international relations in the last few decades, particularly since the finding that democracies tend not to go to war against each other (Russett, 1993), as well as other empirical observations such as the tendency for democracies to win the wars they fight (Lake, 1992; Reiter and Stam, 2002). So-called “institutional” explanations for these findings have many variants, but most begin from the basic premise that leaders wish to stay in office, and that in democracies, elections are the crucial accountability mechanism. These arguments, in turn, place the power to sanction leaders for poor foreign policy in voters’ hands (see Reiter and Stam, 2002, p. 9). Lake (1992, p. 26) notes that the “costs of political participation vary by regime type” and that in democracies, “it is relatively costless to vote and exercise voice.”

In the last few years, however, the democratic advantage has come under fire from two directions. First, at the level of individual voters, scholars have argued that models relying on voter accountability lack clear behavioral microfoundations (see, e.g., Baum and Potter, 2010, 2015; Gartzke and Lupu, 2012; Slantchev, 2006). These critiques rest on well-established insights from the study of American political behavior that emphasize the rational ignorance of the mass public (Downs, 1957). Thus, many models of democracies at war impose excessive informational requirements that most voters will—quite rationally—fail to meet. Rather than gather relevant information at high personal cost, voters look to elites

for cues about whether to retain leaders. In the United States, for example, members of Congress are important cue-givers on the use of force (Howell and Pevehouse, 2007, ch. 7).

Second, at the level of international outcomes, many recent studies have found no significant difference in the behavior of democracies and autocracies, in areas that include credibility in crisis bargaining (e.g., Downes and Sechser, 2012; Weeks, 2008; Weiss, 2013), war initiation and selection (Clarke and Stone, 2008; Downes, 2009; Weeks, 2012), and war-fighting (e.g. Lyall, 2010; Talmadge, 2015). Many of these critiques are empirical; those that have a prominent theoretical component have thus far mainly concentrated on domestic politics in authoritarian regimes, advancing our understanding of the audiences evaluating autocratic leaders' performance in crises and wars. On the democratic side, some studies recognize the need for an intermediate role for elites to provide information that can cue the public (e.g., Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012). But few studies explicitly link the individual and national level. Baum and Potter (2015) are an important recent exception: they show how variation in media access and political parties affects accountability for war across democracies, but do not explore the strategic behavior of leaders within a democratic state. Slantchev (2006) makes a strategic argument about how politicians try to shape the information available to voters, although his model focuses on signaling and audience costs rather than war initiation and effort, and he assumes that private goods or side payments cannot be used to suppress information.

To the extent that bargaining postures or war efforts are shaped to influence elite consensus, just as they may be shaped to secure public support, assuming that the two are independent may be problematic for understanding the foreign policy of democratic states. Yet with some exceptions, models of democratic foreign policy bypass intra-elite bargaining in

favor of a more direct link between leaders and voters. In one of the most prominent models, “selectorate” theory (Buono de Mesquita et al., 2003), a distinguishing feature of democratic systems is a public audience large enough that it cannot be “bought off” with private goods, so that democratic leaders must focus on providing public goods like victory in war. The model focuses on the relationship between the selectorate (S), or the “set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics institutionally required to choose the government’s leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government’s leadership” (p. 42) and the winning coalition (W), or the subset of the selectorate required to put (and keep) the leader in power. Members of W gain a share of any private benefits the leader distributes in exchange for their support (p. 51). In democracies with universal suffrage, W is large—often a simple majority of S . In non-democracies, W is small, though S may be large or small depending on institutional arrangements (p. 70).

Selectorate theory makes arguments about the mix of public and private goods a leader will provide depending on W and S . Public goods include policies that increase national security. Private goods can take the form of “booty or rents that are distributed only among supporters of the regime...favorable tax policies, subsidies to special interests, trade or tariff policies that especially benefit domestic supporters,” or even imperialist policies that are a “burden to the entire state” but “greatly benefited a narrow segment of the population” (p. 29; on imperialism, see also Snyder, 1991, ch. 5). A key insight of selectorate theory is that when W is large, as in democracies, the leader is more likely to provide public goods, such as those that enhance national security, rather than private goods that are targeted at only a few supporters. In terms of war, this means that democracies will be more selective in the wars they fight, and put more effort into the war itself, than autocracies. Since a

large W means that the leader “cannot easily compensate for policy failure by doling out private goods,” successful public policies, like victory in war, are the only way they can keep the members of the winning coalition happy. In contrast, autocrats can “more readily compensate for policy failure by providing benefits to their few key backers” (p. 236).

Consider now what voters’ rational ignorance implies for this model. If voters rely on elite cues to tell them that a war is inadvisable, that an ongoing war is failing, or, if progress is contested, that the war will not bring long-term security benefits, then the elites that provide those cues become the de facto winning coalition. Selectorate theory admits that there are conditions that effectively shrink the size of W even in apparently-democratic contexts: “When support is aggregated through a hierarchical mechanism, such as bloc voting, the effective number of supporters required to form a coalition is often substantially lower than the nominal rule suggests” (p. 472). These “hierarchical” mechanisms, or “correlated affinities” for the leader, take the form of identity voting (such as ethnic bloc voting) or “machine” politics (in which a key patron delivers votes), such that key figures become “essential coalition members...who collectively deliver the requisite number of nominal coalition members,” and thus “reduce the size of the actual winning coalition” (pp. 63-64, 471).

We contend that the public’s reliance on elite cues endows key democratic elites with the power selectorate theory identifies in the case of “correlated” or “lumpy” affinities. While it is true that national security is a public good—and selectivity and success in war presumably enhance security—decisions for war are often highly uncertain in their desirability, and elites have well-documented information advantages over the public (for a discussion, see Baum and Potter, 2008). Although we do not limit our discussion to these wars, uncertainty and informational asymmetries may be particularly acute for modern democracies

that fight “wars of choice,” where reasonable people can disagree about the wisdom of fighting (see Caverley, 2014; Saunders, 2011). Furthermore, in such cases the payoff from war is often uncertain and any benefits may be realized in the relatively distant future (Marinov, Nomikos and Robbins, 2015). Voters, who must economize on information-gathering to begin with and are not likely to have access to independent information about the security benefits of the war for some time, are therefore happy to delegate to elites the task of informing them about the wisdom of fighting. This delegation, in turn, gives the leader an incentive to earn and retain the support of key elites. Explicitly theorizing elite bargaining and leaders’ strategic behavior helps reconcile democratic advantage arguments with critiques from both political behavior and autocratic accountability.

Democracy, War, and Coalition Politics

Our theory rests on the interaction between the leader and a member of the elite whose opposition can cue the public to hold the leader accountable for foreign policy outcomes. In this section, we discuss the identity of these crucial elites and how leaders can secure their support with side payments, a possibility that is effectively foreclosed for democracies in most models. In many areas of democratic politics, including foreign policy, it is well known that democratic leaders use side payments and other tools of domestic coalition building. The literature on international trade and treaty negotiations emphasizes domestic bargaining among elites (e.g. Milner, 1997; Putnam, 1988), yet this type of elite coalition bargaining is rarely discussed in the context of democracies and war.²

²As discussed below, Snyder (1991) is a partial exception that allows coalition politics like log-rolling to lead to war, but he emphasizes that these effects are dampened or transient in democratic polities.

Foreign policy elite figures can come from the legislature (where much existing research has focused, e.g., Arena, 2015; Schultz, 1998), inside the executive branch (Saunders, 2015), or even the military (Dropp, Golby and Feaver, 2014). These elite figures care about the national interest, but they can also be partisan figures, weighing their loyalty to the incumbent against the temptation of defecting to the opposition, and this mix of incentives determines the price at which incumbents can purchase their support. The key, for our theory, is that these individuals can provide information that would cause rationally-ignorant voters to take note of the war effort and to judge the leader more harshly for failure than they would without cues from a fracturing elite.

How does the leader secure the support of these potential cue-givers? In the context of war, it is difficult to imagine that democratic leaders use traditional side payments like pork barrel spending (such as a new project in a member of Congress' district) to gain the support of key elites. Even if such payments occur, they would be difficult to trace empirically in a systematic way. Yet there are a variety of other tools at an executive's disposal that are more reasonable to expect in the context of war, and which have the practical effect of imposing costs on the leader and diverting resources from the war effort, either directly (through limits on the war effort) or indirectly (in terms of costing the leader political capital for future attempts to increase effort). These tactics can be implicit rather than explicit (Milner, 1997, p. 110), making it difficult to assess them empirically but suggesting that they are perhaps more common than the public record implies at first glance.

