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Democratism: Towards an explanatory approach to international politics

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Abstract

International politics has often been viewed as a brutal place where might trumps right and where, as a consequence, questions of democracy are irrelevant to ask. In the last decades, however, scholars and political leaders have increasingly suggested that elements of democracy exist in governance beyond individual states. If this is so, how does democracy beyond the state shape international politics? This article suggests conceptual preliminaries for theorising consequences of democracy beyond the state in general and their implications for problems of peace and conflict in particular. The purpose is twofold: first, to begin reconstructing existing normative democratic theory into an explanatory perspective sensitive to international politics; second, to indicate how this new perspective is able to explain empirical observations pertaining to conflict and cooperation among states; international institutions; foreign policies; human rights protection; and the violence of transnational terrorist networks.

Keywords

Democracy; Legitimacy; Global Democracy; Explanatory Theory; Normative Theory; Conflict; Foreign Policy; International Institutions; Globalisation; Civil Society; Constituent Power

Introduction

Assume, for the sake of argument, that democracy sometimes exists not only within states, in the sense that citizens are free and equal in the making of binding decisions. Assume that it also exists internationally, in the sense that borders, decisions, authorities, and other outcomes of international politics are shaped through processes in which individuals participate, or are represented, as free and equal persons. What can remain of existing general theories of international politics under that assumption? How does it alter explanations of empirical phenomena in the field, for example, patterns of conflict and cooperation among states? What consequences does it lead researchers to expect of major international transformations, for example, the rise of China and the emergence of a global civil society?

It is about time to start asking these questions. In academic research, democracy is no longer limited to domestic politics. It is conceptualised and observed also as a feature of politics beyond individual states.[1] More generally, academic International Relations (IR) is no longer, if it ever was, confined to

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[1] Conceptualisations of democracy beyond the state include those offered by, for example, David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1995); Carol Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio

struggles for survival among states. Law, institutions, and civil society activism are constitutive of the field as well. Still, research on democracy beyond the state (DBS) has so far not addressed the main concern in IR, namely, how to explain international politics *as is*. The last decades have seen increasingly specialised analyses of the meaning, desirability, and empirical relevance of DBS, but no analyses that explore its effects or implications for positive research in general.[2]

To overcome these limitations in earlier research, this article takes a first step towards an explanatory IR theory that is sensitive to the prevalence and consequences of DBS. It seems important to do so for two reasons, one normative and one positive. Let me explain them in order.

In normative research it has long been argued that globalisation, ongoing in the decades after the Second World War and accelerating after the Cold War, has turned domestic politics into a straightjacket for democracy.[3] Globalisation has limited the autonomy and democratic inclusiveness of individual states in ways that establish a permanent crisis of political legitimacy.[4] Life conditions anywhere on earth are shaped by international factors and decisions beyond the control of domestic politics.[5] Unilateral actions by states, for example, to pull out from international cooperation or to close borders to migrants and trade, may attempt to restore a sense of national identity or

Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); James Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); John S. Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer, 'Discursive representation', *American Political Science Review*, 102:4 (2008), pp. 481–93; Terry Macdonald, *Global Stakeholder Democracy: Power and Representation Beyond Liberal States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Empirical observations thereof are suggested, for example, by Thomas D. Zweifel, *International Organizations and Democracy* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2006); Jackie Smith, *Social Movements for Global Democracy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jens Steffek, Claudia Kissling, and Patrizia Nanz, *Civil Society Participation in European and Global Governance: A Cure for the Democratic Deficit?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jan Aart Scholte (ed.), *Building Global Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lucio Levi, Giovanni Finizio, and Nicola Vallinoto (eds), *The Democratization of International Institutions* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Jonathan W. Kuyper, 'Systemic representation: Democracy, deliberation, and non-electoral representatives', *American Political Science Review*, 110:2 (2016), pp. 308–24. A related literature addresses the discint topic of how international politics affects democracy in *domestic politics*; see, for example, Karl Kaiser, 'Transnational relations as a threat to the democratic process', *International Organization*, 25:3 (1971), pp. 706–20; Hans Agné, *Democracy Reconsidered: The Prospects of its Theory and Practice During Internationalisation – Britain, France, Sweden and the EU* (Stockholm, Department of Political Science, 2004); Robert Keohane, Stephen Macedo, and Andrew Moravcsik, 'Democracy-enhancing multilateralism', *International Organization*, 63:1 (2009), pp. 1–30.

[2] Some authors discuss consequences of DBS for normative purposes without developing causal explanations or testable hypotheses, for example, Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*. Hayley Stevenson moves the disucssion further in 'The wisdom of the many in global governance: an epistemic-democratic defence of diversity and inclusion', *International Studies Quarterly*, 60:3 (2016), pp. 400–12, but remains occupied with normative implications rather explanations of empirical matters. Some of my own earlier work has addressed the effects of DBS but in too narrow terms – for example, 'Does global democracy matter? Hypotheses on famine and war', in Christer Jönsson and Jonas Tallberg (eds), *Transnational Actors in Global Governance: Patterns, Explanations, and Implications* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 177–96; 'Accountability's effect: Reaction speed and legitimacy in global governance', *Global Governance*, 22:4 (2016), pp. 575–94; and 'Does stakeholder involvement foster democratic legitimacy in international organizations? An empirical assessment of a normative theory', *Review of International Organizations*, 10:4 (2015), pp. 465–88, with Lisa Maria Dellmuth and Jonas Tallberg.

[3] Please see fn. 1.

[4] See, for example, Colin Crouch *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

[5] See, for example, Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*.

sovereignty, but they also illustrate that domestic politics is often not sufficient to satisfy even the people included in it, let alone the people it excludes. For these reasons, serious efforts to further democracy in today's politics must include an account of how it works, or fails to work, not only within states but also in politics beyond the state. Hence, there are strong normative reasons to develop an explanatory theory sensitive to the prevalence and consequences of DBS.

At the same time in positive IR, that is, in the branch of the discipline occupied with international politics as is, not with how it should be, DBS remains a name for utopian thinking rather than an object for serious research. Seminal expositions of major research paradigms, such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism ignore the concept.[6] Alternately in positive IR, democracy is limited by definition to domestic regimes with international repercussions.[7] Empirical studies of discursive persuasion,[8] transnational advocacy,[9] diplomatic arguing,[10] norm contestation,[11] and politicisation of world politics[12] may implicitly describe DBS and its consequences, but do not specify the relationships in theory. For example, Jennifer Mitzen extends Habermasian normative reasoning to international politics and uses it to explain peace and war, but without addressing DBS.[13]

This neglect of DBS and its consequences appear to be a missed opportunity to explain political outcomes. Democracy as we know it from the study of domestic politics has significant effects: Foreign trade,[14] food security,[15] human rights,[16] international peace,[17] and many other phenomena seem to depend on it. While in some sense there may be less democracy internationally than domestically, the reasons for believing that democracy makes a difference for political outcomes hold regardless of political level. When a relatively large group of people decide together (as in democratic politics), the interests, norms, and insights reflected in the political outcomes are generally different

[6] See, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). Headly Bull gives brief attention to the comsopolitan idea of a world order constituted by human individuals, but as a description of politics he dismisses it; see *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 81–2.

[7] See, for example, Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Edward D. Mansfield, Helen V. Milner, and B. Peter Rosendorff, 'Why democracies cooperate more: Electoral control and international trade agreements', *International Organization*, 56:3 (2002), pp. 477–513; Jon Pevehouse and Bruce Russett, 'Democratic international governmental organizations promote peace', *International Organization*, 60:4 (2006), pp. 969–1000.

[8] Nicole Deitelhoff, 'The discursive process of legalization: Charting islands of persuasion in the ICC case', *International Organization*, 63:1 (2009), pp. 33–65.

[9] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[10] Thomas Risse, '"Let's argue!": Communicative action in world politics', *International Organization*, 54:1 (2000), pp. 1–40.

[11] Antje Wiener and Uwe Puetter, 'The quality of norms is what actors make of it', *Journal of International Law and International Relations*, 5:1 (2009), pp. 1–16.

[12] Michael Zürn, 'The politicization of world politics and its effects: Eight propositions', *European Political Science Review*, 6:1 (2014), pp. 47–71.

[13] Jennifer Mitzen, 'Reading Habermas in anarchy: Multilateral diplomacy and global public spheres', *American Political Science Review*, 99:3 (2005), pp. 401–17.

[14] Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff, 'Why democracies cooperate more', pp. 477–513.

