The Democratic Peace and Lobsters

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For many years the Lobster War has been used to measure the validity of the Democratic Peace theory. Many researchers have considered this theory to be as concrete as a scientific law. I have found, that while the Democratic Peace theory is a strong theory, it cannot be fully justified due to the Lobster War. In my research I will examine the two differences in the Brazilian and French governments, as well as view them on a democracy scale. We will also be viewing why the two countries would not have wanted to go to war with one another. By developing hypothesis with independent and dependent variables one can fully explore the relationship between the variables.

Democratic Peace Theory

The Democratic Peace is the theory that democracies will not go to war with one another. “The historical record shows that democracies are just as likely to get involved in wars as other types of states but they almost never get involved in wars with other democracies. From 1815 to 1980, there were 71 major conflicts identified as inter-state wars. In none of these wars was a democratic state at war with another democratic state.” (Zeigler, 2000, 139) While this idea of Democratic Peace cannot be proven in every case; “it is the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations” (Owen, 1994, 87). Many countries have adopted the theory of Democratic Peace because for most governing bodies it is a way to avoid major conflict with other countries. “And it has become an axiom of U.S. foreign policy. President Clinton declared ‘Democracies don’t attack each other,’ in his 1994 State of the Union Address, meaning that “ultimately the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the peace of democracy elsewhere” (Owen, 1994, 87). Many countries have turned to the theory of Democratic Peace for solving issues because it is a more liberal view of international relations.

The idea of Democratic Peace can be interpreted from Immanuel Kant’s, Perpetual Peace. Kant believed that nature’s natural course is to produce a “harmony among men” (Betts, 2008, 125). He writes that a “state of peace is established in which laws have force” (Betts, 2008, 127). In many cases of Democratic Peace, negotiations have occurred between the two countries by adjudication. In the case of differing democracies the adjudication would be a civil and lawful way of abiding by the idea of Democratic Peace. Adjudication was the method supposedly used to
solve the near war between France and Brazil in 1963.

The Lobster War

In 1962 Brazil and France began small arguments over lobsters due to misconceptions about the international shelf on both countries parts. The two countries were fully aware that in the “Geneva Convention of 1958 on the Continental Shelf gives states the rights on anything of value under their continental shelves out to the limits of exploitability or to where the water is about 200 meters deep” (Zeigler, 2000, 259). This made the waters very unclear when it came to France sending its lobster boats into the continental shelf of South America. “The Brazilians ordered the French to move out to deeper waters, leaving the continental shelf to smaller Brazilian vessels. The French rejected this demand and sent a destroyer to accompany the lobster boats” (Zeigler, 2000, 259). Essentially both navies were moved to high alert; however, this is the closest the two countries came to war. In order to attempt to understand why the two completely different countries avoided war, a look into their government is necessary.

Brazil’s Government

Brazil’s proper name is the Federative Republic of Brazil. During the time leading up to the lobster war and during the early beginning Brazil was going through a time of political instability. In the year 1961 they had three different presidents. Joao Goulart became president in September of 1961 and ended his office on April 2, 1964 (Skidmore & Smith, 1992, 413). Goulart became president after the prior president Quadros suddenly resigned in August of 1961 (Skidmore & Smith, 1992, 176). One we know who the president was during the period we can move on to look at major reforms or government changes he made.

Joao Goulart performed many reforms while in office. Many believe that his asking for more power contributed to his own demise. Goulart appealed to the legislature, asking them to provide him with more power to accelerate reforms. Many believed this was his plan devised to implement his leftist views on the government. As of June 26, 2009, the Archontology source stated “He became more radical in late 1963 and early 1964; in March 1964 he declared reforms that benefited the working class and the rural poor, including land distribution. Army troops began mobilizing on March 31, and on April 1 Brazil’s armed forces, with the support of the country’s elite, middle class, and some politicians, ousted Goulart and assumed power.” (Kapiszeski & Kazan, 2002, 46). Goulart was overthrown in a military coup d’etat in April of 1964, shortly after the government began allowing officials to hold office for multiple years.

France’s Government

Similar to Brazil, France’s proper name is the French Fifth Republic. France
has democratically-elected officials; from this we could assume that maybe France is more democratic than Brazil. But the country gives a lot of power to the presidency. We could still assume that if it were beneficial to them they might abide by the Democratic Peace theory. During the years leading up to the Lobster War, Charles De Gaulle became the President of France.