One form of side payment could be tangible benefits such as favors, including appointments or promotions, campaign support, or quieter, less visible favors like backchannel support for a favored policy or bill. While direct side payments of pork might be unlikely in

the case of Congress, budgetary incentives might be more likely for military and bureaucratic actors. For example, Woodward (2008, p. 286) reports that in the debate over the Iraq “surge,” the Bush administration sought to gain the endorsement of a skeptical military by offering what “[National Security Advisor Stephen] Hadley called ‘sweeteners’—more budget money and a promise to increase the size of the active duty Army and Marine Corps” (see also Feaver, 2011, p. 107). After extensive bargaining about the policy itself (about which more shortly), the administration did claim the service Chiefs’ endorsement. The administration also took specific steps to placate individuals: although Bush replaced his leadership team in Iraq with those who favored the surge, he also promoted surge opponents, including the outgoing commander in Iraq, General George Casey, and the ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, to be Army chief of staff and ambassador to the United Nations, respectively. As Feaver notes, Bush was “determined to bring Casey along to his point of view to avoid creating damaging fissures within the team” (p. 113).³

Threats can also be considered a form of side payment. Although this characterization may seem counterintuitive, Riker (1962) explicitly argues that threats are a form of side-payment, which “consists of a promise not to carry out the threat and the gain of the follower is simply escape from misfortune” (p. 109). Milner (1997) concurs, noting that both promises and threats “are intended to make an actor do something he would not otherwise do” (p. 111). Threats are perhaps more readily imagined in the arena of the use of force than explicit promises of tangible benefits. One tactic is to frame the issue in a way that puts those who oppose it on the wrong side of the issue, as in the case of Senator Joseph McCarthy painting

³This type of side payment may also reflect what Riker (1962, pp. 113-114) calls “payment of emotional satisfaction,” which rests on intangible connections between leader and follower.

his opponents as treasonous during the early Cold War (Riker, 1962, p. 109-110). Presidents have used this tactic in forcing Congress to vote on war-related resolutions, as in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution or the 2002 vote on the authorization for using military force in Iraq, or otherwise threatening political damage for failing to support the war effort.

In the case of either promises or threats, a key element is that the use of these tactics affects the pool of resources available to the leader, of which she would like to preserve as much as possible. Even the “expenditure of energy on bargaining and planning tactics” is a cost to the leader in making side payments (Riker, 1962, p. 116). Using political capital to ensure elite support today may diminish his ability to call in favors tomorrow, including going back to the well of elite support for further military escalation or changes in strategy. Both Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush faced this problem as their support in Congress eroded over the course of their respective wars, but there are also opportunity costs to spending energy or favors on obtaining elite support for war rather than another policy. Logrolling is another form of side payment that can have consequences for decisions for war. Snyder’s (1991) argument about imperialism suggests that even democracies can become “cartelized,” with narrow interests joining forces in ways that produce overextension. In the case of the Cold War, he argues that American involvement in the Korean War was itself the result of a logroll between Asia-first and Europe-first politicians, because the price of getting the increased commitment in Europe that Truman desired was to make commitments in Asia (Ch. 7).

Finally, policy concessions are an important tool of coalition-building. Concessions on the direct issue under negotiation are considered side payments by both Riker (1962, pp. 111-112) and Milner (1997, p. 109). In the context of war, concessions on policy are common,

and may involve the overall size of the war effort or military strategy. For example, the military might be skeptical of involvement in a given conflict yet agree to fight if the leader adopts a particular strategy. Feaver's (2011) discussion of the Iraq "surge" decision notes that the Bush administration engaged in significant bargaining with military leaders about the precise form of the surge in order to gain the military's support for the new policy, and ultimately "modified the strategy as the process unfolded to address the initial concerns of the military and thus win its backing" (p. 114).

As in all cases of distributing private goods or side payments, a critical distinguishing feature of a policy concession related to war or conflict is that it is targeted at a particular individual or group, rather than at the public at large. Other arguments, in contrast, posit that leaders modify strategy to satisfy the median voter's preferences, for example by minimizing casualties (Caverley, 2014). In our model, policy concessions are aimed at an elite figure or group of elites whose support cues the public to support the war—or whose silence keeps the public quiescent. In theory, even casualty-minimizing concessions on strategy could be aimed at a small group of elites rather than the public, given that the public's perception of casualties very often depends on elite cues (Berinsky, 2009).

There is some debate about whether these various tools can all be lumped together under the rubric of "side-payments," or whether they represent distinct political phenomena (for a discussion, see Milner, 1997, pp. 109-112). However, following Riker (1962) and Milner (1997), we see these as different forms of side payments. Of course, policy concessions that relate to the war itself more directly affect the resources available to fight, and thus the probability of success. For this reason, we model them as a distinct form of side payments in the discussion below, to allow for the possibility that bargaining with elites over war policy

rather than other forms of side payments yields different implications. As such, we consider two versions of the model, one involving side payments that are essentially orthogonal to the war itself (promotions, political threats or favors, or implicit vote-trading or deal-making), and the other involving concessions that directly relate to the war, and thus imply that elites have preferences about the effort devoted to the war or the strategy for fighting it.⁴

Model

Suppose that two states, domestic (D) and foreign (F), dispute the division of some prize of unit size. Foreign is a unitary state, but domestic is made up of an incumbent leader (L) and two other actors whose support and opposition determines whether she can retain office: a median voter (or selector, V) and a key member of the elite (B) whose support or opposition can cue the voter over how to evaluate foreign policy outcomes. Both voter and elite are pivotal: V 's support keeps the leader in office, while B 's opposition provides a cue that is sufficiently informative to change how V evaluates the war. At the end of the game, whether the leader initiates a crisis or tolerates the status quo, the voter chooses to retain her in office or replace her. This process of reselection, in addition to L 's own concerns over the national interest, shapes the leader's incentives both to get involved in and devote resources to international conflicts. Figure 1 lists formal symbols and their definitions.

The leader values two goods: (a) her country's share of the international pie and (b) her own share of the domestic pie, which we conceive of as rents, resources, or prerogatives that she enjoys only in the event that she retains office. Her utility function is $u_L = \eta_L \rho_L$,

⁴In practice, of course, it may be difficult to distinguish the two forms of side payments. A promotion such as that of General Casey, for example, could have tangible effects on the war effort.

Table 1: Table of symbols and notation

Symbol	Definition
<i>Parameters</i>	
η_i	i 's payoff for the international pie
ρ_i	i 's payoff for its domestic pie
q	Domestic's status quo share of the international pie
G	Domestic's domestic pool of resources
S	Expected competence of potential successor to L
c	Cost to V of replacing L with successor
T	Foreign state's domestic pool of resources
b	B 's payoff for remaining loyal to L
β	B 's payoff for opposing the L 's foreign policy
M	Structural military balance
r_i	Marginal effectiveness of i 's military effort
d	Destructiveness of military conflict
<i>Choice variables</i>	
g	L 's proposed side payment to B
m_i	i 's military effort

where η_L represents her valuation of the national interest and ρ_L the benefits of retaining office, such that a larger share of either good is most valuable when the other is also large. Likewise, the foreign state values both the international pie and its own domestic resources, $u_F = \eta_F \rho_F$, and the critical elite in the domestic state values the international pie and his own share of the domestic pie, $u_B = \eta_B \rho_B$. Finally, the voter in the domestic state values competent leadership; the better her country does in foreign policy, the less inclined she is to replace L with a challenger to national leadership.

