

Elites, Voters, and Democracies at War*

Elizabeth N. Saunders

George Washington University

Scott Wolford

University of Texas at Austin

June 30, 2018

Abstract

Most theories of democracies at war assume that leaders deal directly with a public audience: voters. Yet elite bargains are an essential feature of democratic politics. We analyze a game-theoretic model in which (a) democratic elites can cue an inattentive voting public by opposing a leader's war effort and (b) leaders can offer elites side payments to 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 and choose their targets less selectively than autocrats. This elite-centered logic of democracy at war emerges not despite but because of the threat of political accountability. We show that explicitly theorizing elite bargaining, voter behavior, and leaders' strategic incentives can reconcile democratic advantage arguments with critiques from political behavior and autocratic accountability.

9968 words

*Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 2015 Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco CA, and at the GWU Institute for Security and Conflict Studies Research-in-Progress Workshop. Thanks to Sarah Croco, Charlie Glaser, Hein Goemans, Alexandra Guisinger, Sarah Kreps, Nikolay Marinov, Bruce Russett, and Caitlin Talmadge for helpful comments and suggestions, Yon Lupu for greasing the wheels at this project's inception, and to Workhorse Bar in Austin and Der Daiwel Rock Bar in Fredericksburg for providing excellent work environments.

Since the end of the Cold War, a major research agenda has coalesced around the distinctive and advantageous nature of democratic political institutions in crisis bargaining and coercive diplomacy (Fearon, 1994; Schultz, 2001), as well as war selection and war-fighting (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Lake, 1992; Reiter and Stam, 2002). These arguments generally rely on a direct relationship between leaders and voters, where the latter can use the sanctioning power of the ballot box to induce the former to defend the national interest. Yet even in democracies, voters often pay little attention to foreign policy, relying instead on cues from elites to judge leaders' performance in diplomacy and war (Berinsky, 2009; Zaller, 1992). Leaders, in turn, can strategically seek the endorsement of crucial elites when making conflict decisions (e.g. Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012; Trager and Vavreck, 2011). Compromises with military or legislative elites can allow leaders to continue wars even in the face of declining public support, as presidents discovered in the Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars. Elite politicking, facilitated by side payments, compromise, and logrolling, is part of democratic politics, yet it has been largely ignored by theorists of democracy and war.¹

What does elite bargaining over foreign policy imply for the relationship between democracy and war? To answer this question, we develop a theory of foreign policy-making at the elite level within democracies. Many elites in democracies represent or serve citizens,

¹See Snyder 1991 and Schultz 2001 for notable exceptions. In contrast, 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).

but they are also autonomous actors with their own preferences and opportunities to make strategic moves independent of the voters. Cabinet officials, 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's, as well as the ability to cue the public to evaluate the leader. We show that bargains struck with this potentially separate audience, which shapes leaders' accountability, alter our expectations about how democracies fight. Public accountability remains possible in our theory, but elite bargaining mediates the relationship, offering a second logic by which to understand the politics of democracies at war.

We analyze a game-theoretic model in which an elite's opposition can cue an inattentive voter to pay attention to a leader's bargaining position or war-fighting strategy, which activates familiar processes of *ex post* accountability. But leaders are strategic, and they can make side payments to accommodate pivotal elites, keeping damaging cues from reaching a public that might otherwise be inclined to punish them for poor performance. In this elite-led logic of democracies at war, leaders endogenously shape the public's ability to hold them accountable. This allows us to address ongoing debates about the "democratic advantage" (Schultz and Weingast, 2003), in which many recent studies have found few significant differences in the conflict behavior and even the military effectiveness of some democracies and autocracies (e.g. Baum and Potter, 2015; Downes and Sechser, 2012; Lyall, 2010; Talmadge, 2015; Weeks, 2008). We identify conditions under which the two logics of democracy at war operate. Democracies retain a distinctive public accountability logic, but introducing the intermediate role of elites and an associated second logic for democracies at war helps account for the rarity of public accountability on foreign policy. We incorporate two important features of democratic polities, including low costs of replacing leaders (Lake, 1992) and limited

public attention to foreign policy (Berinsky, 2009). We first analyze a restricted model including only a leader and median voter, reproducing in a spare environment several common relationships between political accountability and war. We then analyze the full model with an elite whose support may require the diversion of resources that cannot be devoted to the war effort. Focusing first on war effort and then extending the discussion to war initiation, we show that the most accountable leaders do not necessarily devote the greatest effort to their conflicts, nor are they more selective when initiating war. Most notably, democratic leaders do not always make large war efforts or shy away from conflicts with long odds, and these choices stem directly from voters' incentives to replace them for incompetence. The threat of replacement and the ability to manage the elite cues that trigger accountability can result in the leaders of democracies underperforming in war as publics fail to hold them accountable on the equilibrium path—that is, in the observational data that populate the empirical record.

The Democratic Advantage and Its Critics

Two empirical patterns, that democracies tend not to go to war against each other (Russett, 1993) and that they tend to win the wars they fight (Lake, 1992; Reiter and Stam, 2002), have generated interest in democratic distinctiveness in international relations. Explanations typically start with premises that leaders wish to stay in office and that elections give voters a low-cost mechanism, unavailable in autocracies, by which to hold their leaders accountable (Lake, 1992, p. 26). Voters can thus sanction their leaders directly for poor foreign policy (see Reiter and Stam, 2002, p. 9), and the threat of losing office both encourages better

war performance and greater selectivity in decisions to initiate conflicts (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999). But the democratic advantage has come under fire from two directions. First, scholars have challenged claims that democracies are unconditionally distinctive from autocracies, in areas such as the credibility of threats (Downes and Sechser, 2012; Weeks, 2008; Weiss, 2013), war initiation and selection (Baum and Potter, 2015; Clarke and Stone, 2008; Downes, 2009; Weeks, 2012), military effectiveness (Biddle and Long, 2004; Desch, 2010; Lyall, 2010; Talmadge, 2015), and war outcomes (Graham, Gartzke and Fariss, 2017). Further, non-electoral mechanisms of leader punishment can have real effects on the credibility of threats in authoritarian regimes (Weeks, 2008; Weiss, 2013), and—critical for our arguments—elite acquiescence can allow presidents to limit political costs for publicly backing down (Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012).

Second, as several critiques have noted IR models of electoral accountability often lack clear behavioral microfoundations, attributing to the median voter strategies she appears unlikely to adopt (see., e.g. Baum and Potter, 2010, 2015; Gartzke and Lupu, 2012; Slantchev, 2006). These critiques rest on well-established insights in the study of American political behavior emphasizing the rational ignorance of the mass public (Berinsky, 2009; Downs, 1957; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Zaller, 1992). Rather than gather relevant information at high personal cost, voters look to elites for cues about whether to punish leaders for poor performance; otherwise, they are unlikely to invest time and effort in evaluating their leaders' foreign policies. In the United States, for example, members of Congress are important cue-givers for voter evaluations of the use of force (Howell and Pevehouse, 2007, Ch. 7). This is not to suggest that voters can never gain information about conflicts from events (Gelpi, 2010), especially as they wear on for a long time and “reality asserts itself” (Baum and

Groeling, 2010a), though research has also shown that voters see information from the battlefield through the lens of elite or partisan cues (Berinsky, 2009, Ch. 5). But if voters rely on elite cues to evaluate foreign policy, then the assumption of an unmediated relationship between leader and voter may be distorting, even if that reliance is not absolute.

