

Essay 2

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Tutorial 6: Survey Experiments

POL222

Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace

MICHAEL R. TOMZ *Stanford University*

JESSICA L. P. WEEKS *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

One of the most striking findings in political science is the democratic peace: the absence of war between democracies. Some authors attempt to explain this phenomenon by highlighting the role of public opinion. They observe that democratic leaders are beholden to voters and argue that voters oppose war because of its human and financial costs. This logic predicts that democracies should behave peacefully in general, but history shows that democracies avoid war primarily in their relations with other democracies. In this article we investigate not whether democratic publics are averse to war in general, but whether they are especially reluctant to fight other democracies. We embedded experiments in public opinion polls in the United States and the United Kingdom and found that individuals are substantially less supportive of military strikes against democracies than against otherwise identical autocracies. Moreover, our experiments suggest that shared democracy pacifies the public primarily by changing perceptions of threat and morality, not by raising expectations of costs or failure. These findings shed light on a debate of enduring importance to scholars and policy makers.



Read

The first five paragraphs of the introductory section (pp.849-850).

- The fifth paragraph starts with “Participants in our experiments were substantially less supportive of military strikes against democracies...” and ends with “the preferences of ordinary voters contribute to peace among democracies.”

The first five paragraphs and the last (the eighth) paragraph of the section titled “EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN AND PROCEDURES” (pp.853-854).

- The fifth paragraph starts with “We concluded with several bullet points that were identical for everyone...” and ends with “The full text is available on the authors’ websites.”
- The last (the eighth) paragraph starts with “The U.S. study was unique in another way...” and ends with “not only when the country was a democracy but also when it was an autocracy.”

Questions

- What are the dependent and independent variables of their causal theory? Elaborate on their definitions as appropriate for their causal theory.
- How can their causal theory be described based on these variables?
- Who are the participants in the experiment (i.e., the unit of analysis of the experiment)? How are they chosen?
- What are the experimental treatments (stimuli or manipulations)? How are different treatments assigned to the participants? In other words, how is the independent variable operationalized?
- How are the outcomes (i.e., the dependent variable) measured?
- State the causal hypothesis for this experiment in your words based on your answers to (b) and (c) above. In your answer, focus on just one of the three treatment variables — the political regime of the opponent country.

Access: [*jacobawinter.github.io/files/tomz_weeks.pdf*](https://jacobawinter.github.io/files/tomz_weeks.pdf)

A country is developing nuclear weapons and will have its first nuclear bomb within six months. The country could then use its missiles to launch nuclear attacks against any country in the world. **The country is a [democracy/autocracy]**. The country's motives remain unclear, but if it builds nuclear weapons, it will have the power to blackmail or destroy other countries. The country has refused all requests to stop its nuclear weapons program.

By attacking the country's nuclear development sites now, the US military could prevent the country from making any nuclear weapons. Would you favor or oppose using the U.S. military to attack the country's nuclear development sites?

- 1. Favor strongly*
- 2. Favor somewhat*
- 3. Neither favor nor oppose*
- 4. Oppose somewhat*
- 5. Oppose strongly*

Read

The first two paragraphs of the section titled “EVIDENCE ABOUT THE MAIN EFFECT OF DEMOCRACY” (pp.854-855).

- The second paragraph starts with “As Table 1 shows, citizens in both countries were...” and ends with “democracy produced substantively large and statistically significant effects on preferences.”
- Make sure you read footnote 10

Questions

- Table 1 in the article (p.854) summarizes the result of the main experimental treatment — the political regime of the opponent country. Discuss the result by answering the following questions.
 - Focusing on the middle two columns of Table 1, headlined “United Kingdom (between)” and “United States (between),” interpret the result of the experiment. (Ignore “95% C.I.” as we have not covered this yet. This will be covered in POL232)

Access: [*jacobawinter.github.io/files/tomz_weeks.pdf*](https://jacobawinter.github.io/files/tomz_weeks.pdf)

TABLE 1. The Effect of Democracy on Willingness to Strike

	United Kingdom (between)	United States (between)	United States (within)
Not a democracy	34.2	53.3	50.0
Democracy	20.9	41.9	38.5
Effect of democracy	−13.3	−11.4	−11.5
95% C.I.	(−19.6 to −6.9)	(−17.0 to −5.9)	(−14.7 to −8.3)

Note: The table gives the percentage of respondents who supported military strikes when the target was a democracy and when it was not. The difference is the estimated effect of democracy. In the United Kingdom, we obtained between-subject estimates by comparing 364 cases in which the target was a democracy, versus 398 cases in which it was not a democracy. In the United States, we obtained between-subject estimates by comparing 639 cases in which the target was a democracy, versus 634 in which it was not. The United States within-subject estimates were based on 972 respondents, each of whom assessed two scenarios, one in which the target was a democracy and another in which the target was not a democracy. 95% confidence intervals appear in parentheses.

- What you interpreted in (a) above is based on a “between-subject” experimental design, which is the focus of this course and the experimental design you have studied (i.e., randomized controlled experiments/trials or RCTs). In contrast, the last column of Table 1 presents the results from a “within-subject” experimental design.
- What is the “within-subject” experimental design? What were you able to gather about this type of experimental design from reading the assigned portions of this article? How is it different from the between-subject experimental design? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the within-subject design compared to the between-subject design?

- External validity of the sample of this study is expected to be very high, because it uses surveys of representative samples from the U.S. and the U.K. However, suppose some researchers raise concerns about the external validity of the experimental treatment, arguing that the study's treatment — a hypothetical scenario of international crisis and military action — is too artificial to invoke a genuine response from participants to the actual case of this scenario in the real world.
- How would you respond to these researchers' criticisms? Offer an argument to defend the authors' experiment. Additionally, you may offer a caveat if any.