The leader of the domestic state begins the game by choosing whether to tolerate the international status quo or to initiate a crisis, which entails a costly military contest with F . If she does not initiate a crisis, the voter then chooses whether to retain L in office or to replace her with a challenger. If L retains office, then she receives the status quo share

of the international pie, $q \in (0,1)$, and retains the whole of the domestic pie, $G > 0$, such that $u_L = qG$. If V removes her from power, $\rho_L = 0$, which ensures that $u_L = 0$. The voter receives $u_V = q$ if she retains L in office, since L 's foreign policy competence to this point has produced the existing international status quo. If she replaces the leader, she receives $S \in (0,1)$, which increases in the challenger's expected competence, though she also pays a cost $c \in (0,S)$ of replacement. When replacement is as easy as casting a ballot, c is low, but it rises in the difficulty and personal risk of replacing the leader. As such, c serves as an indicator of the extent to which the political institutions in state D are democratic (low c) or autocratic (high c), a setup designed to follow arguments such as that of Lake (1992) and to make public accountability as easy as possible for voters. The foreign state receives $u_F = (1 - q)T$ at the status quo, where $T > 0$ is its own pool of domestic resources, while B receives $u_B = qb$, where $b > 0$ is his payoff for remaining loyal to the incumbent leadership, which he does by construction at the status quo. This ensures that any decision to oppose the leader is driven solely by features of the international crisis, not already-fractious domestic politics.

If L initiates a crisis, she first offers B a side payment $g \in [0,G]$ out of the domestic pie. Next, B chooses whether to support or oppose L in the crisis, where the former entails accepting the side payment. Next, L and F both choose costly levels of effort for the contest, which we can think of as a war or militarized dispute, which determines each side's share of the international pie. If B opposes, no side payment is made and the game proceeds as it would if L offered no side payment. If the leader wins the elite's support, then the voter acts on the same information she would have possessed if there were no crisis; absent an elite cue from B , she has no incentive to change her behavior. However, if B opposes the leader,

then the crisis is politicized and V evaluates the leader on her foreign policy competence as demonstrated by the outcome of the conflict.

The central component of each side's payoffs in this branch of the game tree is the military contest, which allocates a share of the international pie to each side as a function of the structural military balance and efforts devoted to the conflict. L captures the share

$$p(m_L, m_F) = \left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F \right),$$

where $M \in (0, 1)$ is the extent to which the structural military balance favors L , $m_i > 0$ (where $i = L, F$) denotes each side's military effort, and $r_i > 0$ is the marginal effectiveness of each unit of resources devoted to the conflict.⁵ Since the international pie is valued at 1, we impose the restriction that $0 < p(m_L, m_F) < 1$, which implies that F 's share of the pie after the conflict is $1 - p(m_L, m_F)$.

Conflict is also costly and destructive, and we represent these inefficiencies in two ways. First, conflict destroys part of the values over which states fight, so each side pays a cost $d > 0$ for participating in the crisis. Second, states also waste their own resources on the contest when diverted to military efforts, decreasing the size of the domestic pie available for the leadership to enjoy—a pie from which she may already have drawn resources to make a side payment. Therefore, the domestic pies remaining for L and T are $G - g - m_L$ and $T - m_F$, respectively. Since it faces no risk of replacement, F 's contest payoffs are the

⁵Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) use the same contest success function, but players choose efforts sequentially rather than simultaneously, as in our formulation.

most straightforward:

$$u_F = (1 - p(m_L, m_F) - d)(T - m_F).$$

For L , her payoffs depend on the size of the side payment made to B , her level of effort, and whether V retains her in office. If she survives in office, her payoff for initiating a crisis is

$$u_L = (p(m_L, m_F) - d)(G - g - m_L),$$

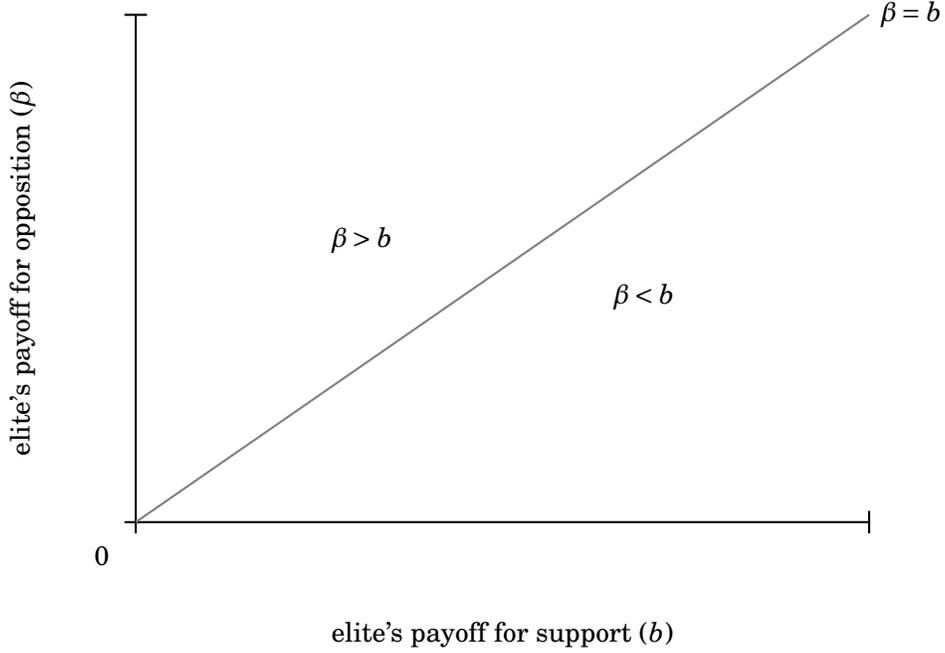
while losing office implies $u_L = 0$, as before. The voter's payoffs in this case are similar, in that retaining L yields $u_V = p(m_L, m_F)$, while replacing L is again worth $u_V = S - c$. Thus, the voter considers the cost of replacement c and the expected competence of a new leader S , which also implies an increase in the competitiveness of domestic politics; as S increases, V will be tempted to replace L no matter how well the latter does in the war, requiring ever greater efforts to win V 's support. This allows us to consider variations in two features of domestic politics: the institutional cost of participation and the availability of viable challengers, which can vary widely even in democratic states.

Finally, the elite's payoffs in the event of a crisis depend on the side payment on offer and whether he supported or opposed the leader's decision to enter the crisis. If he supports and L retains office, he receives

$$u_B = (p(m_L, m_F) - d)(b + g),$$

where he values the crisis outcome as well as the private benefits of remaining loyal ($b > 0$)

Figure 1: B 's relative temptation to support and oppose L



and any payment (g) he might receive. If he opposes and L retains office, he receives

$$u_B = (p(m_L, m_F) - d)(\beta),$$

where $\beta > 0$ is the private payoff for defecting from the current winning coalition. If L loses office, we assume that B gets the same payoff that he does when entering opposition; he values the international outcome, but he is no longer a supporter of the incumbent. This construction allows us to characterize elites in terms of their loyalty to the current leader, or the ease with which their support can be purchased, as a function of the relative sizes of b and β . As shown in Figure 1, opposition is most attractive when b is low and β is high, while support is most attractive when b is high and β is low.

Figure 1 characterizes how B evaluates support and opposition to L 's foreign policy, net

of any concerns about the military outcome and the side payment. When $\beta = b$ and the elite is politically neutral, support and opposition is decided only in terms of the prospective differences in military outcome induced by his choice or the net value of any side payment to offset the benefits of opposition. However, as we move south of the diagonal ($\beta < b$), we have a loyal elite whose temptation to defect comes in the form of enforcing the higher war efforts desired by the voter. A can appease this loyal elite with a side payment or increased war efforts, and as we show below, doing so will be fairly cheap. However, moving north of the diagonal, B 's loyalty is less assured; the temptation to oppose is strong, because $\beta > b$, such that B may require larger side payments or a better military outcome to overcome the temptation of the private benefits of entering opposition. Since side payments come at the expense of the same national pie from which war efforts are drawn, this presents L with a difficult tradeoff, whether B is relatively loyal or disloyal.

What do these elites look like in practice? In our model, just as V is a median voter, B is an individual or organization whose support is key to ensuring that the public does not evaluate L too harshly for failure. Sometimes, the crucial elite is a popular figure involved in the military effort, like General Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War, whose temptation to enter opposition was quite large; he shared neither Truman's desire to limit the war to the Korean peninsula nor the president's political affiliation, having allowed his name to be considered for the other party's presidential nomination in 1948 (Stueck, 2004, pp. 97-98). Other key elites may be relatively loyal, such as members of a leader's own party or faction, who stand little to gain from defection itself but may be tempted into opposition by underperformance in the war; co-partisans in the legislature that must weigh party loyalty against the national interest are a case in point, as are appointed members of the admin-

istration or government. What matters most, as we show below, is the existence of such an elite, the price at which L can purchase his support, and whether L is willing to meet that price. When a member of the elite faces such a decision, our theory offers insights into how that crucial elite can shape how a democracy fights.

