

Fair Fights? *David A. Lake*

Evaluating Theories of Democracy and Victory

In “Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters,” Michael Desch criticizes the methods and results of several studies, mine included, that find that democracies tend to win the wars they fight.¹ After raising a number of empirical and research design issues, Desch concludes that “on balance, democracies share no particular advantages or disadvantages in selecting and waging wars. In other words, regime type hardly matters for explaining who wins and loses wars” (p. 8).

Desch does the discipline a service by challenging extant findings—skepticism is, after all, the most important trait of a social scientist. A careful review of theory and method, however, confirms the finding that democracies tend to be victorious in war. In his article, Desch separates research design from theory and thus does not provide the fair test that he claims. Scholars cannot evaluate empirical relationships outside of their theoretical context. Similarly, the concept of causality cannot be understood apart from a prior theory. Correlation may or may not exist, but causation can only be inferred. Even as the historical record highlights the distinctive nature of democracies, researchers conclude that democracy causes (at least in part) victory in war only because theory implies that it should.

The literature on the democratic peace in general, and the theory and findings on democracy and victory in particular, have contributed to a new generation of research on war as a process. With fresh attention to how war outcomes affect strategic bargaining before and during crises, scholars are moving in the direction of more synthetic and productive theories of conflict that show how attributes of states, such as democracy, interact with their choices to explain war and peace. This is one of the most promising avenues of research in contemporary security studies—and one that reinforces the need to bind empirical

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1. Michael C. Desch, “Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 5–47. All page cites in the text refer to this article.

research to theory.² It would be unfortunate if ill-conceived critiques of the democracy and victory literature were to abort this fruitful line of inquiry.

In this article, I review the theory that originally gave rise to the hypothesis that democracies will tend to win the wars they fight. I then discuss how Desch errs in divorcing his empirical tests from this theory, and the implications of this research strategy for his conclusions. Following this, I survey further tests of the causal mechanism propelling democracies to victory. The conclusion outlines directions for future research.

Powerful Pacifists Revisited

Desch characterizes those of us researching the relationship between regime type and victory in war as “democratic triumphalists.” Contrary to the suggestion implied in this label, demonstrating the superiority of democracy was not part of my original intent in writing “Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War.”³ Instead, in the late 1980s I began work on a theory of state rent-seeking, with a particular emphasis on how different political regimes influence grand strategy. The key idea behind this theory is that the state is a local monopolist in producing public services and, as such, will seek to extract rents or “excess profits” from its citizens through higher than necessary taxes, bribes, or non-pecuniary transfers. Democracy, in turn, is a primary means through which society constrains the state’s rent-seeking abilities. Because democratic leaders can be removed from office at less cost to citizens than autocratic leaders, they are more responsive to public opinion and less able to extract monopoly rents for themselves or their supporters. As democratic states receive smaller returns from each additional unit of territory they control, it follows that democracies possess a smaller optimal size. Conversely, because autocrats earn greater monopoly rents and receive larger returns from each unit of territory, they possess a larger optimal size and an imperialist bias in their grand strategies.

It was immediately apparent that this theory contained within it an explanation of the democratic peace, just then coming into prominence.⁴ In the mutual

2. For a review of this budding literature, see Dan Reiter, “Exploring the Bargaining Model of War,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2003), pp. 27–43.

3. David A. Lake, “Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 1992), pp. 24–37.

4. Although “discovered” some years before, the relationship between democracy and war began to attract scholarly attention with Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1151–1169.