To the extent that leaders choose bargaining postures or war efforts to influence the elite consensus that shapes public support, an assumption that the two are independent may be problematic. Yet models of democratic foreign policy bypass intra-elite bargaining in favor of a more direct link between leaders and voters. Selectorate theory (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003), for example, distinguishes democratic systems by a winning coalition large enough that its support can't be purchased with private goods. As such, democratic leaders must focus on providing public goods, like victory in war, to retain office. Pleasing a larger number of people means that a democrat "cannot easily compensate for policy failure by doling out private goods," so successful public policies—in this case, victory in war—are the surest means of keeping their constituents happy. In contrast, autocrats can "more readily compensate for policy failure by providing benefits to their few key backers" (*ibid.*, p. 236.).

If elite cues are an important way that voters learn that a war is inadvisable or that an ongoing war is failing, then the elites that provide those cues can become a de facto small winning coalition—a potentially important amendment to the conventional story of democracies at war.² The public's reliance on elite cues can yield to key elites the power

²Selectorate theory itself contemplates such conditions: "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" (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003, p. 472). These "hierarchical" mechanisms, or "correlated

to influence the effective size, if not the actual decision, of the winning coalition. In these cases, private goods, i.e. the political favors and considerations that scholars of coalition politics would recognize as side payments (Riker, 1962), emerge as an attractive tool for leaders in democracies, just as they are according to selectorate theory in autocracies. Some work allows for mediation between leaders and the voters tasked with holding them accountable. Baum and Potter (2015), for example, show how variation in partisanship and media access affect accountability for war across democracies. They do not, however, explore leaders' strategic incentives to shape their own level of accountability. Slantchev (2006) shows that politicians may try to shape the information available to voters in a crisis signaling context, and his model assumes that side payments cannot be used to suppress the information by which voters can hold leaders accountable. Neither approach, then, combines a median voter reliant on elite cues to evaluate the leader with a leader and an elite that can bargain over the terms of the former's silence. We show below that explicitly theorizing elite bargaining and strategic leader behavior can reconcile democratic advantage arguments with critiques from both political behavior and autocratic accountability.

affinities" for the leader, take the form of identity voting (such as ethnic bloc voting) or "machine" politics (in which a 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" (*ibid.*, pp. 63-64, 471).

Democracy, War, and Coalition Politics

National security is a public good enhanced by selectivity and success in war. But decisions for war are often uncertain in their desirability, and elites have informational advantages over the public (see Baum and Potter, 2008), and the payoff from war may be realized only in the relatively distant future (Marinov, Nomikos and Robbins, 2015). Voters may therefore delegate to elites the task of informing them about the wisdom of fighting. In this section we consider, first, why the public would listen to elites; second, the identity of these elites and how leaders can secure their support with side payments, a possibility foreclosed for democracies in most models; and third, how our model relates to and departs from existing formulations.

We begin with the premise that voters often economize on information by using shortcuts rather than investing in information (Baum and Groeling, 2010*b*; Berinsky, 2009; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Zaller, 1992), and elite cues can provide such a shortcut. Scholars have shown that such elite cues can be important even in wartime. Although the elite's information advantage erodes as a war drags on (Baum and Groeling, 2010*a*), elite cues can shape not only public support for war itself (Berinsky, 2009; Trager and Vavreck, 2011; Zaller, 1992) but also perceptions of facts about the war, such as the level of casualties (Berinsky, 2009) and even perceptions whether the war was won or lost (Johnson and Tierney, 2006). Even in the Vietnam and Iraq wars, presidents were able to continue and even escalate U.S. involvement for many years before significant voter attention and electoral consequences kicked in—in the Vietnam case, for example, it took several years, and especially after 1967, for anti-war sentiment in Congress to fracture the prior elite consensus in favor of the war

(Zaller 1992, p. 102; see also Berinsky 2004, Ch. 5). In the absence of such elite cues, voters are not inclined to pay sufficient attention to punish leaders for ineffective foreign policy. Although we do not discount the possibility that in the real world, voters can glean information apart from elite cues, particularly as a war grinds on, we put the role of elites into sharp relief by modeling voter behavior through a blunt rule: voters tacitly support the leader's war effort unless cued by a member of the elite that the leader's performance is worth evaluating. Thus, the cue is not a signal from whose absence voters can still learn something; rather, we assume voters are simply not paying attention unless cued, and the content and timing of voter choices in our theoretical model reflect this.

But who are these elites, and why should voters listen to them? Voters seeking a shortcut have an interest in sources that are knowledgeable and authoritative, as well as those perceived to share their interests and values, or those perceived to be paying a cost to speak out (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). Members of Congress can be effective cue-givers in wartime (Baum and Groeling, 2010*b*; Howell and Pevehouse, 2007); the legislature has been the focus of much existing research on domestic constraints on foreign policy (see, e.g. Arena, 2015; Schultz, 1998). The military can also be a trusted source of cues on the use of force, given its knowledge and, in many democracies, its status as a trusted institution (Golby, Feaver and Dropp, 2018). National security or foreign policy officials inside the executive branch, likely to be perceived as knowledgeable and authoritative, can also be effective cue-givers, although their cues may be more effective if they speak out in opposition, given that they are expected to support the leader who appointed them.

The elites in our story care about the national interest, but there is usually a distribution of elite views about what the national interest is and whether and how force should

be used to defend it. Elites also have private political interests and varied access to direct information about the probability of success in war. Some, like legislators, are themselves elected; others, like military officers or the leader's advisers, do not face voters directly but have their own desires to influence policy and possibly their own careers. Given that the public may have ill-defined or shallow preferences about any given war, the potential for uncertainty and debate over the potential costs and benefits of war, and variation in the political, professional, or policy benefits that elites might gain from war (and citizens may not), there is likely to be significant daylight between elite and mass preferences—even if we assume that some elites represent the interests of voters.³ Furthermore, these same political, professional, or policy motives affect whether even elites appointed by the leader or who share her political affiliation will reflexively support the leader. Such uncertainty results in a tradeoff between loyalty to the incumbent and the temptation of defecting to the opposition, either through formal political opposition (in the case of legislators) or through indirect but still-consequential actions such as sending negative signals to legislators, leaking, or speaking out against a leader's policies (in the case of military or insider elites). Key to our story is a non-trivial and politically relevant possibility that these individuals can provide cues that would cause voters to take note of, and evaluate the leader's management of, a war effort they'd otherwise ignore.

We can now consider how leaders interact with elite cue-givers. If leaders deal with a relatively small set of elites, then they can use side payments to bargain with them. The

³Indeed, some survey evidence has shown gaps between elite and mass preferences (Feaver and Gelpi, 2004).

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.⁴ How do leaders 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, and even if such payments occur, they are 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 wartime, 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 policy or bill. Pork might be unlikely for Congress, but budgetary incentives might be likely for military and bureaucratic actors. For example, in the debate over the Iraq "surge," the Bush administration sought to gain the endorsement of a skeptical military by

⁴As 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.

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” (Woodward, 2008, p. 286).⁵ After extensive bargaining about the policy itself (about which more shortly), the service Chiefs endorsed the surge. The administration also took specific steps to placate individuals: Bush may have replaced his leadership team in Iraq with those who favored the surge, but 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. Bush was “determined to bring Casey along to his point of view to avoid creating damaging fissures within the team” (Feaver, 2011, p. 113).⁶

A threat can also be a side payment when it “consists of a promise not to carry out the threat and the gain of the follower is simply escape from misfortune” (Riker, 1962, p. 109). In that sense, both promises and threats “are intended to make an actor do something he would not otherwise do” (Milner, 1997, p. 111). Threats can work as side payments when an actor frames an issue in a way that puts those who oppose it on the wrong side of relevant opinion, as in the case of Senator Joseph McCarthy painting his opponents as treasonous during the early Cold War (Riker, 1962, p. 109-110). Presidents have used this tactic in

⁵See also Feaver (2011, p. 107).

⁶This 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.

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. Both promises and threats link a private benefit, whether a direct payment or the avoidance of pain—i.e., a side payment—to cooperation.