Analysis

We analyze two variants of the model. First, to establish a baseline for comparison to models that do not feature elites mediating between leader and public, we analyze a model in which the public is sure to be cued to evaluate the leader's performance in the crisis. Several familiar dynamics emerge, including democratic states making larger war efforts and exhibiting selectivity in choosing targets. However, in the second, full version of the model, the opportunity to shield herself from accountability sees the leader of a democracy sometimes making less effort than autocrats and being less selective in her decision to initiate crises. Democratic countries may fight harder and be more selective on average, but we identify conditions under which that average may be attenuated by incentives to behave in distinctly unaccountable ways. In the model with no elites, we summarize results in terms of the cost to V of replacing the leader and the value of the status quo, but the model with elites adds another dimension—the cost of buying the elite's support with a side payment and short-circuiting the voter's ability to hold L accountable for foreign policy.

We make one key substantive assumption to facilitate the analysis, namely that $q > S - c$, such that the voter will not replace L if she refuses to initiate a crisis. This ensures that pure diversionary or “gambling for resurrection” (Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Downs and Rocke,

1994) incentives do not operate, allowing us to isolate the reasoning behind L 's decision to initiate a crisis. If she is sure to lose office at the status quo, she stands nothing to lose by initiating a crisis, and the simple fact of her truncated punishment would suffice to explain the initiation of a risky and costly military contest; we focus instead on the interplay of international factors and other features of her country's domestic politics.

The Model Without Side Payments

In the baseline model, any crisis that L initiates is automatically politicized, such that she is vulnerable to replacement if she performs poorly; V requires no elite cue to judge the leader's performance. Since the voter's decision at the final node is the key driver of L 's decisions in both the baseline and the full theoretical models, we specify V 's retention rule first, then give a full characterization of the game's unique Subgame Perfect Equilibrium (or SPE). The voter retains L in office after a crisis when $p(m_L, m_F) - d > S - c$, or when L has demonstrated sufficient competence to outweigh the expected gains of installing a successor in office, net of the costs of replacing the incumbent. The voter's decision rule defines what we call the *retention constraint*, or

$$m_L > \frac{1}{r_L} \left(S - c - M + \frac{1}{2} + m_F r_F + d \right) \equiv m_L^{rc} \quad (1)$$

in reduced form. This defines the minimal amount of effort that L must devote to the crisis in order to secure enough of the international pie to retain office.⁶ Notably, the minimum

⁶Note that m_F is properly written $m_F(m_L)$, since the foreign state's level of effort depends in equilibrium on L 's effort. As such, Inequality (1) is a reduced-form representation of the retention constraint, which we define fully in the appendix.

effort defined by the retention constraint decreases in the ease with which V can replace the leader; as c falls and the voter's threat to turn L out of office grows more credible, L must devote ever more resources to the war effort if she is to survive in office. Similarly, the more competitive is the potential replacement (i.e., as S increases), L must also devote greater efforts to the war in order to ensure political survival.

The retention constraint binds—that is, it alters L 's strategy—when it falls above her unconstrained optimum (m_L^{un}), which we define as the amount of effort she would devote to the war if she were sure to retain office, balancing the potential gains of increasing the international pie against shrinking her pool of domestic resources. As stated in Proposition 1, political survival incentives raise her war effort over her unconstrained optimum when V 's costs of replacing her are sufficiently low ($c < \hat{c}$); however, when replacement is difficult ($c \geq \hat{c}$), she limits war efforts to retain control of a larger share of domestic resources, because her unconstrained optimum satisfies the retention constraint.

Proposition 1. *When $q < S - c$, the following strategies constitute the unique SPE.*

- (a.) *When $c \geq \hat{c}$, L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{un}$ and sets m_L^{un} ; F sets m_F^{un} ; and V retains L .*
- (b.) *When $c < \hat{c}$, L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{rc}$ and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{rc}$; and V retains L .*

Starting with the case where replacing the leader is relatively costly ($c \geq \hat{c}$), which we equate with autocratic political systems, the equilibrium is straightforward. The leader initiates a crisis when the status quo is sufficiently unattractive ($q < q^{un}$), i.e. when she is dissatisfied, and then enters a military contest with the foreign state in which each side

chooses an optimal level of effort.⁷ In equilibrium, these efforts are

$$m_L^{un} = \frac{6d + 4Gr_L - 2M + 2Tr_F - 1}{6r_L} \quad \text{and} \quad m_F^{un} = \frac{6d + 2Gr_L + 2M + 4Tr_F - 5}{6r_F},$$

which balance the need to overcome the other's efforts in the contest—to counter its strategy or to achieve escalation dominance—against the desire to retain as much of the domestic pie as possible. The critical factors in each side's efforts are the size of each other's domestic pie (G , T), the destructiveness of the war (d), the military balance (M), and each side's marginal military effectiveness (r_L , r_F).⁸ L 's effort is also notable for the absence of domestic politics; since the cost to the voter of replacing her is so high, her threat to punish the leader for skimping on the war effort is incredible, and L 's unconstrained optimum satisfies the relatively low retention constraint. This is consistent with Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (1999) model, in which autocrats choose conflicts based solely on the balance of costs and benefits, while democratic leaders evince a lower tolerance for risk, turning down conflicts in strategic circumstances in which autocrats would give battle.

However, when the voter's threat to replace the leader is more credible, or when $c < \hat{c}$ such that the political institutions are more democratic, the contours of the equilibrium change, because L 's unconstrained optimum now falls below the retention constraint ($m_L^{un} < m_L^{rc}$). In this case, her desire to retain as much of the domestic pie as possible conflicts with the voter's desire to ensure good foreign policy outcomes, and if L is to retain office she must raise her war effort beyond her unconstrained optimum. However, she will invest only

⁷We use “dissatisfied” in Powell's (1999) sense of the expected value for war exceeding the value of the status quo.

⁸One surprising result is that efforts actually increase in the deadweight costs of the war d ; the less there is to go around, the harder each side fights for it.

enough to satisfy the retention constraint. Taking into account F 's effort in response, L 's equilibrium level of effort under greater political accountability is

$$m_L^{rc} = \frac{-4c + 6d - 2M + 2Tr_F + 4S - 1}{2r_L},$$

which reflects two features of domestic politics. First, she invests more in the war effort the easier it is for V to replace her (i.e., as c decreases). Second, her effort increases as S increases, or as the expected competence of her most likely challenger for political power increases. Therefore, the investments that leaders make in the war effort decrease in the costs of replacing them and increase in the competitiveness of domestic politics.

The baseline model generates two notable results, stated formally in Proposition 2.

Proposition 2. *In the game with no elite, L 's effort decreases in c , such that $m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$, leading to larger shares of the international pie when c is low. There is no consistent relationship between c and the willingness to initiate crises.*

First, greater levels of domestic accountability are associated with larger investments in the war effort. As they do in selectorate theory, democratic leaders in the version of our model with no elites appear to “try harder” once engaged in conflict than autocratic leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, p. 794). This translates into better military outcomes, though they come at greater cost to the leader's share of the domestic pie, from which she draws these increased war efforts. Second, while there exist conditions under which a democratic leader is hesitant to initiate crises due to the costs of ensuring sufficient performance to retain office, she is sometimes *more* willing to initiate crises than an autocratic leader. When V 's costs of replacing the leader are not too low ($\underline{c} < c < \hat{c}$), then L hesitates to launch

crises that will be too costly, and her initiation constraint is tighter than it is for autocratic leaders ($q^{rc} < q^{un}$). However, when the costs of replacement are extremely low ($c \leq \underline{c}$), democratic leaders become *more* willing than autocratic leaders to initiate crises ($q^{rc} \geq q^{un}$); the outsized efforts demanded by the retention constraint make the domestic pie relatively worthless, but they ensure such a large share of the international pie that she opts to initiate a crisis in any case. This is also consistent with selectorate theory: democratic leaders are perfectly willing to initiate conflicts, even against other democratic states, when they can be sufficiently sure of success to retain office (pp. 800-802).