absence of this imperialist bias, two democracies would have fewer reasons to come into conflict and thus would be less likely to fight each other. As the democratic peace had already attained the status of something close to an empirical law,⁵ and was therefore known to me prior to the formulation of the theory, this prediction alone could not serve as a test or distinguish my explanation from others. On further inspection, however, the theory also implied that democracies would be more likely to win the wars they did fight. According to the theory, the lower level of state rent-seeking in democracies increases the quantity of public services provided by the state, thereby providing greater benefits to citizens at lower cost and promoting loyalty. Conversely, autocracies exploit their monopoly power and, like any monopolist, restrict the supply of public services to drive up their returns and, in turn, rents. Lower levels of state rent-seeking in democracies also stimulate economic growth and higher incomes, allowing them to mobilize resources for war at lower opportunity costs. And because defeat would necessarily imply the exploitation of their citizens, democracies fight harder and, by balancing threats, come to one another's aid when challenged by potentially hegemonic autocracies.⁶ This fear of exploitation produces overwhelming countercoalitions.⁷ These factors combine to predict that democracies will tend to emerge victorious in the wars they do fight. As Desch correctly notes, this is a "democratic effectiveness" argument. It does not rest on democracies selecting only wars they can win, but on their fighting harder and better in those wars they engage.

The proposition that democracies tend to win the wars they fight was, at the time, a novel hypothesis. No other theory generated this prediction, although other theories have subsequently been found to contain this implication as well.⁸ The historical record, in turn, confirmed this expectation. The hypothesis

5. Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in Philip E. Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern, and Charles Tilly, eds., *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

6. On balance of threat theory, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

7. Contrary to Desch's interpretation, I do not argue that democratic alliances are necessarily more effective, only that they are larger (p. 28). Similarly, nothing in my argument precludes "mixed alliances" from forming. Also note that this prediction rests not on a commitment problem, and thus audience costs (contrary to Desch, p. 30), but on a mutuality of interests against exploitative autocratic states. On democratic alliances and victory, see Ajin Choi, "The Power of Democratic Cooperation," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 142–153.

8. See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith, "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (December 1999), pp. 791–807; and Kenneth A. Schultz and Barry R. Weingast, "The Democratic

survived a series of demanding statistical tests, including the use of control variables for plausible rival hypotheses and the exclusion of “outliers,” ambiguous cases, and so on. The democratic advantage in war also survived even more demanding and rigorous tests, with more extensive control variables, primarily conducted by Dan Reiter and Allan Stam.⁹ Many scholars soon accepted this novel “fact” as one of the key traits of the democratic difference in international relations. This is how social science is supposed to work: New theories produce novel implications that are then tested against systematic evidence.

Desch on Democracy and Victory

Desch offers four substantive criticisms of the data used in the various studies of democracy and victory. As a baseline, he begins with a total of 75 wars since 1815 as coded in the Correlates of War (COW) data set, 24 of which he excludes because they involved equally democratic countries, contained missing data, ended in a draw, or were ongoing. This leaves 51 “candidate wars” for examination.

In his first criticism, Desch argues that the COW data set is misaggregated because it treats single wars (e.g., World War II) as conflicts that are more accurately described as a series of smaller wars (e.g., the Battle of France [1940], the European War [1941–45], and the Pacific War [1941–45]). Desch advocates separating these misaggregations and coding victory and loss for each. Two of the 51 candidate wars are misaggregations, according to Desch (see his appendix, pp. 45–47).

Desch then charges that the so-called democratic triumphalists count wars as democratic victories when, in fact, it was the nondemocratic members of mixed alliances that contributed most to these outcomes (e.g., the Soviet Union in the European War, pp. 13–14). Six victories, in his view, are thus incorrectly attributed to democracies.

Third, “in some cases a democracy was much more powerful than its adversary and used that advantage to overwhelm its rival. . . . Such gross mismatches,” Desch argues, “should be considered only if the triumphalists can

Advantage: Institutional Foundations of Financial Power in International Competition,” *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 3–42.

9. Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

prove that regime type caused the imbalance of power" (p. 12). Twenty-four of the 51 candidate wars, nearly half, are coded as gross mismatches.