[15] Amartya Sen, 'Democracy as a universal value', *Journal of Democracy*, 10:3 (1999), pp. 3–17.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*.

than if a decision is made (less democratically) by a small and arbitrary selection of the same people. Different life conditions and experiences produce different interests and insights, so two political processes that include different groups of people, for example, the many and the few respectively, will typically not create outcomes that reflect the very same interests and insights. Hence, there are good reasons to think that democracy, or the lack thereof, in politics beyond individual states will make a difference for political decisions and outcomes. Therefore, the time has come to develop explanatory IR theory sensitive to the consequences for political outcomes of DBS.

The purpose of this article then is to outline a theoretical framework, termed 'democratism', that allows scholars of IR to examine and reflect upon the prevalence and causal importance of DBS, or the lack thereof, across a broad range of political problems. The intention at this point is not to defend a particular set of hypotheses or explain particular events, but to motivate and specify new questions and ways of thinking about causal relationships in this field.

More specifically, the article makes three contributions. First, it provides a brief definition of the most central concept in democratism, namely DBS. The problem is to formulate an idea of democracy that is consistent at the conceptual level with commonly held descriptive assumptions about international politics, for instance, that such politics is sometimes anarchic and populated by states. Second, the article reconstructs two concepts that have often been used to distinguish research paradigms in IR, namely, the *structure* and the *subjects* of international politics.[18] It creates democratic versions of those IR concepts useful for theorising consequences of varying international political phenomena, for example, power transitions and civil society activism in global politics, as well as to compare democratism with other isms in IR. Third, the article briefly illustrates the usefulness of the earlier developed concepts by indicating how problems of international conflict can be explained, in general terms as well as more specifically in relation to the global decline of inter-state wars between 1945 and 2010 and the return of higher levels of conflict in later years. The challenge is to explain these events without assuming an eclectic and perhaps incoherent combination of theories. Specifically, international conflict is suggested to occur, not primarily because of differences in ideology, interests, or cultures among people, but because people lack sufficiently democratic political procedures and ways of social interaction to resolve the disagreements that inevitable emerge from their interaction. The conclusion sums up the argument.

The quality of this contribution should be looked for in the interest of the questions and hypotheses that it draws attention to, not in the proven validity of its empirical predictions.[19] If candidates for general theories had to be proven right at their time of conception, the process of theorising would recede into a reification of empirical observations, even trivialities, with little capacity to expand the boundaries of what we know or can learn. However, to construct interesting questions and hypotheses is not a simple exercise of original speculation, but a fundamental part of the demanding work to create knowledge. Originality does play a role in making a question or hypothesis interesting but is far from sufficient. Interesting questions and hypotheses must be rich in their implications and motivated by reasons and concepts that are coherent, unified, generally applicable, consistent with existing knowledge, transparent in their normative dimensions, or at least satisfy some of these

[18] Stephen M. Walt, 'International relations: One world, many theories', *Foreign Policy*, 110 (1998), pp. 29–46; Jack Snyder, 'One world, rival theories', *Foreign Policy*, 145 (2004), pp. 53–62.

[19] Karl E. Weick, 'Theory construction as disciplined imagination', *Academy of Management Review*, 14:4 (1989), pp. 516–31.

criteria to a reasonable degree. Such is the method for analysing theoretical problems adopted in this article. That said, empirical validation has *some* role to play also in theory construction, namely to ensure that the resulting arguments are sufficiently clear and plausible to deserve attention in the first place. Empirical examples are used for those purposes here, to clarify the content and applicability of theoretical concepts in the first and second sections, and to probe their plausibility in the third section.[20]

Conceptualising DBS

DBS is a specific kind of democracy composed by people from more than one state or by people who do not belong to any state at all. It is typically manifested not in any unified and fixed international political system but in a variety of changing norms, practices, and institutions that, depending on contextual factors, promote rule by the largest group (and therefore also political equality and freedom among individuals, see below). The concept applies to international units of analysis, such as bilateral relationships, regional organisations, global supply chains, or the international system as a whole. It can be used to make and evaluate empirical claims, for instance, that the international system was relatively more democratic in one period, say 1990–2001, than in another, say 1918–39, and then to generate and test expected consequences of such differences.[21]

A preliminary illustration

To get an immediate preliminary glimpse of what DBS looks like in practice, it is useful to revisit a case sometimes invoked to illustrate the opposite idea, that DBS is absent or insufficient. That argument has been made on a number of occasions by pointing to the politics of power stations in border areas.[22] A recurring example is the decision by Sweden to place a nuclear power plant in the village of *Barsebäck* close to the Danish border and visible in good weather from Denmark's capital Copenhagen.[23] The standard interpretation in normative research is that territorial borders often create undemocratic situations in which some people (here Danes) are affected by a decision (here to be exposed by the risks of nuclear power) that they had no equal opportunity to influence.[24]

However, there is more to the politics of locating nuclear reactors than normative democratic theorists have tended to reveal, namely that democratic political influence occurs across borders *already* and affects decisions made. From this perspective, it is interesting to note that the last nuclear reactor in *Barsebäck* was closed in 2005. The decision had been demanded for many years by a large and stable majority of ordinary citizens as well as political representatives *in Denmark*. The Swedish public opinion had in previous years been significantly more positive to nuclear energy. After an

[20] Harry Eckstein, 'Case study and theory in political science', in Fred E. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds), *Handbook of Political Science, Volume VII: Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading: Addison Wesley, 1975), pp. 108–13.

[21] While the difference between positive and normative theory is not clear-cut, upholding the very distinction is necessary for researchers not to impose their own values on their subjects of research.

[22] Sofia Näsström, 'What globalization overshadows', *Political Theory*, 31:6 (2003), pp. 808–34.

[23] See, for example, Eva Erman, 'The boundary problem and the ideal of democracy', *Constellations*, 21:4 (2014), pp. 535–46.

[24] Robert E. Goodin, 'Enfranchising all affected interests, and its alternatives', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 35:1 (2007), pp. 40–68.

incident at the power plant in 1992, 83 per cent of the population in Copenhagen was, according to opinion polls, against nuclear power, and 82 per cent of all Danes wanted to pressure Sweden to close it.[25] At the same time in the nearby Swedish city of Malmö, 81 per cent of the respondents in a small survey were pronuclear while 72 per cent expressed understanding and appreciation of the Danish concerns.[26] The majority of people in support of the decision to close the last reactor in *Barsebäck* appear to have been constituted in the largest part by Danes and Danish interests, while they were *represented* in the political process by the Swedish government, which made the decision. What the politics of nuclear power illustrates, therefore, is not only that DBS is sometimes lacking in practice, as commonly argued in normative theory, but more surprisingly how DBS can emerge in reaction to the lack of it.

What made approximation to DBS possible in this case? To anticipate some broader arguments, individuals in the two countries were relatively similar in domestic and international powers.[27] Their publics and media-structures were relatively sensitive to the interests in the other state.[28] And citizens of both states were free to move across their common borders for political purposes, for example, to campaign, to collect information, and to lobby for their interests or values.[29] Absent democratic institutions such as general elections across the two countries, these factors could still realise the formation of public opinion and responsiveness of politicians to a sufficient degree for important decisions to reflect the views of the largest group of people internationally, in this case to close the nuclear reactor. In the broader literature, suggestions of practices that facilitate DBS in this sense also include: transparency and majoritarian decision-procedures in international organisations[30] (as, to some extent, in the European Parliament and the General Assembly of the UN); public accountability of multinational companies to transnational stakeholder groups[31] (as, to some extent, in companies that have joined the Global Compact of the UN); and protection of individual rights by a cosmopolitan international law[32] (as, to some extent, through international conventions on human rights).

A conceptual challenge and resolution

Using the term 'democracy' to *describe* international politics (and not merely to specify a normative ideal that is relevant but different from it) will from some perspectives seem conceptually incoherent. Insofar as international politics is anarchic[33] while democracy implies a sovereign community[34] or a constitutional order,[35] the concepts of democracy and international politics exclude each other on

[25] Ragnar E. Löfstedt, 'The Barsebäck nuclear plant case', *Energy Policy*, 24:8 (1996), p. 691
[26] Ragnar E. Löfstedt, 'Fairness across borders: the Barsebäck nuclear power plant', *Risk*, 7 (1996), p. 141.
[27] For the importance of resource distribution for DBS, see Klaus Dingwerth, 'Global democracy and the democratic minimum: Why a procedural account alone is insufficient', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:4 (2014), pp. 1124–47.
[28] For the importance of globally representative public debates for DBS, see Dryzek and Niemeyer, 'Discursive representation' and later sections.
[29] For the importance of self-organised cross-border activism for DBS, see Aart Scholte (ed.), *Building Global Democracy*.
[30] See, for example, Zweifel, *International Organizations and Democracy*.
[31] See, for example, Macdonald, *Global Stakeholder Democracy*.
[32] See, for example, Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*.
[33] See, for example, Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.
[34] Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
[35] Alf Ross, *Why Democracy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

logical grounds alone. The term DBS, defined so as to involve people from more than one state, would then highlight a contradiction in terms that is necessarily empty of empirical content and unproductive for explanatory theory.