The Model With Side Payments

Our baseline model replicates some of the key theoretical claims in the literature on regime type and war: democrats have political incentives to invest heavily in war efforts, and their chances of military success weigh heavily against the threat of losing office in their calculations over initiating crises, while they are in general no more or less prone to conflict than autocrats.⁹ Now, we analyze an extension in which the leader may be able to purchase the support of a crucial elite whose opposition would cue a rationally ignorant voter to hold her accountable for poor military performance. Absent an elite cue that L 's performance is poor, the voter evaluates the leader as she would as if the status quo remained in place, and we show in this section that the option to short-circuit the accountability mechanism conditions the role of democratic politics in foreign policy.

⁹We replicate one mechanism that might account for democratic distinctiveness—the threat of political accountability—but there are others, including credible commitments not to punish leaders that lose office (see Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Debs and Goemans, 2010). While this alternative accounts for the apparent lack of a relationship in observational data between war performance and regime type, it can also be explained by a strategic avoidance of those wars that impose the largest political costs.

We restrict our analysis of the elite politics model to conditions under which $c < \hat{c}$, where L 's unconstrained optimum is not sufficient to ensure her political survival. (When $c \geq \hat{c}$ she need not worry about buying elite support; the voter finds removing her from power too costly, regardless of whatever cues he might receive from the elite.) This particular strategy of purchasing elite support to short-circuit accountability can be thought of as a feature of democratic politics—one that gives some members of the elite purchase over the foreign policy that they ostensibly enjoy only in autocratic polities.¹⁰ After characterizing the conditions under which L buys B 's support and insulates herself from accountability, we compare her crisis and wartime behavior across three scenarios: (a) autocratic politics, (b) democratic politics with full accountability, and (c) democratic politics with elite support.

B 's presence introduces another dimension to the equilibrium space: the price at which L can purchase elite support. When B 's support can be secured cheaply, L offers a side payment that B accepts, allowing her to initiate a crisis free from accountability but under a weakly tighter budget constraint ($G - g \leq G$), since resources promised to B cannot go towards the war effort. B supports L in return for g when L offers a sufficiently generous side payment, given the outcome of the crisis if B supports, his payoff for defection (β), and the outcome of the crisis if B opposes (requiring that L set m_L^{rc}):

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F \right) - d \right) (b + g) \geq \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{rc} r_L - m_F^{rc} r_F \right) - d \right) (\beta).$$

Thus, B accepts any side payment large enough to compensate him for remaining loyal but not so large as to undermine the war effort to an intolerable degree by eating up too much

¹⁰Compare this claim that democracies can fall prey to the same weaknesses of dictatorships with Weeks's (2008) claim that some autocracies may share advantageous features with democracies.

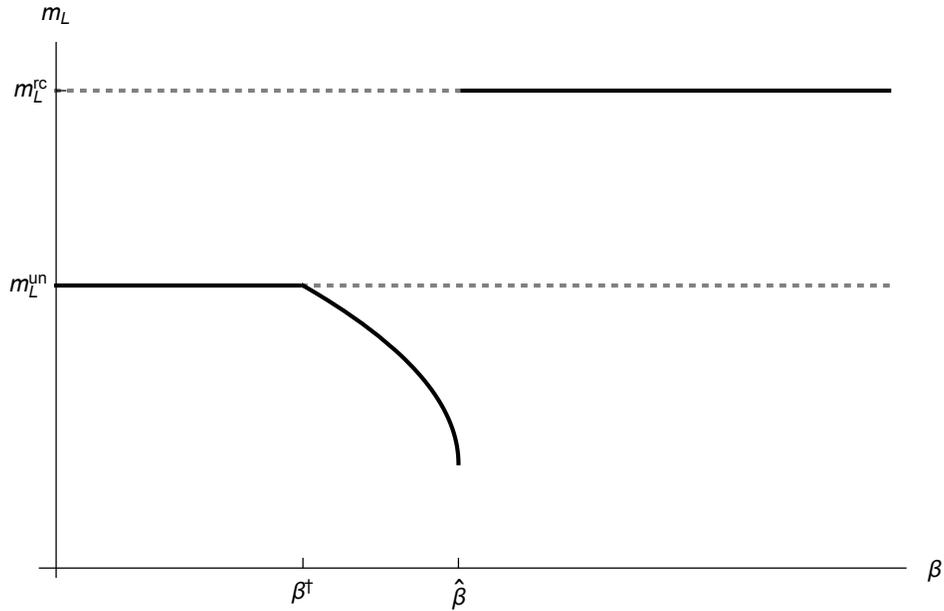
of the domestic pie. If she chooses to make a side payment in equilibrium, L offers the minimum that ensures support, which may be zero, such that $g^* = \max\{g^{su}, 0\}$. Proposition 3 characterizes the conditions under which she does so and the consequences of securing the support of a pivotal elite for both military efforts and crisis initiation.

Proposition 3. *When $q < S - c$ and $c < \hat{c}$, the following strategies constitute the unique SPE.*

- (a.) *When $\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$, L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{un}$, proposes $g^* = 0$, and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$; B supports; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{un}$; and V retains L .*
- (b.) *When $\beta^\dagger < \beta \leq \hat{\beta}$, L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{su}$, proposes $g^* = g^{su}$, and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{su}$; B supports; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{su}$; and V retains L .*
- (c.) *When $\beta > \hat{\beta}$, L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{rc}$, proposes $g^* = 0$, and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$; B opposes; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{su}$; and V retains L .*

Proposition 3 shows that L does not always avail herself of the opportunity to purchase B 's support. When $\beta > \hat{\beta}$ such that the required side payment is too large—because it compromises the domestic pie, the war effort, or both— L foregoes B 's support. Figure 2 shows that this requires her to meet the retention constraint when choosing her level of effort ($m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$), just as she does when the costs of replacing her are low in the model without elite side payments. However, when B 's support comes cheaply enough ($\beta \leq \hat{\beta}$), L can insulate herself from public accountability without sacrificing too much of the domestic pie. Purchasing B 's support is cheaper than escalating the war effort to the retention constraint, allowing her to both retain office *and* enjoy acceptable shares of the international and domestic pies. Thus, she sets her unconstrained optimum ($m_L^* = m_L^{un}$) when B 's support can

Figure 2: L 's equilibrium war effort in the game with side payments by B 's payoff for opposition



be purchased very cheaply, leveraging her insulation from public scrutiny to behave as she would if she were an autocrat. In fact, when B 's support is affordable but nonetheless expensive (the middling range of β shown in Figure 2), she actually devotes *less* to the war effort ($m_L^* = m_L^{su} < m_L^{un}$) than she would as an autocrat.

By short-circuiting the voter's ability to punish her for poor foreign policy performance, L can break the link between democratic accountability and both (a) large investments in war efforts and (b) selective crisis initiation. When the elite's support is cheap enough to purchase but not so cheap that it takes very little from the domestic pie, or when $\beta^\dagger < \beta \leq \hat{\beta}$, then L is unable both to resist the temptation to insulate herself from accountability *and* to invest as much in the war effort as she would at her unconstrained optimum. The very threat of being held accountable leads to the very behavior—a suboptimal war effort—that voters hope to deter leaders from undertaking. Yet since the voter cannot commit not to

replace L with a more competent leader, the incumbent devotes so much effort to avoiding accountability that she can no longer devote sufficient resources to the war effort. As a result, her country underperforms in the war, even as the public fails to hold her accountable on the equilibrium path, distorting foreign policy from both her unconstrained optimum and the retention constraint to which V would like to hold the leadership.

Proposition 3 states that suboptimal war efforts are most likely to occur when L buys the support of more expensive or politically distant elites, suggesting that broader elite consensus may be associated with both poor war performance and low domestic accountability. Thus, the ideal of a bipartisan consensus for war may come at the cost of effective foreign policy, given the price of building a coalition with those less loyal to the leader. The precise threshold of β that determines whether L makes very low war efforts is also, as stated in Proposition 4, shaped by both the size of the domestic pie (G) and the expected competence of a potential successor (S).