De Gaulle became president of France due to the weakening and collapse of the Fourth Republic of France, a parliamentary system. From June 1958 to April 1969 he reigned as the dominant force in France. (Bourgoin & Byers, 1998, 464) De Gaulle was in power in France for many years; although many believe he was a democratic leader he had many autocratic tendencies. He wanted to have very little limitations on his powers. He and Goulart may have been very similar in the fact that both wanted few limitations on their power, but still wanted their countries to be considered democracies. “De Gaulle ruled supreme for 11 years, but his firm hand began to choke and then to infuriate many citizens” (Bourgin & Byers, 1998, 465). He resigned from office after an attempt to get even more power was rejected by the people of France. (Bourgin & Byers, 1998, 465).

Theories

There could potentially be multiple reasons Brazil and France’s avoidance of war. One theory could be they wanted to reap the benefits of the democratic theory, another being that neither may have been financially available to go to war at the time. Both of the countries looked toward the idea of an international adjudication to solve their conflict; could they each have wanted to generally solve the problem? Either way, France wanted the lobsters near South Africa and Brazil believed France was looking for those lobsters on their continental shelf.

Theory #1: Democracy or Autocracy

Clearly, the main problem for both France and Brazil was the lobsters. “By this time (April 1963), both states were asking themselves if they really wanted to go to war over lobsters” (Zeigler, 2000, 259). While both navies were put on high alert neither navy actually attacked the other countries vessels. One could infer that since no navy was attacked, then the two countries wanted to avoid war.

Hypothesis Test #1

Now that we know their leading ruler at the time we can measure exactly if France and Brazil actually were democracies. We will examine whether each democracy was fully a democracy, or if they had tendencies that kept them from being a full-fledged democracy. We could look into the theory by looking at the two types of government and incorporating them into the Theory of Democratic Peace. When previously comparing Brazil and France’s governments, one can infer that although neither is completely compatible with every standard of a democracy, both
meet different qualifications. “Democracy involves more than just holding elections to choose who will make the laws. It matters greatly how big a percentage of the population is allowed to vote. It also matters what power the elected representatives have” (Zeigler, 2000, 139). The extent to which some norms of democratic behavior have become accepted in a political regime may not be closely related to states’ political structures (Maoz & Russett, 1993, 630), essentially stating that some countries will call themselves democracies while their norms completely disagree with other democracies norms. It’s becomes a matter of establishing a general definition of a democracy.

Polity IV will be used in order to measure the extent to which both countries are democracies. “The Polity project has proven its value to researchers over the years, becoming the most widely used resource for monitoring regime change and studying the effects of regime authority”. (Marshall, Jaggers & Gurr, 2010, 3) “Democracy is conceived as three essential, interdependent elements. One is the presence of institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies and leaders. Second is the existence of institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive. Third is the guarantee of civil liberties to all citizens in their daily lives and in acts of political participation.” (Marshall, Jaggers & Gurr, 2010, 4) A 0-10 scale with 10 being the most democratic evaluates the validity to which each government is a democracy. The number 6 is used in Democratic Peace literature to show a true democracy; numbers lower than six may resemble a democracy but cannot be called a true democracy.

**Polity 4 Findings**

**Brazil:**

When looking at the statistics for Brazil in the year 1960, which was only one year before the Lobster War, began their democratic rating was at a 6 with a 0 on the autocracy scale. Meaning that they were mainly democratic, not democratic enough to be a 10 on the scale, but they had no autocratic tendencies. Years to follow seemed to increase in autocracy and decrease in democracy. In the years 1962 and 1962 Brazil was on a 5 for democracy and 0 for autocracy (Marshall, Jaggers, Gurr, 2010). They were given a 4 both years on constraints for the person leading the country; they were given a 4 on civil liberties given to the people and 2 on institutions. While they were not one-hundred-percent democratic those years, they did seem to lean toward a democracy and away from a democracy. However; the following years 1963 and 1964 seemed to prove that they were much less democratic and much more autocratic.

In 1963, the middle of the Lobster War, Brazil scored a 4 on the democracy scale and a 1 on the autocratic scale; some would say their polity score was a 3
meaning they were only part of the ideal democracy. They received a 3 on constraints, a 2 on civil liberties and a 3 on institutions (Marshall, Jaggers, Gurr, 2010). It was during this period that one can assume, from looking at the numbers, that Joao Goulart began trying to loosen his constraints and attempted to implement reforms in Brazil. No information is provided for the following year of 1964, because it was during this year that the military performed a coup de taut in order to overthrow Joao Goulart.