However, looking at democracy and international politics as mutually exclusive categories misses important theoretical possibilities and the actual use of these terms in contemporary research. First, not every viable conception of international politics contradicts the notion of political order inherent in many conceptions of democracy. Oftentimes, international relations are described in terms of governance,[36] hierarchy,[37] and constitutionalism,[38] variation between anarchy and hierarchy.[39] These conceptions of international politics do not equally exclude the possibility of democracy understood as a sovereign community. Second, not every conception of democracy contradicts the notion of anarchy inherent in many notions of international politics. Democracy can be imagined and practiced in processes that have little prospect of ever being constitutionally regulated, even under the express condition of there being no central government.[40]

Specifically, three assumptions about the meaning of DBS should be made in order for it to apply with maximal breadth. First, the concept should not be limited *in space* to the people within a single political community (*contra* most normative studies of DBS, which limit democracy, for example, to the people affected by,[41] or subjected to,[42] the same political decisions). Instead, the definition should allow democracy to be seen also in politics across political borders and communities however defined.[43] Second, the concept should not, by definition, be limited *in time* to political orders or communities that are already constituted (*contra* most empirical studies of democracy in existing states).[44] Instead, democracy should be seen as possible also in political processes that undermine, create, or reconstitute states or political orders more generally.[45] Third, the concept of democracy should not be limited *in content* to the making of binding decisions in the form of laws, public policy, and binding agreements (*contra* standard theories of democracy).[46] Instead, it should be applicable

[36] James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (eds), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[37] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.

[38] Antje Wiener, Anthony F. Lang, James Tully, Maduro Miguel Poiares, and Mattias Kumm, 'Global constitutionalism: Human rights, democracy and the rule of law', *Global Constitutionalism*, 1:1 (2011), pp. 1–15.

[39] Kim Moonhawk and Scott Wolford, 'Choosing anarchy: Institutional alternatives and the global order', *International Theory*, 6:1 (2014), pp. 28–67.

[40] See conceptions of democracy as different as those suggested in Macdonald, *Global Stakeholder Democracy*; Sheldon Wolin, 'Fugitive democracy', *Constellations*, 1:1 (1994), pp. 11–25; Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*; Miguel Abensour, *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Movement* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

[41] Goodin, 'Enfranchising all affected interests, and its alternatives', p. 50.

[42] Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 64–5.

[43] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, p. 12.

[44] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 27; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with adjectives: Conceptual innovation in comparative research', *World Politics*, 49:3 (1997), pp. 430–51. The condition of possibility for democracy assumed in these literatures is that a political order, including political borders, exists already.

[45] See, for example, Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[46] See, for example, Albert Weale, *Democracy* (2nd edn, Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 18; David Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), ch. 1.

also in the study of processes that create ideas (for example, 'sustainable development'), non-binding norms (for example, 'conflicts should be resolved peacefully'), and practices (for example, migration, violence). It follows that the concept of *rule* used in many definitions of democracy should be understood broadly, namely to include the production of binding as well as non-binding decisions or outcomes in general that shape collective and individual life.

Rule by the largest group, conceptual limitations

Once the meaning of 'democracy' has been relaxed on the points noted above (space, time, and content), the conceptual challenge is to specify the term without adding assumptions that impair its applicability in empirical studies of international politics. For this purpose, it is useful to observe how the term was defined before nation-state experimentations with democratic institutions began and they started to influence its conceptual meaning. The perhaps most prominent ancient discussion of democracy, by Pericles in his funeral oration over the first Athenian victims in the Peloponnesian War, understood the term as referring to rule by the many[47] or, more distinctively, as rule by the largest group. That is the basic definition of democracy that steers all other conceptions and illustrations of the term in this article. To address international problems, the people constitutive of the largest group are seen most coherently as unbounded in principle[48] or inclusive of all human beings.[49] Rule by the largest group can still be delimited into rule by the largest group *within* some smaller groups, for example, a nation or state citizenry. The delimitation may be done analytically and for research purposes (for example, to construct data that allow comparative studies of democracy across territorial states) or in practice and for normative reasons (for example, to allow self-government within separate states if demanded by the largest group of people who show some interest in the matter). Still, state borders drawn by a single person or a powerful few against the will of any larger group of people contradict democracy as defined here.

The primary purpose of defining democracy as rule by the largest group is to get a simple and widely applicable idea that allows construction of causal hypotheses across a broad range of cases. Before proceeding to hypothesis construction, however, it should be noticed that rule by the largest group contains other ideas in democratic theory that limit the application of the concept. Three of them will be discussed here, namely majority rule, political equality, and individual freedom (an extended discussion might also cover, for instance, deliberation, constitutionalism, and minimal justice). In light of these implications, rule by the largest group should appear as a demanding ideal-type unlikely ever to be completely attained in practice. The concept may be used not only to hypothesise effects in explanatory IR, but also to inform empirical tests of normative claims that DBS is valuable in light of its consequences. For example, a normative argument that promotion of DBS is valuable because it should enhance social justice in the distribution of economic resources is amendable to empirical testing on the concept of DBS proposed here.[50]

[47] Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, ed. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge Books Online), p. 111, available at: {http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139050371} accessed 18 November 2016; Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, pp. 1, 17.

[48] Arash Abizadeh, 'On the demos and its kin: Nationalism, democracy, and the boundary problem', *American Political Science Review*, 106:4 (2012), pp. 867–82.

[49] Hans Agné, 'Why democracy must be global: Self-founding and foreign intervention', *International Theory*, 2:3 (2010), pp. 381–409.

[50] All normative democratic theorists will not be equally persuaded by the usefulness of the selected definition of democracy, but see in particular Torbjörn Tännsjö, *Global Democracy: the Case for a World Government* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Stevenson, 'The wisdom of the many in global governance'.

First, rule by the largest group implies majority rule. While a minority by definition is constituted by fewer persons than a majority, unanimity rule is not an option since it undermines the possibility of the largest group to change status quo.[51] For instance, the European Parliament scores higher on DBS than the Council of the European Union (EU) because the Parliament, but not the Council, decides by simple majority. Still, it broadens the empirical applicability of democratic theory to see majority rule as an implication, not as an exhaustive definition, of DBS. Depending on the number and sizes of counter groups, as well as on deliberative and learning capacities among the participants, rule by the largest group may translate into support, for example, by 25, 55, or 85 per cent of the whole. To observe elements of democracy in such cases, the idea of rule by the largest group is preferable to that of majority rule.

Second, rule by the largest group implies political equality among individuals and representatives.[52] The largest group of people cannot be identified unless individuals count equally.[53] Again, the European Parliament illustrates a higher level of DBS than the Council of Ministers does, this time because the Parliament is elected by citizens with more equal voting powers. As with majority rule, however, it facilitates international applicability of DBS to think of political equality as an implication, not as the very definition, of DBS. Political equality refers to the distribution of power among citizens,[54] while rule by the largest group can be observed also among representatives whose relationships to the represented individuals are unknown. For example, rule by the largest group, but not political equality, allows conclusions that, other things equal, majority voting in the General Assembly of the UN is more democratic than decision-making under the veto powers in the Security Council, or that influence of large civil society gatherings around UN summits is more democratic than the same influence of smaller gatherings around G20 or the World Economic Forum. Other things equal, political influence by a larger group is more democratic than political influence by a smaller group.

Third, rule by the largest group implies freedom of individuals and minorities to contest decisions and to form public opinion.[55] An individual or representative who lacks opportunities to make and disagree with political decisions, or who is not treated equally with others, is excluded from political ruling and thereby his or her lack of status contradicts the possibility of rule by the largest group by definition. Hence, *rule by the largest group as defined here does not allow any majority to decide that particular persons or groups should not have those same opportunities as other groups or individuals have*. However numerable, a political subject that deprives individuals from their political freedom and equal standing undermines the possibility to practice rule by the largest group over time. Of particular importance for application to international politics, the freedom of individuals and minorities inherent in rule by the largest group can be

[51] Kenneth O. May, 'A set of independent, necessary, and sufficient conditions for simple majority decisions', in Brian Barry and Russel Hardin (eds) *Rational Man and Irrational Society? An Introduction and Sourcebook* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982 [orig. pub. 1952]), pp. 299–301.