Proposition 4. *When L has secured elite support, the threshold above which its effort is less than its unconstrained optimum,*

$$\beta > \frac{b(6d - 2Gr_L - 2M + 2T - 1)}{6(c - S)} \equiv \beta^\dagger,$$

increases in G but falls in S iff G is sufficiently large; when G is smaller, the threshold rises in S .

What determines whether securing B 's support leads to very low war efforts? Proposition 4 assumes that L has secured B 's support, or that $\beta < \hat{\beta}$. Then, after selecting into that part of the parameter space where L has secured domestic support, we use comparative statics

analysis to trace how the threshold β^\dagger changes as a function of G and S . First, the threshold becomes harder to satisfy as G increases, meaning that the lowest war efforts that emerge from purchasing elite support should occur in those states with smaller domestic pies. This is unsurprising; all else equal, a tighter budget constraint forces a starker tradeoff between securing elite support and investing in the war, but it also makes leaders more eager to avoid accountability for poor performance.

Richer states, then, would seem safer from these lowest of the democratic war efforts. However, when large domestic pies (i.e., looser budget constraints) interact with highly competitive electoral environments, then larger states can be *more* prone to extremely weak war efforts. As stated in Proposition 4, β^\dagger decreases in S —making very low war efforts likely—when the domestic pie (G) is sufficiently large. In this case, when the budget is large enough that L values retaining office more highly, she becomes more desperate to secure B 's support in the face of a challenge from an increasingly competent domestic competitor; at the same time, B knows this and leverages his threat to cue to the public to secure ever larger side payments from the incumbent, cutting into the domestic pie so deeply that L must spend even less on the war than her constrained optimum. Therefore, when competition for office is most intense, large budgets actually encourage the lowest war efforts from democratic states. On the other hand, when the domestic pie is smaller, elites are more loyal, demanding less in terms of side payments in order to secure minimally acceptable military performance, granting support at very low cost simply because extorting a large side payment would fatally compromise the national interest. Therefore, richer democracies with stiff political competition should be uniquely prone to extreme under-investment, while poorer democracies with stiff competition will exhibit lower military efforts relative to a case with

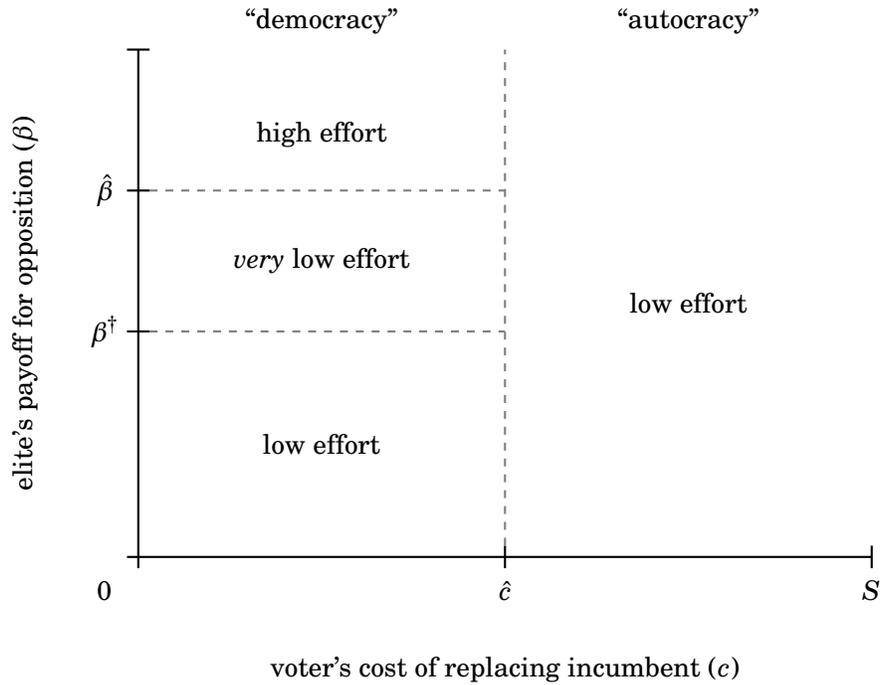
full accountability, but not as low as relatively richer democracies.

When can leaders secure the support of crucial elites? Support may be cheaper to purchase in times of high threat, e.g. when it is easier to paint opposition as unpatriotic or incompetent in its handling of national security. When the leader has a naturally large coalition of elites, as in the case of large majorities in Congress, support may also be cheaper to ensure (see Howell and Pevehouse, 2007). More specific conditions may affect how easily the leader can purchase elite support: for example, if we think of B as a single individual with political ambitions of his own (a large value of β), the leader may need to give B a particularly large side payment to convince B to forgo the benefits of politicizing the war. Such side payments are not unheard of. In the case of Vietnam, Kennedy and Johnson both co-opted their potential Republican rival, Henry Cabot Lodge, by appointing and retaining him to be Ambassador to South Vietnam in the early stages of the war (for a discussion, see Saunders, 2015). The ability to purchase B 's support also creates a new initiation constraint ($q < q^{su}$), but as stated in Proposition 5, it is neither consistently higher nor consistently lower than it is without elite support.

Proposition 5. *In the game with an elite, there is no consistent relationship between the presence or absence of elite support and either (a) the willingness to initiate crises or (b) equilibrium war efforts.*

Figure 3 presents the key differences across the games with and without side payments, plotting L 's equilibrium efforts as a function of the costs of replacement and B 's payoff for opposing L . Thus, accountability is more difficult for V to impose—and the country less democratic—as we move to the right, while B 's support is increasingly expensive to purchase

Figure 3: L 's equilibrium war effort by cost of replacement and B 's payoff for opposition



as we move upward. In the model without side payments, effort is highest when $c < \hat{c}$, which is true regardless of β , while effort is low when the threat of replacement is less credible. However, when side payments that prevent elite cues are possible, the accountable or “democratic” range of the equilibrium space is parsed differently. High effort only occurs when L cannot afford the price of B 's support, limiting the size of the domestic consensus and forcing her to invest heavily in the war effort. Next, when the elite's support is most easily purchased ($\beta < \beta^\dagger$), L can scale back her efforts to her unconstrained optimum, investing just as much as she would with no threat of accountability. However, when $\beta^\dagger < \beta < \hat{\beta}$ and B 's support is at the expensive end of affordable, she invests even less in the war effort than she would with no accountability, avoiding replacement at the hands of a public that has not received an elite cue to facilitate judgment of the outcome.

Extension: Policy Concessions

We have also analyzed an alternate version of the model in which L can attempt to win B 's support by adjusting her effort level. Formally, L and V retain the same preferences, while B suffers the domestic costs of the war effort at a rate different from L , such that she pays $c_B m_L$. This induces a range of acceptable war efforts for B , who will support L when the war effort is large enough to secure a favorable outcome but not too wasteful of the domestic pie. While L 's side payment is different in substantive form, the basic shape of the equilibria—including the inconsistent relationships between c , war efforts, and crisis initiation—remain the same.

Focusing again on the interesting case where L must set $m_L \geq m_L^{rc}$ in order to retain office, she may need to lower or raise her effort from that baseline in order to secure support. First, if B is so hawkish that he prefers an escalation, L refuses to seek support, opting to meet the retention constraint and secure support with an already undesirably high level of effort; in other words, if she can retain office with a smaller increase beyond her unconstrained optimum, she will do so. This choice to forego the support of a hawkish elite, tolerating his opposition with the understanding that the public will support a lower war effort, mirrors Truman's decision to fire MacArthur during the Korean War; the president preferred to satisfy the more dovish median voter than the hawkish elite. Second, when moderating her effort can secure B 's support, L will do so as long as B 's support is not too expensive—that is, as long as the required effort does not dictate that she stray too far below her unconstrained optimum. This, of course, produces the same set of implications discussed in Proposition 4; when B 's support can be bought cheaply, L will dial back the war

effort and escape accountability, and for the most expensive (but still buyable) elites, she may devote less effort to the war than she would in the absence of a threat of removal.