Whether side payments manifest as promises or threats, they shape the pool of available material and political resources. Even the “expenditure of energy on bargaining and planning tactics” is a cost of making side payments (Riker, 1962, p. 116). Expending political capital to ensure elite support today may diminish the ability to call in favors tomorrow, including further military escalation or changes in strategy. Both Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush faced this problem as support in Congress eroded over the course of their respective wars, but there are also opportunity costs to spending energy or favors on 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) suggests that even democracies can become “cartelized,” with narrow interests joining forces in ways that produce overextension; 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 the increased commitment in Europe that Truman desired was commitments in Asia (Ch. 7). Finally, policy concessions on the very issue under negotiation are also side payments (Riker 1962, pp. 111-112; Milner 1997, p. 109). In war, concessions on policy are common, and may involve the overall size of the war effort or military strategy. 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 bargained with

military leaders about the precise form of the surge and ultimately “modified the strategy as the process unfolded to address the initial concerns of the military and thus win its backing” (p. 114).⁷

As in all cases of private goods, a distinguishing feature of a policy concession related to war or conflict is that it is targeted at an 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 silence can prevent a potentially skeptical public from evaluating the leader’s war effort. 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). It is also important to note that most side payments are likely to be ignored or invisible to voters—not only because they might be secret, but also because even if they are not they likely exist beyond the level of detail to which most voters pay attention. Voters may not know that the side payment was given, that a promotion or coordination of policies even constituted a side payment, or that observed elite support came at a price.

⁷There is some debate about whether these tools can all be lumped together as side-payments or whether they represent distinct political phenomena (for a discussion, see Milner, 1997, pp. 109-112). We see them as side payments. Policy concessions that relate to the war itself directly affect the resources available to fight, so we focus on them in our main model. In the appendix, we consider an extension in which elites have preferences about the effort devoted to the war and argue that results should be broadly similar.

It is also worth considering whether we need to go beyond standard models of political institutions, like selectorate theory, to explore how democracies might behave in a small-coalition scenario. If we stipulate that the above discussion of elite cue-taking is correct and that democratic selectorates are effectively a small elite, why can we not simply revert to selectorate theory's account of small-coalition systems? One reason is that we aim to model features of democracies that the literature on democracies and war have suggested make them distinctive and show that even under these conditions, a second, elite-driven logic of democracies at war emerges; it's thus important that the median voter play a role in our model, even if she ultimately acts off the equilibrium path. Selectorate theory makes few assumptions about the nature of political institutions, but we attempt to stack the deck in favor of distinctive features of democracy, such as low costs for replacing the leader, to give democracies the best chance to have advantages in war. Any deviations from this favorable path, then, can be attributed to our specific theoretical innovations.

On the behavioral side, other arguments note the basic information asymmetry between leaders and citizens, and theorize how that information gap can be bridged through opposition parties and independent media (Baum and Potter, 2015; Slantchev, 2006). But rather than focus on structural determinants of the availability of such sources across democracies (e.g. Baum and Potter, 2015) or leaders' ability to repress speech (e.g. Slantchev, 2006), we ask a different question: how might a leader subject to electoral punishment manage the cues the public receives about a war? We problematize the public's opportunity to judge the outcome directly by exploring whether cues are given or strategically prevented. Our theory also accounts for important variation within democratic states, so we hold constant certain

features of democracies and explore how leaders' behavior can affect wartime behavior.⁸

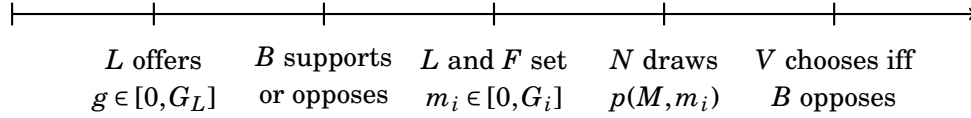
Finally, the importance of elite cues is widely accepted, but not when and how strongly they influence public attitudes (e.g., Gelpi, 2010). It is not necessary for our argument that every member of the public take a cue, but to the extent that a large number do at least some of the time, the size of the coalition independently scrutinizing a leader's actions will shrink. Our model is exploratory (see Clarke and Primo, 2012, Ch. 4) in the sense that it takes the possibility of credible cues as given and traces how this mechanism shapes strategic incentives for democratic leaders and the elite cue-givers themselves. As we show next, the politics of elite support and cue-giving can account for both why leaders in democracies might wage losing wars and why their constituents fail to punish them for it.

Model

Suppose that two states, domestic (D) and foreign (F), engage in a conflict over a prize of unit size. Foreign is unitary, but domestic is made up of an incumbent leader (L), a median selector (V , or voter), and an elite (B) whose opposition cues the voter to evaluate the leader on the outcome of the conflict. If B opposes L 's policy, V chooses whether to retain or replace L . The median voter is pivotal, in that her choice is decisive in retaining or replacing the

⁸Slantchev (2006) shows that opposition signals in a democracy may not be credible because of their political motive; thus, only if the leader can credibly threaten to repress dissent or if there is an exogenous information source like the media can citizens gain information. We assume cues can be credible on their own, as others have demonstrated (e.g. Baum and Groeling, 2010b), to isolate the causal mechanism we aim to explore.

Figure 1: The timeline of the game



leader, but so is the elite, who must first choose to politicize the war if the voter is allowed a move. This game form allows us to (a) represent an inattentive voter, i.e. one that doesn't evaluate the leader on the war outcome unless cued to do so by a member of the elite, and (b) ensure that elite cues are credible and decisive. Because we are interested in exploring how and when this elite-driven logic of democracy at war works, our model ensures that elites actually cue the public. We don't claim this logic always operates—indeed, we show that a voter-driven logic obtains under some circumstances—and in the real world, voters may evaluate leaders along other dimensions, dismiss some elite cues, or obtain information from other sources (cf. Slantchev, 2006). Our game isolates the potential effects of elite cues on voter evaluations, war effort, and conflict initiation, allowing us to explore a potential causal mechanism in a spare, tractable environment.

Figure 1 gives the game's timeline. First, *L* offers *B* a side payment $g \in [0, G_L]$ out of the domestic pie ($G_L > 0$), the same pool of resources from which *L* draws resources for the war effort. (If $g = 0$, there is no side payment, which requires $g > 0$.) Next, *B* chooses whether to support or oppose *L* politically, where the former entails accepting the side payment. *L* and *F* then choose costly levels of effort ($m_L \geq 0$ and $m_F \geq 0$, respectively) for the conflict, which we can think of as a war or any militarized contest short of war that determines shares 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 *B*'s support, the voter has no move,

retaining the leader by construction. If B opposes, he politicizes the crisis, cueing V to evaluate the leader on the outcome of the conflict.

Outcomes entail the result of the conflict and L 's political fate. L values two goods: (a) her country's share of the international pie and (b) her own share of the domestic pie, i.e. the rents, resources, or prerogatives that she enjoys when she retains office. Her utility function is concave, such that $u_L = \eta_L \rho_L$, where η_L represents the conflict outcome and ρ_L the benefits of retaining office. A larger share of either good is most valuable when the other is also large. We make L 's preferences concave for analytical convenience, but as long as war efforts are marginally costly, an additive utility function ($\eta_L + \rho_L$) produces similar results, albeit at the cost of a more cumbersome analysis; we opt here for the simpler multiplicative representation.⁹ Likewise, state F values both the international pie and its own domestic resources, $u_F = \eta_F \rho_F$, and the elite (B) in state D values the international pie and his own share of the domestic pie: $u_B = \eta_B \rho_B$. Finally, V values competent leadership; the more of the international pie her country receives less the social costs of securing it (from which the leader is insulated), the less inclined she is to replace L .