Finally, according to Desch, "there are cases in which the belligerents' interests in the outcome of the conflict are so asymmetrical that it is impossible to ascribe the outcome to regime type and not to the balance of interests" (p. 13). These asymmetric interests are found in 4 of the candidate wars.¹⁰

Restricting the analysis to only wars involving states that were clearly democratic and deleting all cases of mixed alliances, gross mismatches, or asymmetric interests leaves 9 of the 51 candidate wars as what Desch calls "fair fights," of which democracies won 6 (p. 15). In statistical testing, Desch examines all participants in these 9 wars, as is standard for these tests, and disaggregates World War I into a German-Belgian war and another involving Germany, Austria, Russia, and Turkey. He also disaggregates World War II into a German-French war (1939), a German-Belgian war (1940), and a German-Dutch war (1940).¹¹ Thus, Desch creates a data set of 34 observations, compared with 197 in the Reiter and Stam analysis and 121 in mine. With this truncated set of observations, and such a small n , it is not surprising to find that democracy is no longer significantly related to victory in war (p. 17, Table 3). The nearly identical coefficients on the bivariate logits that Desch performs on Reiter and Stam's 197 observations (model 1) and his own set of 34 observations (model 2), suggest that the lack of significance in the latter is the result of the smaller n rather than some fundamental difference in the effect of democracy.

Desch aims to show not only that democracies are no more or less likely to win than other regimes but also that statistical tests may not be appropriate given the small number of fair fights. But Desch's research design is flawed on both theoretical and empirical grounds, negating both his substantive and methodological claims. Theoretically, deleting wars with gross mismatches and asymmetric interests is unfounded.¹² These are precisely the characteris-

10. The text (p. 14), but not the appendix (p. 47), describes the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars as asymmetric conflicts.

11. The German-Austrian-Russian-Turkish war includes no democratic countries. France in 1939 is miscoded as a 0 (anocracy) when the POLITY IV data set codes it as a 10 (democracy). Dropping this war and correcting the democracy score for France does not significantly change the results Desch reports in Table 3. The Football War is missing data, and is dropped from Desch's analysis, effectively making the data set one of 8 wars not 9 as reported in the text (p. 15). Why Desch excludes the German-British war or dyad from the so-called Battle of France (discussed on p. 13 of his article), is not clear.

12. How to handle the cases of mixed alliances is less clear, but because nothing in either a democratic effectiveness or selection effects argument precludes mixed alliances from forming, there is no reason to drop them from the analysis. Moreover, including mixed alliances, and the corre-

tics that theory predicts are likely to exist in wars fought by democracies. Democratic effectiveness arguments, such as mine, predict that democracies will possess greater resources and will tend to form overwhelming counter-coalitions, producing the kind of gross mismatches that Desch wants to exclude. In addition, because democracies recognize that, if defeated, they will be exploited by autocratic victors, they are likely to enter only those wars in which they possess asymmetric interests. Selection effects theories make similar predictions: Democracies are likely to enter those wars they can win (gross mismatches) or those they are exceptionally motivated to fight (asymmetric interests). Desch's research design, thus, systematically excludes all of the wars that fit the conditions of a democratic effectiveness or selection effects theory. That no significant relationship is then found between democracy and victory is hardly unexpected—regardless of the number of observations.

Empirically, as Desch acknowledges, the appropriate test for competing explanations is to include control variables in a multivariate analysis (p. 16).¹³ By excluding cases that may have an alternative cause, however, Desch de facto assumes that the rival hypotheses are deterministic but that the relationship between democracy and victory is probabilistic. This has important implications for his research design and the conclusions that follow.

Deterministic hypotheses take the traditional "if-then" form. If combatants are grossly mismatched, for instance, a deterministic hypothesis states that the more powerful country will win. A power disparity, in other words, is at least a sufficient if not also a necessary condition for victory. Probabilistic hypotheses take a "more (or less) likely" form. If states are democratic, a probabilistic hypothesis predicts that they are more likely to win. In this form, democracy is neither necessary nor sufficient for victory, but its presence increases the prob-

sponding autocracies in the victorious coalition, makes it less likely to find statistically significant results favoring democracies in war. Thus, if mixed alliances bias the results, it is away from rather than in support of the hypothesis.