[52] The logic of this argument is reversed in comparison with the more common theory that stipulates political equality as a normative principle before generating rule by the largest group as an implication in the domain of decision-making (for example, Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*, ch. 1).

[53] For qualifications with no implications for this argument, see Ben Saunders, 'Democracy, political equality, and majority rule', *Ethics*, 121:1 (2010), pp. 148–77.

[54] Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*.

[55] Again, the logic of the argument is reversed in comparison with the more common conception that rule by the largest group (in some form) is an implication of political freedom or autonomy, for example, in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Regh (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

protected by constitutional rights, but also through non-legal social norms and practices. Again, the concept of rule by the largest group does not challenge existing values in democratic theory as much as it unifies them under a single concept while extending the field of enquiry in which the realisation or compromising of those values can be observed.

Structures and subjects in democratism

This section develops the implications of democracy as defined in the previous section for the *structure* and *subjects* of international politics. There are two reasons that motivate this conceptual move. First, it facilitates comparisons between democratism and traditional research paradigms in IR – which have often been based on similar concepts.[56] Second, it specifies the meaning of democracy while not limiting its application to politics within borders, to already constituted powers, or to the politics of making binding decisions – thus meeting the three criteria for conceptions of democracy to be broadly applicable noted in the previous section. DBS requires that both subjects and structures of international politics are democratic. But while neither the concept of subjects nor that of structures captures a sufficient condition for DBS, discussing the two concepts one at the time – as in the following sections – will facilitate the presentation.

The concept of structure in democratism

The term 'structure' is used widely in social science to denote any matter that enables and/or constrains individual action. Human beings may change structures in the long run but not significantly in the short run. For international politics, it has been suggested that structures consist, for example, in the relative power of states (realism), domestic regimes and international institutions (liberalism), and the norms and habits of state and non-state actors (constructivism).[57] To this debate democratism adds a new idea of what shapes and determines agency, namely the distribution of political power among individuals within and across states.

In democratic theory, this specification of political structure should be seen as orthodox. It simply transposes the conventional idea of political equality into a general cause and effect proposition, namely that international political outcomes depend on the proximity of politics to the democratic ideal of equality of political power among individuals. But for empirical and explanatory research in IR, the idea may be more challenging, especially when used to generate expectations. The greater the approximation to political equality among people within a political space – whether manifested in territorial states, a single world state, or other kinds of governance – the greater the likelihood that political outcomes will reflect the interests, norms, preferences, and insights shared by the people within that space.

Figure 1 illustrates different structures of international politics in democratism. There are three political spaces in rounded squares (1–3) in which the three rectangles symbolise different states with varying international power in proportion to their size. Each state has a number of individuals symbolised by the dots or small filled circles whose international powers are represented by their sizes.[58] While the models are ideal-types, Space 1 may for heuristic reasons be illustrated by NAFTA, Space 2 by the Arab League, and Space 3 to some extent by the EU. More definitely, a neorealist analysis would suggest that the relevant power structure is the same in all three spaces, as the

[56] Walt, 'International relations'; Snyder, 'One world, rival theories'.
[57] Ibid.
[58] For the moment, power may be defined in broad relational terms as the ability to achieve outcomes.

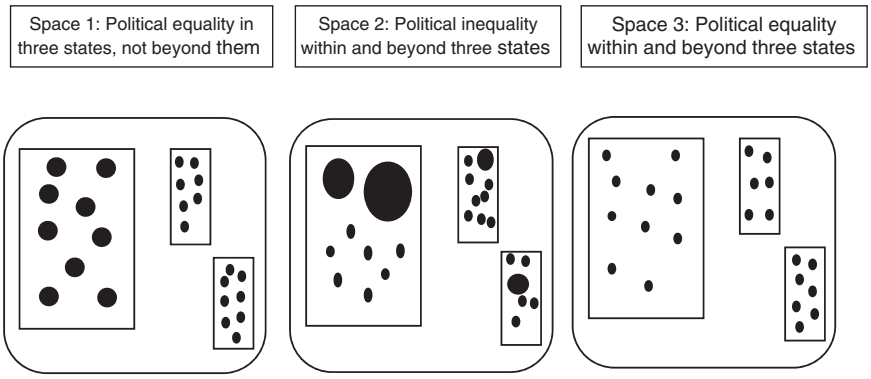

Figure 1. Three political spaces and their different structures.

states are equal in number and power, which exhausts the neorealist conception of structure. Various liberal theories, for example, democratic peace theory, recognise differences between Space 2, on the one hand, and Spaces 1 and 3 on the other. But liberal theories do not distinguish between Spaces 1 and 3 in which all individuals have the same power in domestic politics, which suggests that both spaces approximate domestic democracy. Democratism, by contrast, highlights an equally significant difference between Spaces 1 and 3: individuals are unequal with regard to their international political power in Structure 1, but not in Space 3. In comparisons with these research paradigms, democratism can be used to generate structural explanations of international outcomes that depend on the distribution of power among individuals within as well as among states.[59]

The distribution of political power among individuals can be used to explain which political subjects emerge internationally, their predispositions for action, and political outcomes. If power is divided equally among individuals worldwide, it is reasonable to assume that the predispositions for political action in the global political system will be biased towards the interests and identities (or other subjective features that influence action) shared by the largest group of human beings. Political structures supported by few rather than many individuals should be expected to start changing as soon as individuals get equal power to reshape them.

If power is divided unequally among individuals, on the other hand, it is reasonable to expect that predispositions for political action will be biased towards the particular interests and identities held exclusively by the relatively more powerful group, for instance a particular class or nation. Hence, the groups of people expected to make or support political decisions are likely to be larger in Space 3 than in Spaces 1 and 2. It is only in Spaces 1 and 2 that the power distribution allows particular (non-universal) groups of individuals to benefit from policies that reflect self-interests

[59] The difference in political power between individuals in the big states in Spaces 1 and 3 can be interpreted as generated by varying access among individuals to transnational resources, such as prestige or investment opportunities. The fact that the big states are equally powerful in all spaces, despite difference in the sum total of the powers held by their citizen, can be interpreted as individuals having powers not accessible for their territorial states. The fact that in Space 3 one state is more powerful than the other two without consequences for the international power of the individuals constitutive of the weaker states implies that the big state in this case does not or cannot act as an empire in relation to the individuals of the other states. That is, the superior international power of the biggest state in Space 3 is limited to political outcomes that have no *necessary* implication for the political power of individuals. Empirical examples of this concept may be contested but suggestively include powers to shape rules on trade, diplomacy, and international law.

or identities unique to them. And in turn, the varying size or inclusivity of groups also explains their action predispositions. No group or political subject – however inclusive and politically equal its decision-procedures – is likely to protect the interests or accord with the norms of persons who successfully seek exclusion from it. A political subject will promote the identities or interests shared by the individuals who constitute it.

Three applications: the ICC, rise of China, and politics of NGOs

To understand the concept of structure in greater depth (not testing its predictive accuracy), consider first the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002. In a world led by state or class interests alone, this event would appear unlikely, even anomalistic. Despite the many weaknesses and failures of the ICC to live up to its own standards, it is unique among global institutions to recognise individual persons as legal subjects. Why should state leaders protect human right even in other states by subjugating themselves to an international body empowered to prosecute themselves? From the perspective of democratism, a structure likely to promote such an institution would distribute power relatively equally among individuals across states. The action to recognise individual persons as legal subjects can then be interpreted, for example, as a reflection of a human-wide interest to seek protection from political oppression and violence by others. Some approximation to a democratic international structure in that sense could be observed in the global civil society campaign, which was in fact important for the establishment of the ICC.[60]

If, on the other hand, a more exclusive group with relatively more powerful individuals mobilises around their own interests, the expected effect should be that the relative power of the globally more inclusive group is reduced. This theoretical possibility may be illustrated by the ultimate decision by the US not to ratify the ICC treaty.[61] In democratic terms, the decision not to ratify meant that a global minority (partially united within the US) sought private benefits and exploited its superior power for its own advantage. Counterfactually, the US may be expected to be more likely to ratify the ICC treaty would its constituting citizens at some point in the future become less powerful in global comparisons. If the population of the US doubles while its international power remains as of today, individual US citizens will have less relative power internationally; the US government will be expected to offer each of them less protection internationally (the government will have more, and more diversified, individuals to protect); and the individual citizens should then have greater incentives to push for ICC ratification also by the US.