Several features of the model are worth noting. First, absent an elite cue, the voter retains L in office. This ensures that we don't study a degenerate case; if elite support can't

⁹Similar results can be obtained when payoffs enter additively if we add a marginal cost of effort, i.e. $u_L = p(m_L, m_F) + (G - l m_L)$, where $p(m_L, m_F)$ is a contest success function and $l > 0$ is a marginal cost of effort. This results in a proliferation of equilibria (distinguished by whether or not L meets her budget constraint) and more involved interpretation of the effects of parameters like G and M .

insulate the leader from the voter's evaluation, then she has no reason to pursue it, and our model would contain extraneous machinery. This also ensures the threat of removal following elite opposition is the only source of political threat. This is a strong assumption, but it is useful to isolate the elite-driven logic, abstracting away from the messier information environment of the real world. Finally, the side payment is beyond the notice of most voters, so the occurrence of the cue, rather than the side payment itself, is what shapes V 's response. Therefore, elite support for L 's war policy leads the public's view to remain unchanged from what it would have been in the absence of elite disagreement.

For the military contest, Nature allocates a share of the international pie to each side as a function of the distribution of military capabilities $M \in (0, 1)$ and military efforts ($m_i \geq 0$, where $i = \{L, F\}$). L captures the share $p(M, m_L, m_F) = (M + m_L - m_F)$, and F 's share is $1 - p(M, m_i)$.¹⁰ Conflict is also costly; each leader draws resources from the war effort from the domestic pie, from which L may already have drawn a side payment. The domestic pies remaining for L and F are $(G_L - g - m_L)$ and $(G_F - m_F)$, where $G_F = 1$ without loss of generality. For F , $u_F = (1 - p(M, m_i))(1 - m_F)$. L 's payoffs depend on the the side payment, her military effort, and whether V retains her. Surviving in office yields $u_L = p(M, m_i)(G_L - g - m_L)$, and losing office yields $u_L = 0$.

V 's payoffs resemble L 's, though she pays a social cost $d > 0$ of conflict from which L is insulated. Retaining L yields $u_V = p(M, m_i) - d$, and replacing her yields $u_V = S - c$, where $S \in (0, 1)$ increases in the expected competence of a new leader and $c \in (0, S)$ is the

¹⁰This also implies the restriction $m_L - m_F < M < 1 - (m_L - m_F)$. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) use a similar function.

cost of replacement. When replacement is as easy as casting a ballot, c is low, but it rises in the difficulty of replacing the leader. As such, c represents the extent to which political institutions in state D are democratic (low c) or autocratic (high c). Finally, S represents 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. This allows us to consider variations in both the institutional cost of participation and the viability of challengers, which can vary widely even in democracies.

Finally, B 's payoffs depend on the side payment and whether he supports or opposes L . Like the leader, B is insulated from the social costs of war. If he supports and L retains office, he receives $u_B = p(M, m_i)(b + g)$ for the conflict outcome the private benefits of remaining loyal ($b > 0$) and any payment (g) he might receive. If he opposes and L retains office, he receives $u_B = p(M, m_i)(\beta)$, where $\beta > 0$ is the private payoff for a political breach with the leader. If L loses office, B gets the same payoff that he does when opposing; he values the international outcome, but he loses access to the benefits of staying in the leader's good graces. This construction allows us to characterize elites in terms of the ease with which their support can be purchased through the relative sizes of b and β : 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. When $\beta = b$, B is politically neutral; support is based only on 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, when $\beta < b$, we have a loyal elite whose temptation to defect comes in the form of forcing 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, when $\beta > b$, B 's loyalty is less assured; B may

require larger side payments or a better military outcome to overcome the temptation to oppose. Since side payments come at the expense of the same national pie from which war efforts are drawn, L faces a difficult tradeoff whether B is relatively loyal or disloyal.

Analysis

We analyze two variants of the model. In the restricted variant, the voter evaluates directly the leader's performance in the crisis. A familiar pattern emerges in which democratic states make larger war efforts and secure larger shares of the international pie, reflecting the traditional logic of democracy at war. In the unrestricted variant, the ability to shield herself from accountability sometimes allows the leader of a democracy to make a smaller war effort than even politically insulated autocrats—a second, elite-driven logic. Democracies may fight harder on average, but we identify conditions under which leaders of democracies make smaller war efforts thanks to the support of pivotal elites. In the model with no elite, we summarize results in terms of V 's costs of replacing the leader, but in the full model a second dimension emerges: the cost of buying elite support with a side payment that keeps the war depoliticized and secures the leader in office regardless of the war's outcome.

The Model Without an Elite

In the model without an elite, V requires no elite cue to judge the leader's performance. If L devotes sufficient effort to the conflict, V retains her in office, but the effort that V can demand depends on the credibility of her threat to replace L . Proposition 1 states that, when V can punish unsatisfactory performance, L devotes more to the war effort than she devotes

if V cannot credibly threaten to replace her for retaining a larger share of the domestic pie for herself.

Proposition 1. *In the game with no elite, the following strategy profile constitutes the unique Subgame Perfect Equilibrium.*

(a.) *When $c \geq \hat{c}$, L sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$ (where $m_L^{un} > m_L^{rc}$), F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{un}$, and V retains iff*

$$m_L \geq m_L^{rc}.$$

(b.) *When $c < \hat{c}$, L sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$, F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{rc}$, and V retains iff $m_L \geq m_L^{rc}$.*

See appendix for proof.

In Proposition 1, L and F choose military efforts to maximize their shares of the international pie while retaining as much of their domestic pies as possible. Both sides invest more in the war effort as L 's domestic pie (G_L) grows, while L devotes fewer extra resources, and F more, as L 's military advantage (M) increases. L must also worry about the ease with which V can replace her. When $c \geq \hat{c}$, V finds it prohibitively costly to replace L . In this case, where “elections” are unfree, uncompetitive, or both, L sets a level of effort that we call her *unconstrained optimum*, or $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$. At her unconstrained optimum, she can balance F 's effort while preserving an acceptable share of the domestic pie for herself. On the other hand, when $c < \hat{c}$, V finds turning L out of office both feasible and attractive. V can credibly threaten to replace an L that fails to choose a level of military effort that satisfies V 's *retention constraint*, i.e. the minimal level of effort that L must devote to secure V 's support ($m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$). The desire to avoid reselection, which yields L 's worst possible payoff (0), means that L must devote more to the war effort, securing a larger share of the international pie at the expense of her own share of the domestic pie.

In the restricted game, greater levels of domestic accountability (lower values of c) are associated with larger war efforts, as democratic leaders “try harder” than autocratic leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, p. 794).¹¹ But while we use the costs of replacement as a shorthand for democracy, several other factors shape L ’s incentives to “try harder.” As we show in the appendix, L chooses a war effort of $m^* = m_L^{rc}$ when

$$c < S + d - \frac{G_L - M}{3} = \hat{c}. \quad (1)$$

This constraint is easier to meet when domestic politics are more competitive (S is high), when the leader can afford larger war efforts (G_L is high), and when the social costs of war (d) are high. With a credible threat to remove L , the voter demands higher war efforts; absent the threat of deposition, L has no reason to try to compensate the public for shouldering the burdens of war. Thus, low costs of replacement are necessary but not sufficient to ensure that voters can demand extensive war efforts. Elections can be free and fair, but if they’re also uncompetitive, the democratic advantage may fail to manifest even when leaders are unable to purchase the support of key elites.

¹¹We replicate one mechanism that might account for democratic distinctiveness, but there are others, including credible commitments not to punish leaders that lose office (see Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Debs and Goemans, 2010).