13. Desch confuses the problem of nonindependent observations with an omitted variables problem (pp. 15–17); the latter can sometimes be addressed appropriately through a fixed effects specification, but the former cannot. Although he correctly points to a potential problem of nonindependent observations, an appropriate statistical correction is to calculate robust standard errors (a technique not available when I published my article in 1992; rerunning my models with robust standard errors does not weaken the significance of democracy). See Nathaniel Beck, Jonathan N. Katz, and Richard Tucker, "Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (October 1998), pp. 1260–1288. Whatever dependencies that may continue to exist are exacerbated by Desch's decision to restrict the set of wars (thereby limiting variation) and disaggregate them into phases (which introduces additional dependencies).

ability of success. It is by no means clear that the theory underlying gross mismatches, asymmetric interests, and the other factors examined by Desch is in fact deterministic. Although it is not explicit in his article, I infer that he is drawing on some variant of realism. Does realism actually imply that a 2:1 power disparity must produce victory for the more powerful state regardless of any other conditions? If the usual “all else held constant” clause is necessary for the hypothesis to hold, then the hypothesis is probabilistic, not deterministic. By excluding from analysis cases of asymmetric interests, for example, Desch asserts that such asymmetries must always and everywhere lead to victory. This is dubious, even for realism. Important theoretical claims are being made here under the guise of methodology.

Even if the alternative causes identified by Desch are deterministic, testing a deterministic relationship by excluding cases from analysis is appropriate only when there are no measurement errors in either the independent or dependent variable, no random or nonsystematic errors in the environment, and no alternative causes.¹⁴ These conditions are almost always violated, as they are in the case of victory in war. For this reason, even most deterministic hypotheses are tested as if the underlying theory implies a probabilistic relationship. Adopting a probabilistic design allows the analyst to better assess the uncertainty in his or her estimates introduced by measurement and random error or by confounding causal variables. Simply put, independent of the nature of the theory being tested and even ignoring the random error inherent in any social system, Desch’s research design is invalid. Pointing to possible measurement errors in the data used by others, he cannot be confident that his own data, drawn from largely the same sources, is error free. And his strategy of excluding cases is premised on the existence of alternative explanations, which therefore requires a probabilistic, not a deterministic, design.

Importantly, unless the theory is deterministic and there are no sources of uncertainty in the estimates of the relationship between the relevant variables, a probabilistic design is preferred regardless of the number of observations. Indeed, Stanley Lieberman concludes that small-*n* research designs always “have difficulty in evaluating probabilistic theories.”¹⁵ Desch’s preferred case study method is no solution. Because of the competing explanations and likely mea-

14. Stanley Lieberman, “Small N’s and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (December 1991), pp. 309–310.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

surement errors in victory, democracy, gross mismatches, and other variables of interest, a probabilistic, large-*n* research design remains the most appropriate test.

In short, although Desch raises important issues about the correct research design, his alternative of excluding cases from analysis introduces more problems than it solves.¹⁶ By systematically discarding the very cases that the theory predicts, he selects as his observations for analysis those least likely to support the theory. Moreover, he imposes his judgment about the true causal impact of competing explanations on the data rather than testing his beliefs against the evidence. There is no doubt that further work needs to be done to probe, sharpen, and refine the effect of democracy on victory in war. But scholars cannot accept Desch's central claim that regime type does not matter.

Causal Mechanisms

Desch further asserts that alternative explanations must be "ruled out" to establish causation (p. 18). In what I regard as the more standard view, causation is an analytic concept that is prior to empirical investigation.¹⁷ Causation is not what is left over after other explanations have been eliminated, nor does the absence of alternative explanations necessarily transform a correlation into causation. Rather, establishing "cause" requires specifying a relationship between an explanatory variable—in this debate democracy—and an outcome variable—victory in war—in which the relationship between the variables is derived from some prior theory. Because the fundamental problem of causal inference cannot be solved, all conclusions about causality are necessarily tentative.¹⁸ Scholars conclude that one variable causes another only when theory predicts a directed relationship. They develop more confidence in their theories and causal arguments, in turn, not by dismissing alternatives but by deriv-

16. Desch also suggests that the relationship between democracy and victory may be spurious, depending instead on whether or not the regime is consolidated (p. 19). Desch converts the mean democracy score for victors in my study from 5.60, based on the 11-point POLITY democracy variable, to 0.59, based on POLITY's 21-point democracy-autocracy scale. The original mean in my results is just below the cutoff of 6 that I used as a threshold for democracy. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists," p. 31. Although Desch correctly notes that this average is pulled down by the autocratic victors (typically in mixed alliances with democracies), he errs in concluding that this is evidence of regimes in transition. Most of the cases in my set of wars are clustered toward the bottom and top of the democracy scale and, on further inspection, appear to be stable.

17. Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 76.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

ing hypotheses and subjecting them to ever more demanding and unbiased tests. Given that many phenomena are overdetermined, or are consistent with more than one theory, scholars also gain confidence in their theories by deducing novel implications supported by empirical analysis.

As explained above, my original hypothesis on democracy and victory was composed of several steps linking state rent-seeking (more prevalent in autocracies) to lower levels of public services, lower rates of economic growth, and an imperialist bias. This is, I admit, a long and complex causal chain. Since publishing the article, I have, in association with several collaborators, subjected each of these intermediate links to further analysis. This is a form of process tracing, as often advocated by proponents of case studies, or multiplying implications and observations.¹⁹ In either view, examining the individual links in the chain is a means of bolstering confidence in the theory. For each of the three primary links in my argument, empirical tests confirm expectations.

First, as noted above, I predict that democracies, more constrained from extracting rents from society, will provide greater levels of public services than nondemocracies. This is a direct test of the state rent-seeking hypothesis.²⁰ Matthew Baum and I examine this hypothesis in a set of cross-sectional models, covering seventeen different indicators of public education and health (over multiple years), and five time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) tests.²¹ Using a full battery of control variables, we find a strong and robust positive relationship between democracy and the level of public services. Moreover, the effects of democracy are substantively important. Our TSCS results, to pick one example, suggest that a maximum increase in democracy decreases the rate of infant mortality by nearly 5 children per 1,000 live births.

Conversely, Desch argues that societal rent-seeking may be more common in democracies than nondemocracies, but he offers nothing more than casual speculation to support his case. Relying on Mancur Olson's *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, he largely ignores Olson's later article, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," and book, *Power and Prosperity*, which produce

19. See *ibid.*, pp. 85–87, 224–228.

20. Contrary to Desch's claim, the extent of the government's intervention in the economy says nothing about the magnitude of the rents extracted by the state (pp. 27–28): A large role for the government is equally consistent with high rent extraction or a high societal demand for public goods and social equality; and because rents can be accrued in nonmonetary forms, even governments with a limited role in the economy can earn large rents.

21. David A. Lake and Matthew A. Baum, "The Invisible Hand of Democracy: Political Control and the Provision of Public Services," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (August 2001), pp. 587–621.

hypotheses similar to mine.²² Claiming that “economists offer compelling arguments for why it is more likely that interest groups will be successful rent seekers in a democracy” (p. 26), Desch does not acknowledge that other economists make equally compelling arguments to the opposite effect.²³ As in my original article, I remain agnostic on the relative extent of societal rent-seeking across regimes: In democracies, many groups are likely to succeed in using state power to extract relatively small rents; in autocracies fewer groups are more likely to use state power to reap larger gains.²⁴ Analytically, the net effect is unclear. Most important, however, the first link in the causal chain from state rent-seeking and democracy to victory is directly tested by the public services data and clearly supported by the results.

Second, I predict that, in the relative absence of state rent-seeking, democracies will have higher rates of economic growth and levels of income. In a second article, Baum and I test this further implication of the theory and find a strong, positive but indirect effect of democracy on growth through the creation of human capital.²⁵ Although Desch correctly points to the conflicting evidence on this score, Baum and I argue that existing models of democracy and growth are misspecified. Most analysts begin with the neoclassical growth model—the standard in the literature, typically including only initial technology and inputs of physical and human capital and labor—and simply add democracy as one more variable. Conversely, we hypothesize that, as above, democracy constrains state rent-seeking, improves public health and education, and thereby fosters the creation of human capital and, indirectly, growth. In other words, there may or may not be a direct effect of democracy on growth, as posited by others (Baum and I find none), but we expect there will be a strong indirect effect through the creation of human capital. Using recursive regression to capture this indirect effect, and a panel of 128 countries over

22. Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982); Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 567–576; and Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Communist and Capitalist Dictatorships* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

23. See especially Robert B. Ekelund and Robert D. Tollison, *Mercantilism as a Rent-Seeking Society: Economic Regulation in Historical Perspective* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981). For a political science contribution on this point, see Mark Brawley, “Regime Types, Markets, and War: The Impact of Pervasive Rents in Foreign Policy,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (July 1993), pp. 178–197.