Not relying so much on hypotheticals, the distinction between power distributions among individuals and states respectively can be illustrated by the 'rise of China' and its expected consequences for international security. The standard worry among offensive realists[62] and power transition theorists,[63] inspired generally by the consequence of the German rise before the two world wars, is that the rise of

[60] Some approximation to a democratic international structure could be observed in the global civil society campaign, which was in fact important for the establishment of the ICC. See Marlies Glasius, *Expertise in the Cause of Justice: Global Civil Society Influence on the Statute for an International Criminal Court* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[61] William A. Schabas, *An Introduction to the International Criminal Court* (4th edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 25–34.

[62] See, for example, John Mearsheimer, 'The gathering storm: China's challenge to US power in Asia', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3:4 (2010), pp. 381–96.

[63] Ronald L. Tammen and Jacek Kugler, 'Power transition and China–US conflicts', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 1:1 (2006), pp. 35–55.

China will increase international tension and conflict levels. As with Germany, a rising China is expected to challenge the international privileges of the existing international powers, force them to balance against China, and thereby to create a security dilemma and to increase the conflict level.[64] From the perspective of democratism, however, there are, so far, significant differences between the German and the Chinese cases that suggest less bellicose outcomes today than a hundred years ago. The German citizens rose in global power from an already high level of international power. The Chinese citizens have so far been rising from a lower level of international power. The rise of China, therefore, has so far largely been an equaliser of global power among individuals, while the rise of Germany exacerbated an already existing inequality among individuals internationally.

But why may this distinctiveness of the Chinese case be expected to promote peace? Equality in power over a shared resource, for example, international security or a global economy, should motivate individuals to establish or support institutions that protect their common interest to manage these resources.[65] In the absence of shared resources, individuals with relatively equal political powers still have a common interest to draw on the resources not only of their own states, but of all states that can reach, and be reached by, those individuals. Such individual interests can be promoted by states who are sensitive to domestic publics (not necessarily democracies); by transnational actors that target governments worldwide creating boomerang effects and transnational norm diffusion;[66] and directly by private initiatives to create and strengthen forums and institutions for regulating transnational issues. On these assumptions, greater political equality among individuals should be expected, among other things, to strengthen structures of regional and global governance, and the embeddedness of states in such structures is a noted reason why China – *contra* influential realists – has risen peacefully and *not* become more assertive in its foreign policy so far.[67] Hence, the concept of democratic structures can be used to subsume a common explanation of the so far peaceful rise of China. Beyond this particular case, it follows from democratism that security dilemmas, where states create conflicts by promoting their own security,[68] are no universal predicaments of international politics but depend on the international distribution of power among individuals.

In more specific terms, a distribution of power may be constituted by particular institutions and legal rights,[69] by material resources and levels of education,[70] by opportunities to influence

[64] For a more detailed discussion, see Barry Buzan, 'China in international society: is "peaceful rise" possible?', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3:1 (2010), pp. 23–5.

[65] This familiar argument applies no less to transnational groups than it does, for example, to individual fishermen who self-regulate their use of a natural resource. On the latter, see Elinor Ostrom, 'A behavioral approach to the rational choice theory of collective action: Presidential address, American Political Science Association, 1997', *American Political Science Review*, 92:1 (1998), pp. 1–22.

[66] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*; Jacqui True and Michael Mintrom, 'Transnational networks and policy diffusion: the case of gender mainstreaming', *International Studies Quarterly*, 45:1 (2001), pp. 27–57.

[67] The thesis of a more assertive Chinese foreign policy is debunked by Iain Alastair Johnston, 'Is China a status quo power?', *International Security*, 27:4 (2003), pp. 5–56 and again by Björn Jerdén, 'The assertive China narrative: Why it is wrong and how so many still bought into it', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 7:1 (2014), pp. 47–88. While these analyses stop before the Xi Jinping regime (2013), the expectation that the rise will intensify international conflict had been around for two decades at that point in time already; see Nicholas D. Kristof, 'The rise of China', *Foreign Affairs*, 72:5 (1993), pp. 59–74. On the pacifying effects of Chinese embeddedness in regional and global governance, see Ann Kent, 'China's international socialization: the role of international organizations', *Global Governance*, 8:3 (2002), pp. 343–64; John Ikenberry, 'The rise of China and the future of the West: Can the liberal system survive?', *Foreign Affairs*, 87:1 (2008), pp. 23–37.

[68] John H. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

[69] See, for example, Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*.

[70] See, for example, Dingwerth, 'Global democracy and the democratic minimum'.

policymaking,[71] by knowledge of language and common discourses,[72] and other non-actions with consequences for actions. Each kind of resource – information, rights, finance, etc. – is potentially constitutive of specific structures that – depending on how far they approximate political equality – account for the emergence of specific subjects, their action predispositions, and political outcomes.[73] To illustrate the usefulness of specifying structures in these ways, recall an often-heard argument that NGOs are normatively motivated actors, or forces for good, that protect human rights by collecting and disseminating information on human rights violations.[74] Against this argument it is commonly objected that NGOs have no natural tendency to pursue moral aims but are just as concerned with their material self-interests as other actors, even to the point where their normative aims are compromised.[75] Information gathering by NGOs is then seen to have no effects in general, or even opposite effects if the collected information would become accessible to national intelligence services or private militia. The unresolved problem then is whether information politics of NGOs should in general be expected to protect human rights or not.

Democratism explains diverse effects of collecting and spreading information by differentiating structures of power across collections of information. The hypothesis in this case would be that information that approximates equality of political power among persons will facilitate human rights protection, while information with a different power structure will not. Information may be seen to distribute power equally among individuals if the largest group of people wants to share it, as perhaps with information on human rights violations, and unequally if most people want to keep the information private, as perhaps with information about the social and political connections of the victims of human rights violations. A refined more generally acceptable hypothesis about the effects of information politics by NGOs can then be summarised as follows: political actors who collect and spread information on human rights have a general tendency to protect those rights if and only if the structure of power in the information approximates equality among individuals, as indicated by the willingness of the largest group of people to share that information. More generally, this discussion illustrates that the relevance of democratism for explaining outcomes can be strengthened in relation to some fields of research by formulating the concept of political structure in context-specific terms, such as the distribution of power inherent in certain information collections, legal rights, and financial resources.

The concept of political subject(s) in democratism

A political subject is here defined as a collective of individuals with the capacity to act in ways that depend on an intention, interest, identity, or some other 'subjective' quality.[76] Evidently, expectations of political outcomes in international politics depend on what we take the subject in question to be. To illustrate, from the identity of being a state, it follows that there are territorial borders, a

[71] See, for example, Steffek, Kissling, and Nanz, *Civil Society Participation in European and Global Governance*.
[72] Arcbibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens*.
[73] By specifying its general concept of structure, research guided by democratism may subsume arguments about the power-distribution in widely different institutions, for example, a formal parliament on the one hand and informal communication systems on the other, and compare their different effects.
[74] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, pp. 18–20, 116–17.
[75] Alexander Cooley and James Ron, 'The NGO scramble: Organizational insecurity and the political economy of transnational action', *International Security*, 27:1 (2002), pp. 5–39.
[76] I do not use the near-synonymous and more common term 'actors' in this context in order to emphasise the logical possibility that interactions across borders may reflect the intentions or interests of a single broadly inclusive political subject.

government, and often some kind of written constitution. If, in addition, the state is self-interested, whether by nature, socialisation or selection, it has aims not necessarily shared with other potential political subjects (for example, private firms, peoples, or classes) to protect the attributes essential for its identity (territorial borders, a government, and a constitution). The political content of international politics – such as patterns of conflict and cooperation – will then be seen to depend on how such subjects develop and interact on the basis of these or some other predispositions for action.

What then is the subject of *democratic* politics in terms that apply internationally? A democratic political subject is a group of individuals with opportunities to form public opinion and which allow the largest group of people to make political decisions (binding or non-binding) in case of internal disagreement. Political outcomes accepted by the largest group can be implemented jointly as well as individually. So defined, the political subject is one that is capable of action also in the absence of centralised decision-making institutions. A technocratic or religious network, for example, may steer collective action through the commitment of individual persons to it.[77] When the political subject has effective and centralised decision-making institutions to its disposal, individuals may accept rule by the largest group because of expected positive or negative sanctions. When such institutions are not in place, rule by the largest group may still be accepted out of moral convictions and cognitive habits shared by all individuals constitutive of the political subject.