The Model With an Elite

In the unrestricted model, the conflict is politicized only if the leader fails to secure B 's support. Absent a cue, V retains L . Securing B 's support can be expensive, because side payments draw from L 's share of the domestic pie. We restrict our analysis of the model with an elite to conditions under which $c < \hat{c}$, where L 's unconstrained optimum is insufficient to ensure her political survival, because when $c \geq \hat{c}$ the voter's costs for removing L are so high that L need not worry about elite support. Thus L can retain a large share of the domestic pie only by making a potentially costly side payment to secure B 's support. Proposition 2 states that, when B 's support comes at an acceptable price, L purchases it and devotes less to the war effort than the retention constraint demands—at times even less than she does at her unconstrained optimum.

Proposition 2. *In the game with an elite, the following strategy profile constitutes the unique Subgame Perfect Equilibrium when $c < \hat{c}$.*

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

See appendix for proof.

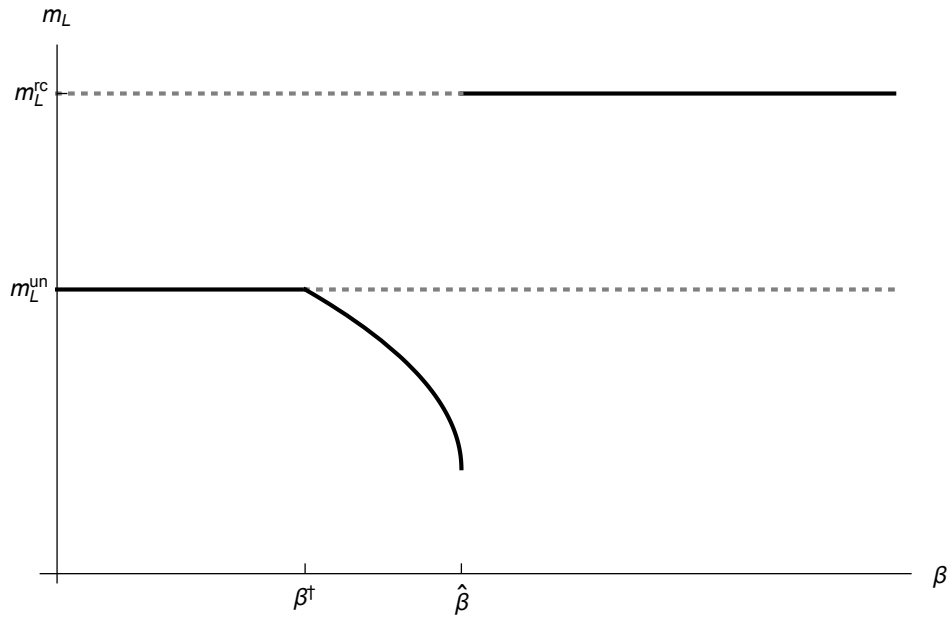
The SPE described in Proposition 2 shares several features with the equilibrium of the game without an elite. Both L and F balance the private costs of military efforts against increasing their share of the international pie, and V retains L in office following a sufficiently high effort—but only if V is given that choice. Should L purchase B 's support, V never receives a cue that the war has been managed incompetently, removing the threat of removal. Precisely because V can't commit not to remove L for poor performance, L has an incentive to deny V that opportunity. Nonetheless, L only purchases elite support when the price is not too high. B accepts side payments when they are large enough, or

$$g \geq \beta \left(\frac{M + m_L^{rc} - m_F^{rc}}{M + m_L^{su} - m_F^{su}} \right) - b, \quad (2)$$

and Inequality (2) shows that the price rises in the attractiveness of opposition (β). When $\beta > \hat{\beta}$, the required side payment is too large, threatening to compromise the domestic pie, war effort, or both. L foregoes elite support, meeting the retention constraint ($m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$) and ensuring her survival. But when B 's support is not so expensive ($\beta \leq \hat{\beta}$), L can both retain office *and* avoid escalating the war effort to the retention constraint without dipping too deeply into rents of holding office. When B 's support can be purchased even without a side payment ($\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$ such that $g^* = 0$), L sets her unconstrained optimum ($m_L^* = m_L^{un}$), leveraging insulation from public scrutiny to behave as she would if the voter couldn't remove her. And when B 's support is affordable but expensive (the middling range of β shown in Figure 2), L devotes *less* to the war effort ($m_L^* = m_L^{su} < m_L^{un}$) than she would absent a credible threat of removal.

Denying the voter a cue that allows her to punish poor performance, L breaks the link

Figure 2: L 's war effort in the game with an elite by B 's payoff for opposition



between democratic accountability and large war efforts. When B 's support is cheap enough to buy but not so cheap that it takes very little from the domestic pie, or when $\beta^\dagger < \beta \leq \hat{\beta}$, L is unable both to resist the temptation to insulate herself politically *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—an anemic war effort—that voters hope to deter. As a result, V 's country underperforms in the war, even as V fails to hold L accountable on the equilibrium path, dragging the war effort below both L 's unconstrained optimum and V 's retention constraint. Notably, the lowest war efforts ($m_L^* = m_L^{su}$) occur not when the elite is relatively more loyal (and thus easy to buy off) but when B is slightly less loyal, and thus able to demand a larger side payment in return for his support.

What determines whether elite support supports very low war efforts? Proposition 2

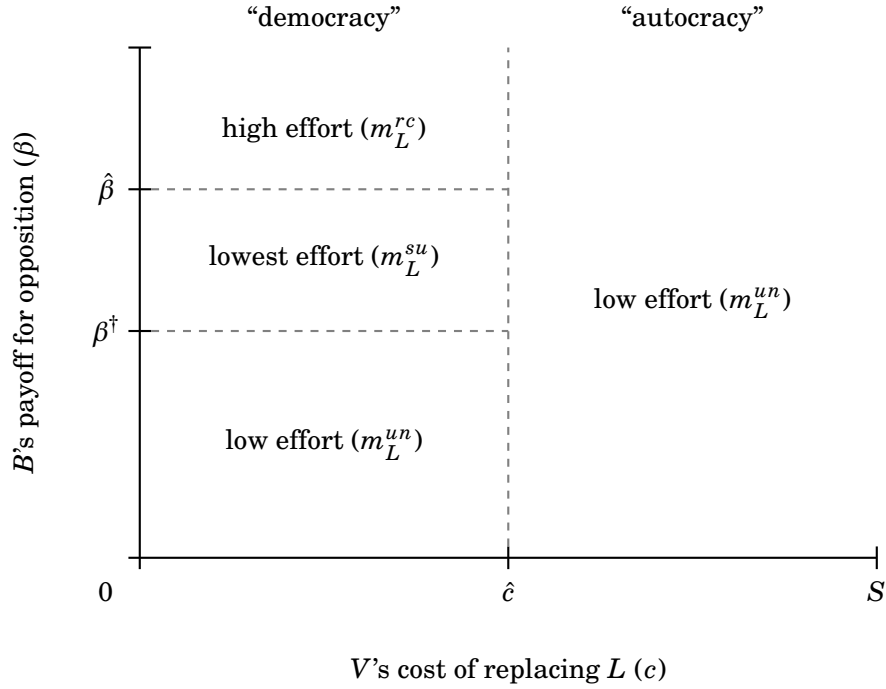
states that the critical threshold is

$$\beta^\dagger = \frac{b(G_L + M)}{3(S - c + d)}, \quad (3)$$

above which L buys the support of an elite with relatively divergent preferences but devotes the lowest effort to the war *and* survives in office. And where competitive domestic politics (high S) and high social costs of war (d) encourage larger war efforts in the model without an elite, the opposite obtains once leaders secure elite support. Increasingly competitive domestic politics and higher social costs of war each *lower* the right hand side of Inequality (3), discouraging L from “trying harder” to retain office. However, a larger domestic pie (G_L) and a more substantial military advantage (M) both make the constraint more difficult to meet, because they drive down the price that B can demand for his support; the more likely is L to do well in the conflict in the first place, the more likely is B to support for free (accepting $g^* = 0$, as he does when $\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$).