24. See Lake, “Powerful Pacifists,” p. 34, n. 15.

25. Matthew A. Baum and David A. Lake, “The Political Economy of Growth: Democracy and Human Capital,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (April 2003), pp. 333–347.

thirty years, we confirm this hypothesis as well. Specifically, we find that a maximum increase in democracy indirectly accelerates the rate of economic growth by 0.68 percentage points through increased life expectancy in countries with a gross domestic product per capita of less than \$2,500 and by 0.26 percentage points through increased education in countries with a GDP per capita of more than \$2,500. Thus, if the rate of economic growth were previously 2 percent per year, a maximum increase in democracy would raise that rate to 2.68 and 2.26 percent per year in relatively “poor” and “rich” countries, respectively. Again, this second important link in the causal chain between democracy and victory is supported by additional, theoretically appropriate tests.

Desch is correct, however, that countries with higher per capita income are more likely to be democratic, suggesting that the relationship between democracy and victory may be spurious.²⁶ Because economic growth rates themselves do not appear to be related to income levels or regime transitions in the short run, endogeneity does not appear to be a debilitating problem. But clearly the long-run relationship between income, democracy, and victory in war is worthy of further investigation.

Desch also points to the problem of mobilizing wealth for military purposes. The empirical evidence here is more mixed than Desch claims (p. 27).²⁷ But more important, although I predict that democracies have greater extractive capacity, it is not clear what the theory predicts about relative extraction rates.²⁸ If democracies enjoy greater wealth, and lower opportunity costs for extraction, should they mobilize resources at a higher rate, thereby greatly outspending their rivals and increasing their probability of victory? Or, as democracies tend to fight harder and better on the battlefield and form overwhelming countercoalitions, should they capitalize on these natural advantages in warfare and conserve resources for other valued uses? How states

26. See Ross E. Burkhardt and Michael S. Lewis-Beck, “Comparative Democracy: The Economic Development Thesis,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (December 1994), pp. 903–910; and John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole, “Does High Income Promote Democracy?” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (October 1996), pp. 1–30.

27. In a detailed study of state extraction, Alan C. Lamborn finds that relatively more democratic Britain and France faced less resistance and were better able to mobilize resources than was relatively less democratic Germany in the lead-up to World War I. Lamborn, *The Price of Power: Risk and Foreign Policy in Britain, France, and Germany* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), especially chaps. 6–8. For a general discussion of state extraction under changing international circumstances, see Michael Mastanduno, David A. Lake, and G. John Ikenberry, “Toward a Realist Theory of State Action,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (December 1989), pp. 457–474.

28. Lake, “Powerful Pacifists,” p. 30.

optimize across multiple goals likely depends on the specifics of the conflict, the preferences of the citizens in each state, and the size of the coalition that is formed. This is an area where further theorizing is critical. Although I provocatively billed democracies as “powerful pacifists” in my article, the meaning of power in this context is far from clear. But because theory is still ambiguous on this point, I am hesitant to read too much into the existing findings on observed extraction rates—regardless of which way they may point.

Third, I also predict that democracies will tend to possess smaller territories. This is a relatively direct test of the hypothesis that autocracies will have an imperialist bias in their grand strategies. In another paper, Michael Hiscox and I build a model of state size, premised on the same conception of state rent-seeking, and test it empirically.²⁹ Controlling for federalism, which we hypothesize will be a nearly unique characteristic of democracies that allows them to capture greater economies of scale and, thus, grow to a larger optimal size, we find that democracy is negatively and significantly related to territorial size. Indeed, using 1985 as the year of observation and holding all control variables at their mean values, we predict that unitary democracies will be roughly one-fourth the size of unitary autocracies. This provides strong confirmation for this penultimate and crucial link in the causal chain between democracy and conflict propensities.