Conclusion

The notion of a democratic advantage in war is, despite its prevalence in recent scholarship, relatively new (Desch, 2002; Reiter and Stam, 2002). As both the scope conditions (Lyll, 2010) and sources (Arena, 2015) of this distinctiveness have come into question, the need has emerged for a theory that can account for both democratic advantages and democratic deficiencies. By incorporating insights from the literatures on voting behavior and elite bargaining over foreign policy, we have shown that democracy can be a source of either advantage or handicap in war. When elite consensus can be easily purchased with side payments, a set of conditions that varies both across countries and over time, leaders in democracies may both under-invest in war efforts and choose their wars poorly. We also identify the conditions most conducive to extreme under-investment in war efforts: loose budget constraints (i.e., large economies) and highly competitive domestic politics.

Although direct public accountability remains possible in our account, we identify the conditions under which low military effort (which undermines deterrence) and poorly chosen conflicts (which can mire otherwise powerful states in losing wars) are likely to occur, not as anomalies, but as understandable outputs of a democratic political process. The credible threat of deposition wielded by democratic publics can be a double-edged sword: under some conditions, it encourages restraint in choosing wars and all-out effort once engaged, but under others, it discourages both—even to the point of encouraging lower war efforts and

less selectivity than autocrats exhibit in the same international conditions.

One might reasonably ask whether the elite-dominated logic of war we identify—designed in part to short-circuit public accountability—is consistent with democracy. There are, of course, many critiques of the democratic advantage school of thought, many of which lay the blame for opportunistic or aggressive policies at the door of voters or see elites as simply channeling those voters’ preferences (Caverley, 2014; Marinov, Nomikos and Robbins, 2015). Still others assert that foreign policy in a democracy cannot or should not be captured by elites, or that when such elite-driven policy emerges, democracy is weakened or ceases to function. Caverley (2014) argues that “if an elite minority can capture the government to decide what military gets built, which countries to attack, and how to fight these conflicts without any influence from the public, then that foreign policy is not particularly democratic” (p. 17).¹¹ Snyder (1991), while explicitly highlighting elite bargaining, also sees it as pathological in democracies. He notes that, in the United States, politicians are

elected at different times by different constituencies, some of them parochial or manipulatable. When this is the case, policy-making necessarily involves bargaining among various party and regional factions and specialized legislative committees, as well as unelected bureaucratic professionals. Even in a democracy this bargaining process, which provides opportunities for logrolling, may resemble a limited form of cartelized politics (p. 51).

Snyder sees these processes as temporary pathologies, however: in the early Cold War period, he argues that “cartelization was merely a transitory aspect of the handling of some foreign policy issues, caused by a temporary pattern of factionalism and partisanship” (p. 257).

¹¹See also Jacobs and Page (2005) and Page and Bouton (2006).

Other arguments highlight inequality and oligopolistic tendencies in the United States; though less focused on foreign policy, they add another dimension to the idea that elite political dominance is anti-democratic (Gilens and Page, 2014; Winters and Page, 2009).

But it is not clear that elite bargaining or even elite dominance of foreign policy is incompatible with democracy. Consider Immanuel Kant, often invoked by IR scholars for the proposition that the “consent of the citizens” is an effective restraint on aggression in democracies. Kant (1970) makes a distinction between direct democracy and republicanism, arguing that the former is a “despotism” while the separation of powers under the latter is the main institutional constraint on making war (p. 100-101). The arguments for representative democracy in the *Federalist* also rest on these concerns about direct democracy (Nos. 9, 10). Furthermore, a strand of democratic theory, well-represented in comparative politics debates but less familiar in the IR literature on war, stresses a more “minimalist” approach to democracy (Przeworski, 1999). Here, voters elect politicians but largely ignore the details of policymaking until the next election (see also Fearon, 1999). Accountability helps keep politicians from pursuing extreme policies, but it does so only in the broadest sense, leaving many of the details up to elites.

Other views of what makes democracy distinct prevail as well, including credible commitments not to kill, imprison, or otherwise mistreat leaders after they leave office (Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Debs and Goemans, 2010), but our aim is to provide an account of democratic crisis bargaining decisions that deals with the empirical reality of voter ignorance and delegation to elites, as well as the strategic behavior of democratic leaders. We have followed Lake (1992) in assuming that the costs of participation in democracies are significantly lower, in order to track as closely as possible the assumptions of existing demo-

cratic advantage arguments and “stack the deck” in favor of democratic distinctiveness. Even when we put voters in such an advantageous position, however, democratic polities may show themselves to be feckless in foreign policy in ways that many theories attribute mostly to autocracies.

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Appendix

Proof of Proposition 1. Since V 's strategy determines war efforts, we first characterize V 's best response to its choice over retaining or replacing the leader. First, he retains L at the status quo when $q \geq S - c$, which is true by assumption. Second, following a crisis, he retains L when

$$\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F\right) - d \geq S - c, \quad (2)$$

where m_F is an endogenous variable that is determined by F 's best response function given L 's war effort. To determine F 's optimal m_F for an arbitrary m_L , we state F 's maximization problem as

$$\max_{m_F} \left\{ \left(1 - \left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F\right) - d\right) (T - m_F) \right\}, \quad (3)$$

which she solves by setting

$$m_F = \frac{2d + 2Tr_F + 2m_L r_L + 2M - 3}{4r_F}. \quad (4)$$

Substituting this expression into Inequality (2) and solving for m_L yields the retention constraint,

$$m_L \geq \frac{-4c + 6d + 2Tr_F - 2M + 4S - 1}{2r_L} \equiv m_L^{rc}.$$

Thus, for any equilibrium in which V retains L , it must be the case that $m_L^* \geq m_L^{rc}$.

Now suppose that $c \geq \hat{c}$, where L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{un}$ and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{un}$; and V retains L . We first derive optimal efforts in the military contest and show that L 's unconstrained optimum satisfies the retention constraint, which ensures that she retains office. Then, we derive the conditions under which she initiates a crisis. F 's maximization problem remains the same as in (3), and L chooses m_L to solve

$$\max_{m_L} \left\{ \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F \right) - d \right) (G - m_L) \right\}.$$

The first order conditions are

$$d + m_F r_F + r_L (G - 2m_L) - M + \frac{1}{2} = d + r_F (T - 2m_F) + m_L r_L + M - \frac{3}{2} = 0,$$

which are satisfied by equilibrium efforts

$$m_L^{un} = \frac{6d + 4Gr_L - 2M + 2Tr_F - 1}{6r_L} \quad \text{and} \quad m_F^{un} = \frac{6d + 2Gr_L + 2M + 4Tr_F - 5}{6r_F}.$$

L sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$ when $m_L^{un} \geq m_L^{rc}$, which is the case when

$$c \geq \frac{1}{6}(6d + 2Tr_F - 2Gr_L - 2M + 6S - 1) \equiv \hat{c}. \quad (5)$$

Therefore, when $c \geq \hat{c}$, L sets her unconstrained optimum and retains office. Anticipating equilibrium efforts and the retention of office, L initiates a crisis when

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{un} r_L - m_F^{un} r_F \right) - d \right) (G - m_L^{un}) > qG$$

or when

$$q < \frac{(-6d - 2Tr_F + 2Gr_L + 2M + 1)^2}{36Gr_L} \equiv q^{un}.$$

The proposed strategies are therefore in equilibrium when $c \geq \hat{c}$.

Finally, let $c < \hat{c}$, where L initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{rc}$ and sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$; F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{rc}$; and V retains L . As shown by Inequality (5), L 's unconstrained optimum, so to retain office she sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$, which is the minimal investment that she can make to ensure that she remains in office. To find F 's best response, we substitute m_L^{rc} into Equation (4), which yields

$$m_F^* = T - \frac{1 - 2d - S + c}{r_F} \equiv m_F^{rc}.$$

Anticipating equilibrium efforts and the retention of office, L initiates a crisis when

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{rc} r_L - m_F^{rc} r_F \right) - d \right) (G - m_L^{rc}) > qG$$

or when

$$q < \frac{(S - c)(4c - 6d - 2Tr_F + 2Gr_L + 2M - 4S + 1)}{2Gr_L} \equiv q^{rc}.$$

The proposed strategies are therefore in equilibrium when $c < \hat{c}$. □

Proof of Proposition 2. There are three claims to establish: (a) $m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$ when $c < \hat{c}$, (b) L gains a larger share of the international pie when $c < \hat{c}$, and (c) there is no consistent relationship between c and the crisis initiation constraints. The first claim follows directly from Inequality (5). For the second claim, we solve

$$\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{rc} r_L - m_F^{rc} r_F \right) - d > \left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{un} r_L - m_F^{un} r_F \right) - d,$$

which is true when $c < \hat{c}$, which is the precise condition required for $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$ in equilibrium.