Next, what shapes the ease with which elite support can be purchased? Support may be cheaper when it’s easier to paint opposition as unpatriotic or incompetent in foreign policy (i.e., when β is low). When L has a large coalition, e.g. large Congressional majorities, support may also come cheap (see Howell and Pevehouse, 2007), thanks to higher values of initial loyalty (b) in crucial legislative committees. More specific conditions may also matter: if we think of B as an individual with political ambitions of his own (high β), L may need to give B a particularly large side payment to convince B to forgo the benefits of politicizing the war. This is not unheard of: Kennedy and Johnson both co-opted potential Republican rival Henry Cabot Lodge by appointing and retaining him as Ambassador to South Vietnam

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



in the early stages of the Vietnam War (Freedman, 2000, p.367-368).

Figure 3 describes differences across the games with and without elites, plotting L 's equilibrium war effort as a function of V 's costs of replacement (c) and B 's value for opposition (β). V 's threat to replace L becomes less credible—and the country less democratic—as we move to the right; B 's support becomes more expensive as we move upward. In the model without an elite, effort is highest when $c < \hat{c}$, and effort is low when replacement is less credible. However, when side payments are possible, the “democratic” range of the equilibrium space is parsed differently. High effort satisfying the retention constraint occurs only when L can't afford B 's support, limiting the size of the domestic consensus and forcing her to invest heavily in the war effort. Next, when B is most loyal ($\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$), L secures elite support on the cheap and sets her unconstrained optimum, investing just as much as she would

with no threat of replacement. Finally, when $\beta^\dagger < \beta \leq \hat{\beta}$, B 's support is at the expensive end of affordable. Therefore, L invests less in the war effort than even her unconstrained optimum would dictate, avoiding replacement at the hands of a public that has not received an elite cue to judge the outcome. When domestic politics are competitive and elite support is expensive, then leaders in democracies may engage in unusually low war efforts.

Extension: Conflict Initiation

Democratic advantage arguments also see accountable leaders as uniquely selective in decisions over when to use force (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999; Filson and Werner, 2004; Reiter and Stam, 2002), so in this section we extend our model by giving L a choice over initiating a conflict or tolerating the status quo. We show that while L is more selective in initiating conflicts when the costs of removal are low in a model with no elite, the relationship between the costs of removal and conflict initiation in the model with an elite is much weaker. Though still more selective on average, a democratic L 's willingness to initiate is conditioned by the costs of removal and the price at which she can secure elite support. When large but affordable side payments encourage the lowest war efforts in equilibrium, she initiates conflicts more selectively than she would at her unconstrained optimum, though still less selectively than when she meets the retention constraint.

L begins the extended game by choosing whether to initiate the conflict in Figure 1 or to pass. If L initiates, the game plays out exactly as it does above. If L passes, V chooses whether to retain or replace L in office. If L retains office after passing, she receives the status quo share of the international pie, $q \in (0, 1)$, and retains the whole of the domestic

pie, $G_L > 0$, such that $u_L = qG_L$. If V removes her, $\rho_L = 0$, which ensures that $u_L = 0$. The voter receives $u_V = q$ if she retains L , since L 's foreign policy competence to this point has produced the existing international status quo. If she replaces L , her payoffs are as given above $(S - c)$.¹² Finally, we assume that $q > S - c$, such that the voter will not replace L if she passes. This rules out diversionary or “gambling for resurrection” (Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Downs and Rocke, 1994) explanations for conflict.

We take equilibrium behavior as given by Propositions 1 and 2, then analyze for any given strategy profile whether L is willing to enter a conflict subgame. Since L never takes an action that leads to her removal, we solve

$$(M + m_L^* - m_F^*)(G_L - g^* - m_L^*) > qG_L$$

to identify conditions under which L initiates. This yields a value of q below which the status quo is sufficiently unattractive that L initiates; as this *initiation constraint* falls, L is more selective. Proposition 3 corresponds to the model without an elite, and Proposition 4 corresponds to the model with an elite.

Proposition 3. *In the model with no elite, $q_{rc} < q_{un}$ when $c < \hat{c}$, such that L initiates crises more selectively when $c < \hat{c}$ than she is when $c \geq \hat{c}$.*

In the game without an elite, we see selectivity consistent with democratic advantage arguments. When $c < \hat{c}$, L must meet the retention constraint, and she initiates conflicts for a narrower range of the status quo ($q < q_{rc}$) than she does when the costs of replacement

¹² F 's payoffs are trivial, so we don't specify them here.

are high enough ($c \geq \hat{c}$) that she can set her unconstrained optimum ($q < q_{un}$). Retaining office when V can credibly threaten to remove her requires such heavy investments in the war effort that L initiates conflict only when she can improve on an already dire status quo or when F is sufficiently weak that military success is cheap. But when V can't credibly threaten replacement, L is more willing to initiate, using less of the domestic pie in pursuit of the international pie; insulated from both the threat of removal and the social costs of war, less accountable leaders are correspondingly more willing to initiate.

Proposition 4. *In the model with an elite, $q_{rc} \leq q_{su} \leq q_{un}$, such that L initiates crises most selectively when she does not secure elite support ($c < \hat{c}$ and $\beta \geq \hat{\beta}$) and least selectively when she can set her unconstrained optimum war effort ($c \geq \hat{c}$ or $c < \hat{c}$ and $\beta < \beta^\dagger$).*

In the full model, the opportunity to purchase elite support more cheaply than voter support attenuates the relationship between the costs of replacement and conflict initiation. Recall that when $c \geq \hat{c}$, L chooses her unconstrained optimum ($m_L^* = m_L^{un}$) and initiates when $q < q_{un}$, just as she does in the game without an elite. But as the costs of removal fall such that $c < \hat{c}$, V 's threat to replace L induces greater selectivity only when elite support is too expensive ($\beta > \hat{\beta}$). When elite support comes cheapest ($\beta \leq \beta^\dagger$), L is no more selective than she is without a threat of removal, initiating crises when $q < q_{un}$, where $q < q_{rc}$ (as established by Proposition 3). Finally, as stated in Proposition 4, when elite support is affordable but still expensive, driving L 's efforts below the unconstrained optimum, she initiates conflicts more selectively than she does when elite support is cheap but still less selectively than when V can threaten to remove her ($q_{rc} \leq q_{su} \leq q_{un}$). L knows that she must make a relatively large side payment ($g^* = g_{su}$) to secure elite support, but the costs

to the domestic pie discourage her from being as willing to initiate as she would be if B were more loyal. Under the same conditions that elite support leads L to make the lowest war efforts in equilibrium, she is also slightly more cautious thanks to the costs of the endeavor, which she pays not to the war effort but to the elite whose support keeps her in office.

Conclusion

Incorporating theories of voting behavior and elite bargaining in a mode of war effort and conflict initiation, we have shown that democracy can be either helpful or harmful in foreign policy. When elite consensus can be easily purchased with side payments, leaders in democracies may under-invest in war efforts and choose their conflicts less selectively. Direct public accountability remains possible in our account, but we identify conditions under which weak military efforts (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 process.