Each link in my original causal chain between democracy and victory has been isolated, subjected to rigorous empirical testing, and supported by the available evidence. This does not “prove” causation, but it does produce greater confidence in the theory as a whole and in the hypothesis on democracy and victory in particular. I see no reason to reject the hypothesis for the statistical reasons that Desch develops and that I discuss in the previous section, and I see several reasons based on these additional tests to believe that the theory is capturing a real effect. As always, further research is necessary. But theory and evidence combine to support strongly the hypothesis that democracies will tend to win the wars they fight and for the reasons I suggest.

War Outcomes and the Study of Interstate Conflict

Although I am pleased that my findings ultimately support my normative belief in the superiority of democracy as a form of government, this was not my

29. Michael J. Hiscox and David A. Lake, “Democracy, Federalism, and the Size of States,” Harvard University and University of California, San Diego, 2002.

original purpose in taking up this research. Nor, contrary to Desch's description of the democratic triumphalists (pp. 42–43), do I or others writing on this topic claim that democracy is the most important or even a primary factor in why states win or lose wars. War outcomes are complex events, and scholars still lack good theory to explain them. My ambition was not to account for war outcomes, but to test a theory of state rent-seeking and one of its more original implications. As such, my theory does not predict that democracy will matter a lot in determining war outcomes, a little, or barely at all. It only suggests that democracy will contribute positively to victory, which it clearly does.

As the subtitle of his article indicates, Desch claims only that “regime type hardly matters,” which is a statement that scholars cannot dispute without better developed theories of war outcomes than exist today. Nonetheless, there is some reason to believe that it is worthwhile to try to develop such theories. Based on my original results, the probability of victory increases from 0.34 for the most autocratic states to 0.85 for the most democratic, implying that democracies are more than 50 percentage points more likely to win the wars they fight than are autocracies. This is a greater effect than increasing military personnel or iron and steel production from their minimum to maximum values.³⁰ This is a big number. Even if this estimate is eventually reduced by more refined tests, as it almost certainly will be, it suggests that there are important causes of war outcomes on which scholars in the field would do well to focus attention.

The rationalist approach to war, synthesized only a decade ago, was an important step forward in conflict studies.³¹ Equally important, in recent years analysts have moved beyond theories of war as a single, game-ending event modeled as a costly lottery to theories of war as a process—a sequence of events—in which when to end the conflict and on what terms are outcomes of an ongoing bargaining process.³² Stimulated in part by the earlier work on war

30. See Lake, “Powerful Pacifists,” p. 32, Table 2, Equation 2. Predicted probabilities calculated via Michael Tomz, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King, *CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results*, Version 1.2.1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, June 1, 1999), <http://gking.harvard.edu>.

31. James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414. See also Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

32. On war as a process, see Harrison Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 2000), pp. 469–484; Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, “A Bargaining Model of War and Peace: Anticipating the Onset, Duration, and Outcome of War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 819–837; and Branislav L. Slantchev, “The Power to Hurt: Costly Conflict with Completely Informed States,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 123–133.

outcomes, this is a potentially revolutionary advance in understanding conflict. It would be a tragedy if flawed critiques of the small but growing literature on war outcomes were to divert the field from this promising line of research.

Ultimately, and as implied by these new theories of war, the democratic effectiveness and selection effects arguments will need to be synthesized. Democracies may well be more careful in choosing the wars they enter, but it is their greater capabilities, ability to fight harder, and oversized coalitions that allow them to be more selective. And knowing their propensity for victory, opponents will choose more carefully as well. All of this has implications not only for which wars get fought but also for those international bargains negotiated in the shadow of war.

If I am in any way a triumphalist, it is about the ability of social scientists to eventually develop empirically verified theories that help all scholars to understand and, hopefully, mitigate violent conflict. Although I fully recognize the difficulty of the road ahead, it is only through careful attention to theory and research design that scholars can hope to realize this ambition.