To establish the final claim, we solve $q^{rc} < q^{un}$, which is true when $\underline{c} < c < \hat{c}$, where

$$\underline{c} = \frac{1}{12}(6d - 2Gr_L - 2M + 2Tr_F + 12S - 1).$$

Otherwise, when $c \leq \underline{c}$, $q^{rc} \geq q^{un}$. Therefore, there is no consistent relationship between c and the willingness to initiate crises. \square

Proof of Proposition 3. Since $q < S - c$ and $c < \hat{c}$, L is sure to retain office at the status quo, and V will retain her after a crisis if $m_L^* \geq m_L^{rc}$. Therefore, if she does not secure B 's support, equilibrium behavior is identical to that characterized in Proposition 1 when $c < \hat{c}$. Thus, it remains to characterize equilibrium behavior and the conditions supporting it when L does secure B 's support.

B accepts any g that satisfies

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F \right) - d \right) (b + g) \geq \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{rc} r_L - m_F^{rc} r_F \right) - d \right) (\beta) \quad (6)$$

which defines a range of acceptable side payments. The values defining this range, $g \in [g^{su}, \bar{g}]$, depend on m_L and m_F , both of which themselves are functions of g . Therefore, to determine the size of the size payment in equilibrium, we derive each side's effort for an arbitrary g . If L secures B 's support, she solves $\max_{m_L} \{\eta_L \rho_L\}$ or

$$\max_{m_L} \left\{ \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L r_L - m_F r_F \right) - d \right) (G - g - m_L) \right\},$$

while F 's problem is the same as in Equation (3). The first order conditions are

$$d + r_L(-g + G - 2m_L) + m_F r_F - M + \frac{1}{2} = d + m_L r_L + (T - 2m_F) r_F + M - \frac{3}{2} = 0,$$

which are satisfied by equilibrium efforts

$$m_L^{su} = \frac{6d + 4(G - g)r_L - 2M + 2Tr_F - 1}{6r_L}$$

and

$$m_F^{su} = \frac{6d + 2(G - g)r_L + 2M + 4Tr_F - 5}{6r_F}.$$

Substituting equilibrium efforts into Inequality (6) yields the full-form range of side payments acceptable to B , defined at the minimum by $\max\{g^{su}, 0\}$ and at the maximum by \bar{g} . Next, L wishes to purchase B 's support with the minimally acceptable side payment, because each component of her expected utility decreases in g . To show this, we substitute efforts as defined above into her expected utility for winning B 's support, for which both

first partials with respect to g are negative:

$$\frac{\partial \eta_L}{\partial g} = -\frac{r_L}{3} < 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial \rho_L}{\partial g} = -\frac{1}{3} < 0.$$

Therefore, if she purchases B 's support, she proposes $g^* = \max\{g^{su}, 0\}$, where

$$g^{su} \equiv \frac{1}{4r_L}(1 - 6d + 2(M - r_L(b - G) - Tr_F) - \sqrt{(1 - 6d + 2(M - r_L(b - G) - Tr_F))^2 + 8r_L(b + 6(\beta(c - S) - bd) + 2b(M + Gr_L - Tr_F))}).$$

When $0 > g^{su}$, L can secure B 's support costlessly, such that she can set $g^* = 0$. This ensures both that she can pursue her unconstrained optimum war effort m_L^{un} while shielding herself from accountability and that she initiates a crisis when $q < q^{un}$, just as she does when $c \geq \hat{c}$. Since her unconstrained optimum is her most-preferred war effort, she is sure to choose it when she can do so at no cost ($g = 0$), since any alternative requires either a positive (and therefore wasted) side payment and/or an unattractively high war effort. To verify the conditions under which L proposes $g^* = 0$ and wins B 's support, we simply solve the inequality $0 \geq g^{su}$, which yields

$$\beta \leq \frac{b(6d - 2Gr_L - 2M + 2T - 1)}{6(c - S)} \equiv \beta^\dagger,$$

such that she proposes $g^* = 0$, wins B 's support, sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$ while T sets m_L^{un} , and is retained by V when $\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$.

Next, we focus on the case where $\beta > \beta^\dagger$, which ensures that $g^{su} > 0$. Substituting $g = g^{su}$ into the efforts derived above yields equilibrium efforts m_L^{su} and m_F^{su} , which we can use to fully characterize L 's choice over purchasing B 's support with a positive side payment and acting without it. In reduced form, L purchases B 's support when

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{su} r_L - m_F^{su} \right) - d \right) (G - g^{su} - m_L^{su}) > \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{rc} r_L - m_F^{rc} \right) - d \right) (G - m_L^{rc}),$$

or when $\beta < \hat{\beta}$, where $\hat{\beta}$ is the most expensive type of B that L finds affordable. Its derivation is complicated, so we omit it here, but the existence of $\hat{\beta}$ is guaranteed by the fact that both components of L 's expected utility, as above, decrease in β . Finally, when she will purchase B 's support, L initiates a crisis when

$$\left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{su} r_L - m_F^{su} \right) - d \right) (G - g^{su} - m_L^{su}) > qG,$$

or when, in reduced form,

$$q < \frac{1}{G} \left(\left(M - \frac{1}{2} + m_L^{su} r_L - m_F^{su} \right) - d \right) (G - g^{su} - m_L^{su}) \equiv q^{su}.$$

Thus, when $\beta < \beta \leq \hat{\beta}$, L buys B 's support and initiates a crisis iff $q < q^{su}$. As noted above,

equilibrium strategies when $\beta > \hat{\beta}$ are identical to those when $c < \hat{c}$, and strategies when $\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$ are identical to those when $c \geq \hat{c}$, in the restricted version of the model with no elite (see Proposition 1). This ensures that the proposed strategies are in equilibrium for $c < \hat{c}$. \square

Proof of Proposition 4. First, to establish the claim that β^\dagger decreases in G , note that the first partial with respect to G is

$$\frac{\partial \beta^\dagger}{\partial G} = \frac{br_L}{3(S-c)} > 0,$$

which is sure to be positive since $S > c$. Second, to establish the second claim, the first partial with respect to S is

$$\frac{\partial \beta^\dagger}{\partial S} = \frac{b(6d - 2Gr_L - 2M + 2T - 1)}{6(c-S)^2},$$

which is negative when

$$G > \frac{6d - 2M + 2T - 1}{2r_L}$$

and weakly positive otherwise. \square

Proof of Proposition 5. There are two claims to establish about the game with an elite. First, we compare initiation constraints with and without elite support, where $q^{su} > q^{rc}$ implies that $q^{su} - q^{rc} > 0$. Substituting the equilibrium value for q^{su} , we have

$$0 < -q^{rc} + \frac{1}{144Gr_L} \times (1 - 6d + 2M + 2(b+G)r_L - 2Tr_F + \sqrt{(1 - 6d + 2(M - Tr_F))^2 + 4r_L((b+G)((1 - 6d + 2M) + (b+G)r_L - 2Tr_F) + 12(c-S)\beta)})^2$$

which can be either positive or negative, depending on the value of β . Next, since the term under the radical (call it k) decreases in β , i.e. $\partial k / \partial \beta = 48r_L(c-S) < 0$, the whole of the squared term does as well. Therefore, when β is high enough, $q^{su} - q^{rc} < 0$, and when β is low enough, $q^{su} - q^{rc} > 0$.

Second, we compare L 's equilibrium war efforts with and without elite support. We first establish that m_L^{su} decreases in β , since its first partial is negative, or

$$\frac{4(c-S)}{\sqrt{(1 - 6d + 2(M - Tr_F))^2 + 4r_L((b+G)((1 - 6d + 2M) + (b+G)r_L - 2Tr_F) + 12(c-S)\beta)}} < 0.$$

Therefore, there is sure to exist a value of β above which $m_L^{su} < m_L^{rc}$ and below which $m_L^{su} > m_L^{rc}$, and solving the relevant inequalities shows that this value is

$$\beta = b + \frac{3c - 3d - Tr_F + M - 3S + 1/2}{r_L} + G.$$

Thus, there is no consistent relationship between elite support and either crisis initiation or war efforts.