One can ask whether the elite-led logic we identify is consistent with democracy. But Kant distinguishes between direct democracy and republicanism, labeling the former a “despotism” and identifying the latter’s separation of powers as the main constraint on war (Kant, 1970, p. 100-101). Arguments in *The Federalist* 9 and 10 for representative democracy also rest on concerns about direct democracy. Furthermore, a strand of democratic theory, well-represented in comparative politics debates but less familiar to the IR literature, stresses a “minimalist” approach to democracy (Przeworski, 1999) in which voters elect

politicians but largely ignore the details of policymaking until the next election.¹³ Accountability helps keep politicians from pursuing extreme policies, but it does so only *ex post*, leaving many of the details up to elites. Other views of what makes democracy distinct prevail as well, including credible commitments not to mistreat leaders after they leave office (Chiozza and Goemans, 2011; Debs and Goemans, 2010), but we have provided an account that confronts the empirical reality of voter inattention and the role of elites, as well as the strategic behavior of democratic leaders. Even when we assume that the costs of participation are uniquely low, democratic polities may behave in ways that many theories attribute mostly to autocracies.

References

- Arena, Philip. 2015. "Crisis Bargaining, Domestic Opposition, and Tragic Wars." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 27(1):101–131.
- Baum, Matthew A. and Philip B.K. Potter. 2008. "The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11:39–65.
- Baum, Matthew A. and Philip B.K. Potter. 2010. "Democratic Peace, Domestic Audience Costs, and Political Communication." *Political Communication* 27(4):453–470.
- Baum, Matthew A. and Philip B.K. Potter. 2015. *War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Baum, Matthew A. and Tim Groeling. 2010a. "Reality asserts itself: Public opinion on Iraq and the elasticity of reality." *International Organization* 64(3):443–479.
- Baum, Matthew A. and Tim J. Groeling. 2010b. *War Stories: The Causes and Consequences of Public Views of War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2004. *Silent voices: Public opinion and political participation in America*. Princeton University Press.

¹³See also Fearon 1999.

- Berinsky, Adam J. 2009. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Biddle, Stephen and Stephen Long. 2004. "Democracy and military effectiveness: A deeper look." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48(4):525–546.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson and James D. Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson and Alastair Smith. 1999. "An Institutional Explanation for the Democratic Peace." *American Political Science Review* 93(4):791–807.
- Caverley, Jonathan D. 2014. *Democratic Militarism: Voting, Wealth, and War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chiozza, Giacomo and Hein E. Goemans. 2011. *Leaders and International Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, Kevin A. and David M. Primo. 2012. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, Kevin A. and Randall W. Stone. 2008. "Democracy and the Logic of Political Survival." *American Political Science Review* 102(3):392.
- Debs, Alexandre and Hein E. Goemans. 2010. "Regime Type, The Fate of Leaders, and War." *American Political Science Review* 104(3):430–446.
- Desch, Michael C. 2010. *Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism*. JHU Press.
- Downes, Alexander B. 2009. "How Smart and Tough Are Democracies? Reassessing Theories of Democratic Victory in War." *International Security* 33(4):9–51.
- Downes, Alexander B. and Todd S. Sechser. 2012. "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility." *International Organization* 66(3):457–489.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Downs, George W. and David M. Rocke. 1994. "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War." *American Journal of Political Science* 38(2):362–80.
- Fearon, James D. 1994. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88(3):577–592.
- Fearon, James D. 1999. Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance. In *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, ed. Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski and Susan Stokes. New York: Cambridge University Press pp. 55–97.

- Feaver, Peter D. 2011. "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision." *International Security* 35(4):87–125.
- Feaver, Peter D. and Christopher Gelpi. 2004. *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Filson, Darren and Suzanne Werner. 2004. "Bargaining and Fighting: The Impact of Regime Type on War Onset, Duration, and Outcomes." *American Journal of Political Science* 48(2):296–313.
- Freedman, Lawrence. 2000. *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*. Oxford University Press.
- Gartzke, Erik and Yonatan Lupu. 2012. "Still Looking for Audience Costs." *Security Studies* 21(3):391–397.
- Gelpi, Christopher. 2010. "Performing on Cue? The Formation of Public Opinion Toward War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54(1):88–116.
- Golby, James, Peter D. Feaver and Kyle A. Dropp. 2018. "Elite Military Cues and Public Opinion About the Use of Military Force." *Armed Forces & Society* 44(1):44–71.
- Graham, Benjamin A.T., Erik Gartzke and Christopher J. Fariss. 2017. "The Bar Fight Theory of International Conflict: Regime Type and Victory." *Political Science Research and Methods* 5(4):613–639.
- Howell, William G. and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Johnson, Dominic D.P. and Dominic Tierney. 2006. *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1970. *Perpetual Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lake, David A. 1992. "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War." *American Political Science Review* 86(1):24–37.
- Levendusky, Matthew S. and Michael C. Horowitz. 2012. "When Backing Down is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs." *Journal of Politics* 74(2):323–338.
- Lupia, Arthur and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyall, Jason. 2010. "Do Democracies Make Inferior Counterinsurgents? Reassessing Democracy's Impact on War Outcomes and Duration." *International Organization* 64(1):167–92.
- Marinov, Nikolay, William G. Nomikos and Josh Robbins. 2015. "Does Electoral Proximity Affect Security Policy?" *Journal of Politics* 77(3):762–773.

- Mayer, Frederick W. 1992. "Managing Domestic Differences in International Negotiations: The Strategic Use of Internal Side-Payments." *International Organization* 46(4):793–818.
- Milner, Helen V. 1997. *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1999. *Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense*. New York: Cambridge University Press pp. 23–55.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1988. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: the Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42(3):427–460.
- Reiter, Dan and Allan C. Stam. 2002. *Democracies at War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Riker, William H. 1962. *The Theory of Political Coalitions*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Russett, Bruce M. 1993. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schultz, Kenneth A. 1998. "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review* 92(4):829–844.
- Schultz, Kenneth A. 2001. *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schultz, Kenneth A. and Barry R. Weingast. 2003. "The Democratic Advantage: Institutional Foundations of Financial Power in International Competition." *International Organization* 57(01):3–42.
- Slantchev, Branislav L. 2006. "Politicians, the Media, and Domestic Audience Costs." *International Studies Quarterly* 50(2):445–477.
- Snyder, Jack L. 1991. *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Talmadge, Caitlin. 2015. *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Trager, Robert F. and Lynn Vavreck. 2011. "The Political Costs of Crisis Bargaining: Presidential Rhetoric and the Role of Party." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3):526–545.
- Weeks, Jessica L. 2008. "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve." *International Organization* 62(1):35–64.
- Weeks, Jessica L. 2012. "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict." *American Political Science Review* 106(2):325–347.

- Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2013. "Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences and Nationalist Protest in China." *International Organization* 67(1):1-35.
- Woodward, Bob. 2008. *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

Proofs

Proof of Proposition 1. We prove the existence of the equilibrium via backward induction, which ensures that equilibrium actions are based on credible threats—i.e., that strategy profiles are Nash equilibria in every proper subgame. Begin with V 's decision at the terminal node. She retains L iff

$$u_V(\text{retain}) \geq u_V(\text{replace}) \Leftrightarrow (M + m_L - m_F) - d \geq S - c,$$

or when

$$m_L \geq S - c - (M - m_F) + d = m_L^{rc}, \quad (4)$$

which defines V 's retention constraint. Equation 5 shows that m_L is in equilibrium a function of m_L , so Inequality (4) presents the constraint in reduced form.

Next, consider strategies in the military contest, where L and F simultaneously choose military efforts. We first consider the case in which $c \geq \hat{c}$, such that L 's unconstrained optimum is sufficient to secure retention. Objective functions are

$$EU_L(m_L, m_F) = (M + m_L - m_F)(G_L - m_L)$$

and

$$EU_F(m_L, m_F) = (1 - M - m_L + m_F)(1 - m_F),$$

and the first-order conditions are

$$G_L - M + m_F - 2m_L = M - 2m_F + m_L = 0,$$

yielding a pair of optimal efforts,

$$m_L^{un} = \frac{2G_L - M}{3} \quad \text{and} \quad m_F^{un} = \frac{G_L + M}{3}.$$

If L can choose her unconstrained optimum and retain office, which is the case when m_L^{un} satisfies the retention constraint ($m_L^{un} \geq m_L^{rc}$), then she is sure to do so, since either term in $EU_L(m_L, m_F)$ can at worst equal zero, since $0 \leq p(m_L, m_F) \leq 1$ and $m_L \leq G_L$.