Favourable empirical circumstances for the emergence of political subjects in this sense internationally are likely to include opportunities of communication (for example, through movement of people across borders, news and social media, shared languages and translation technologies); methods to represent preferences in the public (for example, opinion polls, election outcomes, physical meeting places, self-appointed public spokespersons); and senses of trust among individuals towards political actors and processes transcending individual states (for example, cosmopolitan attitudes and willingness to sacrifice national interests for internationally shared ones). At least some of these conditions appear to have been present in the Denmark/Sweden example of DBS suggested earlier. However, other empirical cases, say Palestine/Israel, or the whole of the international system, may be used to develop other potential 'operational indicators' of democratic political subjects. The discussion of how theoretical concepts in democratism should be operationalised for empirical research across different contexts is yet far from concluded.

Nonetheless, to illustrate the theoretical difference between democratic and other conceptions of the political subject, Figure 2 shows five different political spaces (A to E), each constituted by three states (the three squares) and a set of individuals (dots). The individuals encircled by dashed lines illustrate internally democratic political subjects while their global inclusiveness varies from complete (A) to minimal (E).

D and E illustrate international politics that is likely to be driven primarily by state interests. D is domestically democratic; E is not. European politics at different points in time between the First and the Second World Wars may illustrate both situations. When the people of two states act democratically among themselves, while excluding the people of a third state, international politics can be described as in C. The relationship between NATO-members and Russia in today's international politics may somewhat illustrate the situation. When based on the interests or norms of a transnational group, international politics may instead approximate B. Issue-specific

[77] See, for example, Deborah D. Avant, 'Pragmatic networks and transnational governance of private military and seecurity services', *International Studies Quarterly*, published online (18 February 2016), available at: {DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqv018}.

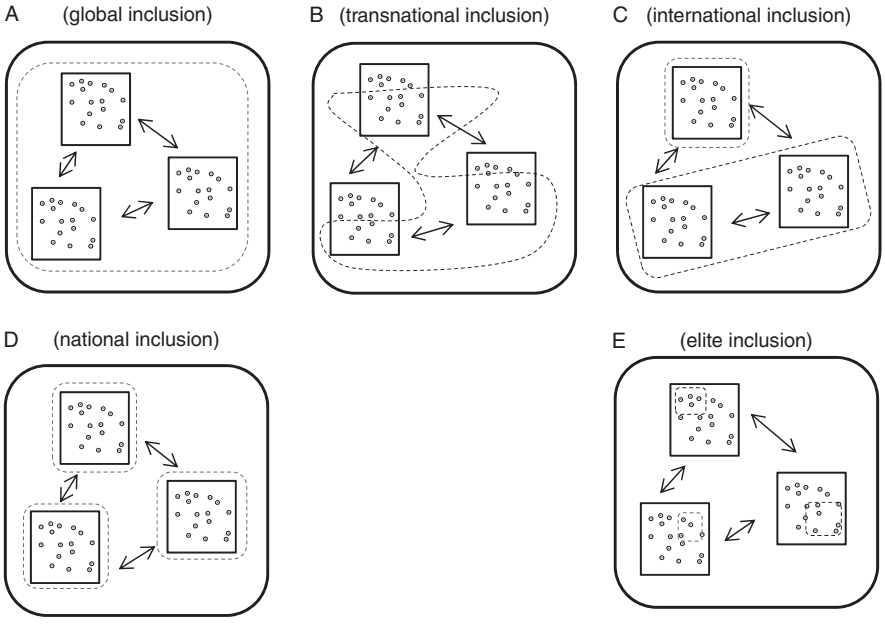

Figure 2. Five international spaces with three states in each and their different political subjects (the dashed areas).

stakeholders, for instance climate change activists, or members of a particular social class, may illustrate or at least attempt to create that situation. In A, finally, the group of people who can actively support or disagree with any political outcome includes a larger proportion of all individuals than in any of the other models. Perhaps the model is approximated by the Scandinavian international relations among contemporary Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland (or more so than in the other examples).

As illustrated by the differences of A to E in Figure 2, what ultimately matters for political outcomes in democratism is the proportion of individuals in an international political space that has approximately the same power over international political outcomes and which are communicating to solve common problems. Other IR theories can be helpful to explicate parts of this insight, while the logic of democratism is distinct and not reducible to those of other theories. Theories that limit political subjects to territorial states (for example, liberalism and realism in most variants) will lead scholars to deny the differences from D to A in Figure 2. Among theories that accommodate the possibility of political subjects beyond individual states, Marxism is too limited to account for presence or variation in democracy as illustrated in the figure. It necessitates that subjects are generated by particular classes, as in model B but not in models A or D. Constructivism, on the other hand, is both more and less limited than democratism, and deserves more attention.

Constructivism easily subsumes the differences specified in Figure 2 by treating the emergence of political subjects and their interests as an empirical and historically contingent matter. However, the defining assumptions of constructivism are too unlimited to provide *a priori* reasons to make and expect significant effects of those differences in the first place.[78] It is possible, but not necessary, that

[78] Regardless of whether constructivism refers to shared ideas and values or – as in more recent extensions of the theory – to norm contestation (cf. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and

the norms analysed in constructivism manifest or approach DBS.[79] More critically though, democratism is also more inclusive than constructivism. In democratic theory, preferences and norms are both endogenous (in deliberative procedures, for example, debating) and exogenous (in aggregative procedures, for example, voting) while a core feature of constructivism is to see preferences and norms as endogenous to social interaction.[80] In a similar vein, explanations based on democratic theory can refer to alleged objective or subjective matters (for example, the objective feature of political equality among individuals as well as the subjective feature of normative commitment to that condition) while explanations in constructivism do not refer to objective matters alone.

So why is inclusivity of a ruling group expected to make a difference for political outcomes in the first place? There is a range of widely applicable arguments available for specification and testing in relation to international politics. Insofar as individuals are the best judges of their own interests,[81] participation or representation of a larger group of people in political procedures should promote political outcomes that better satisfy the preferences of that group. Insofar as all groups develop interests of their own out of experiences and social conditions unique to them,[82] political outcomes made by elites should be expected to reflect different interests or norms than outcomes made through procedures inclusive of larger groups. Insofar as there is an objectively best solution to a given social problem and that people on average are more likely to be right than wrong, inclusion of more people in the political process increases the probability for selecting the decision-alternative that is best or closest to truth.[83]

Three applications: Convergence, bifurcation, and unpredictability in foreign policy

In light of the earlier discussion, the most important question in theory is no longer whether relatively more democratic political subjects affect outcomes, which should be fairly obvious. The more important question is how and under what conditions it happens. Usefully for this purpose, normative debates on DBS present alternative interpretations of the political subject that in turn suggest different predictions and enabling conditions of DBS. Influential alternatives include those of the people,[84] the multitude,[85] the stakeholder community,[86] humanity,[87] transnational collective identities,[88] and performative as well as compositional interpretations of the demos.[89] In terms

political change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917 and Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, 'Rethinking the life cycles of international norms: The United Nations and the global promotion of gender equality', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18:1 (2012), pp. 103–27).

[79] See, for example, Risse, '"Let's argue!"'; Mitzen, 'Reading Habermas in anarchy', but not Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

[80] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

[81] John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991 [orig. pub. 1861]).

[82] Karl Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto', in *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume I* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969 [orig. pub. 1848]), pp. 98–137, available at: {http://www.marxists.org}.

[83] Christian List and Robert Goodin, 'Epistemic democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet jury theorem', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 9:3 (2001), pp. 277–306; David Estlund, *Democratic Authority* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008); Stevenson, 'The wisdom of the many in global governance'.

[84] Sofia Näsström, 'The legitimacy of the people', *Political Theory*, 35:5 (2007), pp. 624–58.

[85] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*.

[86] Macdonald, *Global Stakeholder Democracy*.

[87] Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*.

[88] Roger Smith, 'The principle of constituted interests and the obligation to include', *Ethics & Global Politics*, 1:3 (2008), pp. 139–53.

[89] Christian List and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, 'Can there be a global demos? An agency-based approach', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 38:1 (2010), pp. 76–110.

of Figure 2, these concepts suggest specific and alternative interpretations of model A. Unlike concepts like states and classes, they are not stretched by assuming that ever more people are included in them.[90] Their points of empirical discrimination lay elsewhere, namely, where a smaller group gains superior power in comparison with a larger group (for no good reasons stipulated differently by the different conceptions). Despite that common ground, however, these conceptions inspire very different accounts of how DBS affects international politics. They explain different foreign policies and generate competing expectations about the effects of democratising international politics. Three examples will follow.