After looking at the numbers in each of the three categories for the 4 years one can infer that while Brazil was close to a democracy they can only be considered a full-fledged democracy in 1960, which was one year before the Lobster War even began. So, can the Democratic Peace theory really be applied in the case of Brazil? No, because Brazil was not an existing democracy during the time of the conflict. Although they were extremely close, many of their tendencies kept them from reaching that particular standard on the Polity IV scale.

**France:**

France during the time period of 1960 to 1964 scored a 6 on the democracy scale and a 1 on the autocracy scale, their polity score was a 5 (Marshall, Jaggers & Gurr, 2010). This also put them right below par for becoming a full-fledged democracy. Each year they scored a 4 on civil liberties of the people, a 3 on constraints on the government, and a 5 on institutions (Marshall, Jaggers, & Gurr, 2010). However, throughout the year, they became much more durable, meaning that they were more able to survive with the surrounding competitive countries.

While France may have seemed like a democracy at the time, one can assume that their low rating for constraints on the government is what kept them from being a 6 on the democracy scale. France was not a democracy on the Polity IV scale, so why are these two countries used so often to explain the Democratic Peace theory. Despite the fact that both countries were only 5 out of 10 on the scale, they are still not democracies. The Lobster War can be an example of the Democratic Peace theory when looking at near democracies, but when one is examining two solid democracies at least a 6 must be scored on the Polity IV scale. Brazil and France in the Lobster War of 1961 do not fit a proper measurement of the validity of the Democratic Peace theory because neither country was fully a democracy.

**Theory #2: Adjudication**

Brazil and France avoided war in an extremely legal manner, or at least they seemed to. They used international adjudication to solve their conflict. Adjudication "is thought of as depending on the legal rights and wrongs of the case, which President Taft called 'a clean judgment of the facts and the law on its merits’” (Zeigler, 2000, 259). Therefore, the tactic used to meet their strategy for the avoid-
ance of war, was using international adjudication to decide who was right and who was wrong. “Under adjudication the likelihood is great that one party will come out a clear winner and the other a clear loser, because the judges are deciding on the legal merits of the case, not the acceptability if their judgment” (Zeigler, 2000, 259).

Hypothesis Test #2

As noted earlier, one could interpret much of Immanuel Kant’s Perpetual Peace, and incorporate it into the theory of Democratic Peace. Kant writes that a “state of peace is established in which laws have force” (Betts, 2008, 127). Clearly, an international court would have some kind of laws that have force. Thus, one could infer that introducing some sort of neutral decision maker could completely change the flow of the conflict. That neutral decision maker would have no bias between the two countries and would merely consider the facts to which the conflict was occurring over. One could look at the percentage of cases that have been solved by international adjudication to measure its success.

“From 1945 to 1975, according to a detailed study by one scholar, there were 310 significant conflicts between states. In approximately the same period only 26 disputes were brought before the World Court. Of the 26, seven went unsettled and either were settled independently of the court; in only 11 cases was the court partially or entirely responsible for the settlement” (Zeigler, 2000, 260). From this one can infer, that in democratic countries the World Court may be involved. The extent of the involvement may vary, but the more democratic a country the more likely they will bring in some form of outside influence by means of adjudication. This strengthens the Democratic Peace argument because it explains how the more democratic countries are more likely to settle because they know war is not good for their economy, international relations, or internal relations.

Conclusion

While the theory of Democratic Peace seems to be the most obvious reason for the avoidance of the Lobster War, it is hard to explain the role of the two near democracies. The fact that neither country was a democracy at the time throws a loop in the Democratic Peace theory. Should the theory be edited to state that no two democracies or near democracies will go to war with one another? If researchers plan on continuing to use the Lobster War to test the validity of the Democratic Peace theory then these changes will need to be made. The Democratic Peace theory cannot fully be used to justify why these two countries did not go to war. While the international court was not used to solve the dispute, it was mentioned and from there the two agreed to some form of agreement of compromise. There are plenty of reasons why one might turn to the Democratic Peace theory, however; since neither country was democratic at the time it is just as fitting to look at the benefits of not going to war. Mostly democratic countries, like France and Madison Wilson
Brazil, are used to the idea of compromise, especially when it comes to elections. Thus, potentially the idea of compromise was in their governments’ background, so they believed their strongest option was compromise. No matter the case, war was closely avoided by a form of compromise, which strengthens the argument that democracies and near democracies will not go to war with one another, no matter how different. The Lobster War is a prime example of two near democracies not going to war with one another, but it does not fully fit the theory of Democratic Peace.

Work Cited