To establish when $m_L^{un} \geq m_L^{rc}$, we must establish F 's best military effort response to m_L^{rc} , which requires solving the first-order condition for $EU_F(m_L, m_F)$ in isolation from L 's first-order condition. As such, solving $M - 2m_F + m_L = 0$ yields

$$m_F = \frac{M + m_L}{2}. \quad (5)$$

After substituting this expression for the reduced-form m_F , we can solve V 's equilibrium

retention constraint in Inequality 4 for the minimum effort that sustains L in office,

$$m_L \geq 2(S - c + d) - M = m_L^{rc}.$$

L is sure to choose at least this minimum effort in order to retain office, since replacement yields 0 and she can secure at least that much for any $m_L \in [0, G_L]$. Therefore, she sets $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$ when $m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$, and she sets $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$ when $m_L^{un} \geq m_L^{rc}$. To find this value, we solve $m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$ for c , which yields

$$c < S + d - \frac{G_L + M}{3} = \hat{c}.$$

The proposed strategy profile thus constitutes a Subgame Perfect Equilibrium. \square

Proof of Proposition 2. As before, we prove the existence of the equilibrium via backward induction. By the proof of Proposition 1, we know that V 's retention constraint (if allowed the choice) is $m_L \geq m_L^{rc}$, where

$$m_L^{rc} = 2(S - c + d) - M,$$

and that should L fail to secure B 's support she will set $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$ to retain office (because $m_L^{rc} > m_L^{un}$ when $c < \hat{c}$). Finally, the proof of Proposition 1 also establishes that F 's best response to $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$ is $m_F^* = m_F^{rc}$.

Now consider military effort decisions if L has secured B 's support by setting some $g \geq 0$, which frees L from the retention constraint. Objective functions are

$$EU_L(m_L, m_F) = (M + m_L - m_F)(G_L - g - m_L)$$

and

$$EU_F(m_L, m_F) = (1 - M - m_L + m_F)(1 - m_F),$$

and the first-order conditions are

$$G_L - g - 2m_L - M + m_F = 1 + m_L + M - 2m_F = 0,$$

yielding a pair of (reduced-form) optimal efforts,

$$m_L^{su} = \frac{2(G_L - g) - M}{3} \quad \text{and} \quad m_F^{su} = \frac{G_L - g + M}{3}.$$

To complete the optimal efforts, note that the side payment g that secures B 's support is also a function of military efforts. B supports in return for a given side payment when $u_B(\text{support}) \geq u_B(\text{oppose})$, or when

$$(M + m_L^{su} - m_F^{su})(b + g) \geq (M + m_L^{rc} - m_F^{rc})(\beta),$$

or when g falls in a range defined inclusively by the lower and upper values of

$$g = \frac{1}{2} \left(-b + G_L + M \pm \sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2 + 12\beta(c - d - S)} \right).$$

If L wishes to secure support, it will not propose more than necessary in order to retain a larger share of the domestic pie, so in equilibrium it will propose

$$g^* = \max \left\{ 0, \frac{1}{2} \left(-b + G_L + M - \sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2 + 12\beta(c - d - S)} \right) \right\},$$

where we simply write g^{su} for the second term in the bracket. This helps characterize L 's side payment strategy. First, when $0 \geq g^{su}$, which is the case when

$$\beta \leq \frac{b(G_L + M)}{3(S - c + d)} = \beta^\dagger,$$

L proposes $g^* = 0$ and wins B 's support, which allows it to set $m^* = m_L^{un}$, such that F sets $m_F^* = m_F^{un}$. Second, when $g^{su} > 0$ (i.e., when $\beta > \beta^\dagger$), we substitute the side payment into our reduced-form expressions of m_i^{su} to yield military efforts of

$$m_L^{su} = \frac{1}{3} \left(b + G_L - 2M + \sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2 + 12\beta(c - d - S)} \right)$$

and

$$m_F^{su} = \frac{1}{6} \left(b + G_L + M + \sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2 + 12\beta(c - d - S)} \right).$$

It remains to show when, given $\beta > \beta^\dagger$, L chooses to secure B 's support by setting $g^* = g^{su}$ or to set $g^* < g^{su}$ and forego B 's support (where she must satisfy V 's retention constraint, since $c < \hat{c}$). L sets $g^* = g^{su}$ when

$$u_L(g^{su}) \geq u_L(g < g^{su}) \Leftrightarrow (M + m_L^{su} - m_F^{su})(G_L - g^{su} - m_L^{su}) \geq (M + m_L^{rc} - m_F^{rc})(G_L - m_L^{rc}),$$

or when

$$\beta \leq 6(S - c + d) - 3(G_L + M) + \frac{\sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2(G_L + M - 2(S - c + d))(S - c + d)^2}}{(S - c + D)^2} = \hat{\beta}.$$

The proposed strategy profile thus constitutes a Subgame Perfect Equilibrium. \square

Proof of Proposition 3. We begin by deriving q_{un} and q_{rc} , which define the values of the status quo below which L initiates a crisis when, respectively, $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$ and $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$. First, when $m_L^* = m_L^{un}$, L initiates when $qG_L < (M + m_L^{un} - m_F^{un})(G_L - m_L^{un})$, or when

$$q < \frac{(G_L + M)^2}{9G_L} = q_{un},$$

and when $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$, L initiates when

$$qG_L < (M + m_L^{rc} - m_F^{rc})(G_L - m_L^{rc}),$$

or when

$$q < \frac{(S - c - d)(G_L + M - 2(S - c + d))}{G_L} = q_{rc}.$$

Next, we solve $q_{rc} < q_{un}$, which is true when either

$$c < S + d - \frac{G_L + M}{3} = \hat{c}$$

or

$$c > S + d - \frac{G_L + M}{6} = \bar{c}.$$

And since $m_L^* = m_L^{rc}$ only when $c < \hat{c}$, we can be sure that $q_{rc} < q_{un}$ in equilibrium. \square

Proof of Proposition 4. We derived the value q_{un} in the proof of Proposition 3, so it remains to derive q_{su} , the value of q below which L initiates a crisis when $m_L^* = m_L^{su}$. At such an equilibrium, L initiates when $qG_L < (M + m_L^{su} - m_F^{su})(G_L - g_{su} - m_L^{su})$ or when

$$q < \frac{\left(b + G_L + M + \sqrt{(b + G_L + M)^2 - 12\beta(S - c + d)}\right)^2}{36G_L} = q_{su}.$$

Next, we solve $q_{su} < q_{un}$, which for $\beta > 0$ is true when $\beta > \beta^\dagger$, the condition supporting $m_L^* = m_L^{su}$ in equilibrium. Therefore, $q_{su} > q_{rc}$ when m_L^{su} is chosen in equilibrium. \square

Extension: Bargaining Over Military Strategy

We have considered an alternate version of the model in which L can win B 's support by adjusting her effort level. In this version, L and V retain their preferences from the main model, while B is sensitive to the shrinkage of the domestic pie 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 destructive 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 war efforts and the costs of replacement—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 B 's support. First, if B is so hawkish that he prefers an escalation, L refuses to seek elite support, opting to meet the retention constraint and retain office with an already undesirably high level of effort; if she can retain office with a smaller increase beyond her unconstrained optimum, she will do so. This choice to forgo 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 implies the same pattern characterized in Proposition 2; 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.