The political subject of *humanity* or *mankind* is constituted and held together – to the extent that it exists at all – by the interests and norms shared broadly by individual human beings. If we think of the political subject as humanity, we should therefore expect democratisation, in the sense of empowering this subject relative to other subjects (for example, classes or nations), to increase convergence and coordination of foreign policies among states in order to meet their common goals. To illustrate, *convergence* of foreign policies among the members of the EU can be explained by a greater role of human-wide interest and norms in this region.

Stakeholder communities, on the other hand, refer to a group of people who are significantly affected by particular decisions and which mobilise to control or influence them. In principle, each foreign policy decision may engender a new stakeholder community. If the political subject is a stakeholder community, therefore, international democratisation will push the field of foreign policy into different policy streams that are generally not coordinated across different fields, such as trade and security for instance. For example, an erosion of the difference between high and low politics in diplomacy and the ensuing possibility of leading economic and security policies by different interests and aims, can be explained by a greater political role of stakeholder groups. It allows foreign policies to *bifurcate*.

The *multitude*, to take a final example, is an anonymous and unbounded group of irreducibly singular individuals that rebel against dispersed structures of power, most commonly but not necessarily associated with capitalism and sovereignty. Democratisation in the sense of empowering a multitude is therefore likely to produce an increasing tendency among states to break with the customs, agreements, and fundamental principles of foreign policy conduct at unpredictable moments in time. If one would dare interpret the international order emerging under the influence of current (2017) populist and nationalist political leaders as an outcome of democratic practices and not only as a backlash against democracy (accepting the rhetoric of Donald Trump in the US, Victor Orban in Hungary, Boris Johnson in Britain, and others), the subject of democratic politics is conceived most conveniently as a multitude. It would explain the *unpredictability* and ridicule of existing norms in foreign policy that has been emblematic at least for the early days of Donald Trump's presidency in the US.[91]

These alternative conceptions of the democratic political subject are intended to expand the explanatory scope and generate competing predictions of foreign policy *within democratism*. The role of the theory then is to define the outer borders of relevant arguments while being agnostic on which more specific interpretation of the political subject is most fruitful. The *external* validity of democratism, on the other hand, requires testing of the argument that foreign policies depend on DBS

[90] Other noted political subjects in the literature such as 'transnational advocacy networks', 'global civil society', and 'world public opinion' may but need not instantiate democracy as specified in Figures 1 and 2.

[91] For a helpful news article, see David J. Lunch, 'Trump's unpredictability on foreign policy keeps world guessing: Disregard for diplomatic protocol by incoming president makes him difficult to read', *Financial Times* (19 January 2017).

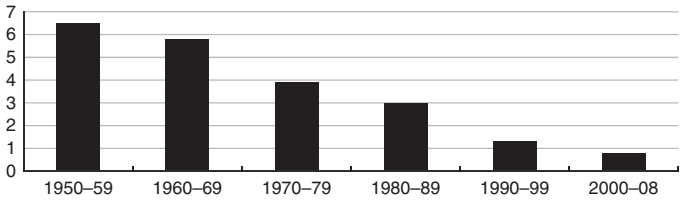

Figure 3. Average number of international conflicts per year (interstate and colonial).[92]

in the first place, against state- and class-centric arguments for instance. The following section illustrates the research needed for that purpose.

Peace and conflict in democratism

The emergence and resolution of international conflict – involving governments or people from more than one state, and ranging from political disagreement to total war – remains a key problem of study in IR. To examine what democratism may contribute to its explanation, let me address an issue that yet has to find its explanation in a coherent and generally applicable theory, namely the decline in international conflict globally from 1945 to 2010 or, specifically, the decline in wars (Figure 3) as well as battle deaths (Figure 4) during this time.[93]

A common explanation of the decline in conflict is that the distribution of power among states changed from a bipolar to a unipolar world in 1990. However, the changes long before and after 1990 are beyond the scope of that explanation.[94] Economic globalisation and the increasing costs of war is another commonly suggested explanation of the trend, but is difficult to reconcile with the many colonial wars among states with very high degrees of economic interdependence fought during this time period. Focusing instead on domestic politics, democratisation has been highlighted as the main cause behind the development. However, domestic democratisation does not explain why conflicts have declined also where authoritarian states are involved, for example, in relation to risings powers like China. Looking again to international level factors, the norm of peaceful conflict resolution may have been reinforced as a reaction to the Second World War and been diffused gradually since then. However, in the face of an arms race including nuclear weapons that occupied the minds of leading actors during most of the period, the assumption of a reinforced peace norm appears empirically problematic.

Confronted with these similar problems, scholars may seek to expand the explanatory scope of their theories by combining explanations, and then typically downplay the importance of coherence and unification in theory. Alternatively, the scope of the explanation may be delimited, for instance addressing 'only' the East Asian peace from the 1980s,[95] while neglecting the bigger global picture

[92] As published in the *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Original Data Source: UCDP/PRIO, available at: {http://www.hsrgroup.org/human-security-reports/20092010/text.aspx}.

[93] See John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Dutton, 2011); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

[94] For this and other arguments, see Mueller, *The Remnants of War* and the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*; Goldstein, *The War against War*.

[95] Stein Tonnesson, *Explaining the East Asian Peace: A Research Story* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017).

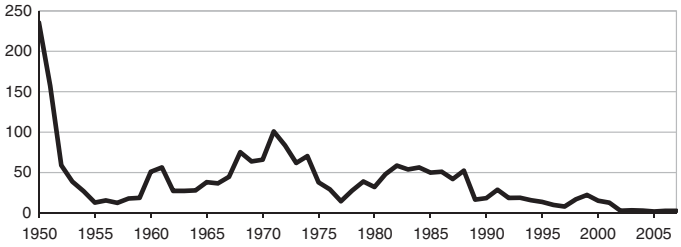

Figure 4. Battle deaths per year (x-axis) per world population (millions) (y-axis).[96]

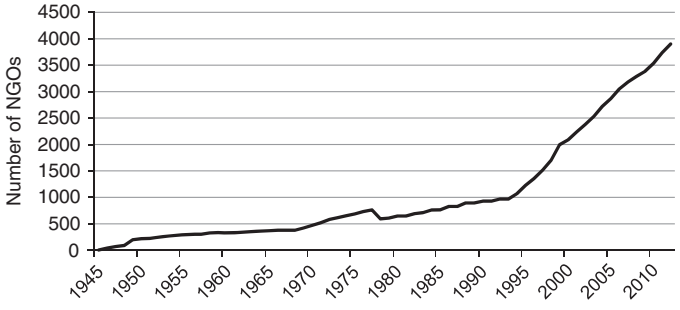

Figure 5. Number of NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN, by year.[97]

and causal pathways. A still different reaction is to continue searching for an idea that explains the original observation by invoking a coherent, unified, and generally applicable theory. Let me proceed along this third path to illustrate the plausibility and added value of democratism.

The international development from 1945 to 2010 can be seen as an uneven but gradual increase in DBS at the global level. The normative problem of insufficient democracy in global politics may have deepened during this time, as the powers exercised globally may have grown more than DBS expanded. Still, significant changes towards more DBS can be observed from different perspectives of what democracy means in practice. In light of the so-called cosmopolitan model of democracy, the universal inclusion of states in the UN, the use of majority voting in the General Assembly, the emergence of an international human rights regime, and the growing number and powers of international institutions within the UN system since 1945 all amount to a strengthening of democracy in the structures of international politics.[98] Looking at international politics instead from the perspective of the so-called stakeholder theory of democracy, the key observation is similar: politically affected individuals and their organisations have gained opportunities to mobilise politically and seek direct involvement in global politics increasingly over the relevant time period (Figure 5).[99]

[96] As published in the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*. Data Sources: PRIO; UCDP/HSRP Dataset; UN World Population Prospects.

[97] Data retrieved from Pieter Willets, 'The Growth in the Number of NGOs in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations' (2015), available at: {http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/NGOS/NGO-GRPH.HTM#data}.

[98] Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens*, ch. 6.

[99] David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Johathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), ch. 1.

What then are the likely consequences, if any, for levels of international conflict of the uneven while gradual shift towards more DBS between 1945 and 2010? While DBS may in principle lead to conflict (the largest group may be less rational than elites are, elites may be ready to protect their privileges by force) two causal mechanisms with an opposite effect apply more broadly.

First, higher levels of DBS should promote outcomes that are satisfactory to more people simply because DBS allows a larger group to influence outcomes.[100]As a subcomponent of the added political satisfaction, DBS should be expected to diminish also the dissatisfaction that might otherwise have escalated into conflict. This causal process can be studied across many different cases, such as the promotion of human rights by 'unrecognised peoples' in global governance that should reduce the risk of ethnic violence,[101] or the ability of the UN Security Council to restrain suggested international military action (for example, against Syria since 2012) or diminish war coalitions (for example, against Iraq 2003). Second, the more inclusive political subject of DBS should facilitate for governments and other actors to know the inclinations of their potential adversaries to fight, and thereby to avoid wars based on strategic misinformation.[102] Such information effects can materialise through, and by studied in, transnational mobilisation and communications (in stakeholder theory) or (in cosmopolitan theory) through reactions by the UN to conflicts. Both processes can signal that a threat of war is serious.[103]

Can these arguments explain conflict levels in particular cases or is the explanation limited to systemic effects? A brief look at the casualty numbers in the two US wars against Iraq and Vietnam respectively suggest that DBS may indeed explain conflict levels also in individual cases. According to one early estimate, 1,500,000 persons in Vietnam and 125,000 persons in Iraq died as a *direct* consequence of war actions.[104] The hypothesis then is that the lower number of causalities in the Iraq war depends to some degree on the relatively higher levels of democracy in the international relations of the US at this time. That suggestion seems plausible. For example, the attack on Iraq in March 2003 was preceded by which seem to have been the biggest globally coordinated street protests in history, including but not limited to 3,000,000 people in Rome and 1,500,000 in London marching against the war plans.[105] In contrast, the biggest protest against the Vietnam War assembled around 500,000 people in Washington, DC, 15 November 1969.[106] That is, a significantly smaller group of people in one country alone protested at a significantly later point in time (as measured from the beginnings of the wars) in the case of the Vietnam War. While obviously the international protests against the plans to attack Iraq in 2003 did not stop that war (and are but one of the many components of DBS to which earlier sections of this article motivate attention), their intended effects

[100] Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*.

[101] *The Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation: Information Brochure November 2014*, available at: {www.unpo.org} accessed 22 September 2017.

[102] Cf. James D. Fearon, 'Rationalist explanations for war', *International Organization*, 49:3 (1995), pp. 379–414.

[104] Goldstein, *Winning the War on War*.

[103] Ibid., p. 16, using data from PRIO (the Peace Research Institute of Oslo).

[105] Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht, 'Introduction', in Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht (eds), *The World Says No to War: Demonstrations against the War on Iraq* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. xiii–xxvi.

[106] 'Anti-Vietnam War demonstration held: the learning network', *New York Times* (15 November 2011; 15 November 1969), available at: {http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/15/nov-15-1969-anti-vietnam-war-demonstration-held/}.

to restrain violence are worth further analyses. As the death toll in Vietnam suggests, the situation in Iraq could have been more conflictual.[107]

However, if an increase of DBS since 1945 explains the diminishing levels of conflict observed until 2010, what explains the slightly increasing conflict levels observed from 2010 to 2014?[108] To clarify the puzzle, it is helpful to notice that the change is constituted primarily by events in Syria and Iraq, including the Islamic State. The political process that led to the war against Iraq in 2003 was, within the post-1989 context of strong multilateralism, widely perceived as a low point in terms of DBS and cosmopolitan principles. According to leading democratic theorists at the time, unusually little notice was taken of international law, diplomatic protests, and world public opinion, when the US and its coalition planned, decided and implemented the military policies.[109] Alienating large groups of people from the political process should in turn be expected to diminish the legitimacy of the Iraqi state as well as the threshold for individuals to resort to military or terrorist violence, which ultimately spread to Syria.[110] Hence, the increasing violence globally after 2010 may be explained by the decreasing level of democracy a few years earlier in the international relations of the Middle East (including actions taken by the US and the coalition it led in the region). Hence, the general hypothesis worth testing in future research remains: DBS lessens international conflict, and decreasing DBS increases it.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to construct an analytical framework – democratism – that is sensitive to the possibility and prevalence of DBS when analysing causes and consequences in IR. The first step was to establish an understanding of DBS that may describe international politics without contradicting fundamental assumptions about this matter in the literature. For much research in IR and democratic theory, the construction of such an understanding represents a theoretical problem in its own right. As I have shown, however, it can be overcome by defining democracy as rule by the largest group within as well as across state borders, before as well as after the founding of territorial states, and pertaining to binding decisions as well as to the making of non-binding political outcomes.

For theorists, this understanding of democracy is useful to generate and examine new interpretations of traditional concepts in explanatory and empirical IR, such as the structures and subjects of international

[107] But couldn't the lower conflict level in the Iraq war be explained more conventionally by the greater power preponderance of the US in that case (for example, Daniel S. Geller, 'Power differentials and war in rival dyads', *International Studies Quarterly*, 37:2 (1993), pp. 173–93)? To some extent, but not entirely. What a power preponderance theory does not explain is the seemingly stronger preference of the US to end the war in Iraq. The US did not reach its aim neither in Iraq (to create a liberal democracy and to eliminate sources of terrorism in the region), nor in Vietnam (to hinder the establishment of a communist regime in the country). It did, however, pretend to have reached a victory much more quickly in Iraq (on 1 May 2003, forty days after launching the attack). Hence, democratism, in contrast to power preponderance theory, is interesting by potentially explaining two seemingly interdependent matters: conflict levels (as indicated by casualties) and perceived war costs (as indicated by early declarations of victory and readiness to pull out despite not having accomplished the aims of war).

[108] Therése Pettersson and Peter Wallensteen, 'Armed conflicts, 1946–2014', *Journal of Peace Research*, 52:4 (2015), pp. 536–50.

[109] David Held, *Global Covenant: the Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. xi–xv; Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 180–05.

[110] Barack Obama, interviewed in *Asharq Al-Awsat* (13 May, 2015), available at: {http://english.aawsat.com/2015/05/article55343422/obama-we-are-prepared-to-use-all-elements-of-our-power-to-secure-our-interests-in-the-middle-east}.

politics and the ways in which they interact. The democratic versions of those concepts are different from, and on critical points incompatible with, the conceptions supported by approaches such as realism, liberalism, constructivism, and Marxism. An international political structure is democratic if it distributes political power equally among individuals in a political space that includes more than one state. An international political subject is democratic if it includes, in the formation and implementation of political will, all individuals in a political space that includes more than one state. For empirical researchers, these definitions provide criteria against which international politics should be assessed in the processes of explaining political outcomes or testing hypothesised effects.

In this vein, the global decline in inter-state conflict between 1945 and 2010 was discussed to illustrate that the suggested democratic theory concepts are both empirically applicable and generative of empirically accurate predictions. To clarify some more limited points, the possibility to explain five other issues were illustrated more tentatively: *first*, the so far peaceful transition of relative power (resources) from the US to China as well as the stability of Chinese foreign policy in this period; *second*, the establishment of the ICC and its lack of ratification by the US; *third*, the choice by some NGOs to collect and disseminate information that enhances human rights protection despite absent self-interest to do so, and the possibility that other NGOs and organisations act differently; *fourth*, the intensification of political conflict and transnational terrorism centred in the Middle East around 2010; and *fifth*, the likelihood for a preponderant power, like the US in Iraq as well as in Vietnam, to declare victory and to pull out sooner rather than later from an ongoing conflict (in fn. 107).

Furthermore, the capacity of democratic theory to generate explanations was illustrated by suggesting different foreign policy trajectories for states whose international relations undergo democratisation. Alternative specific conceptions of the political subject in democratic politics, including humanity, the multitude, and stakeholder communities, account for dramatically different political outcomes and generate competing empirically testable expectations. As demonstrated, they can be used to explain foreign policy convergence, for example, within the EU; systematic unpredictability, for example, of the US under Donald Trump; and differentiation of the national interest across subfields in foreign policy, as for example, in security (former high) and economic (former low) policy. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that democratic theory offers plenty of opportunities for researchers to explain and to test competing expectations about standard problems in IR. For future research, it appears worthwhile for scholars of IR to construct explanations of political problems based on democratic theory concepts, to deduce propositions from those explanations that are testable against empirical evidence, to collect new or reorganise old data, and to pursue in-depth analyses of those democratic theory propositions.

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