

## **Mansfield and Snyder – “Democratization and the Danger of War” (1995)**

Nutshell: Though a world full of mature, stable democracies would likely be more peaceful place, countries cannot become such overnight. Rather, they must go through an often-difficult transitory period where democratic processes do not maintain full control and may fail altogether. During this unstable period of “democratization”, states are more likely to go to war, even against democracies, than are other democracies or even other autocracies. We should think twice about aggressively pushing dangerous states like Russia and China down the democratizing path given the propensity for conflict to emerge from such instability.

Central Question: Though the democratic peace literature has concentrated on the perceived paucity of conflict between stable democracies, how do nations in the transitional stage toward democracy fit the pattern? What about nations where the transition period fails, and lapses back toward autocracy (autocratization)?

Theoretical Explanation for Conflict in Unstable Regimes: There is a pattern of domestic political competition for power after the breakup of an autocracy which is conducive to conflict. In this competition, elites use nationalist appeals compete for mass allies, but find that these allies, once mobilized, are difficult to control. War results from nationalist prestige strategies that leaders use to remain atop their unstable coalitions. This is not to say that the public in the unstable regime has a predisposition toward war, but that elites exploit the imperfect developing democratic institutions in such a way that “promote belligerent pressure-group lobbies or upwellings of militancy”. The state may effectively jettison democratic institutions, but the nationalist rhetoric remains. The volatility inherent in such a situation makes the state prone to war.

Measures and Analysis: M&S begin by distinguishing between democratic, democratizing, and autocratizing states for use in quantitative analysis. A state is a democratizer if it goes from autocracy to either anocracy (a form of government with both democratic and autocratic features) or democracy, or from anocracy to democracy, in a given period of time. A state is an autocratizer if the arrow goes the other way. Their null hypothesis is that a democratizer, an autocratizer, and a state with no regime change have an identical probability of going to war. They tested this relationship for 1, 5, and 10 year periods in the period 1811 – 1980.

Findings: On average, democratizing states were two-thirds more likely to war than states that did not have a regime change. They are more likely to go to war than even stable autocracies. They also display no inhibitions about warring with stable democracies. The relationship between democratizers and war was strongest for the ten-year periods, and weakest for the one-year periods. Autocratizing states are also more likely to go to war than states with no regime change, but are less likely to do so than democratizing states. As with democratizers, this relationship is stronger in the ten-year periods than the one-year periods. M&S find no statistical difference in these relationships for instability between great powers and other states. Once a democratizer becomes a stable democracy, it tends to fight wars as often as other types of states but:

- 1) tends to win,

- 2) is likely to abandon overcommitments,
- 3) is unlikely to fight a preventive war.

This, however, only emerges in the very long run. The development of efficient democratic institutions is hindered by the fact that everyone is not made better off. Losers include the old bureaucracy (including the ousted leader), old economic elites, and special interest groups favored in the previous regime. Significantly, the interests threatened in democratization tend to be military in nature. The drag created by the losers creates an impasse in the road to democracy, leading to the short-run thinking and reckless policy-making conducive to war. This occurs for four reasons:

- 1) the social changes impelling democratization create a wider spectrum of politically significant groups with increasingly incompatible interests,
- 2) the threatened old elites take an inflexible view of their own interests,
- 3) mass mobilization is a competitive process that becomes increasingly ungovernable and volatile,
- 4) since the old autocratic institutions are dismantled and the new democratic institutions are not yet mature, central authority is greatly weakened.

The impasse leads to three war-prone tactics:

- 1) logrolling – each elite group tends to get what it most wants, so if only a few groups want a policy conducive to war, they'll probably get it,
- 2) Squaring the circle – the diverse coalition tries to make sense of the contradictory policies that emerge from their conflicting interests and often make too many foreign enemies in the process,
- 3) Prestige strategies – democratizing countries often try to seek domestic legitimacy by scoring victories abroad.

Conclusions: Considering the dangers of the democratization process, it makes little sense to push nations through the process without paying attention to their particular context. Scholarship in Latin America suggests the process goes most smoothly when the threatened elites, and particularly the military, are given a “golden parachute”: guarantee they won't end up jail, and make sure they have a reasonably bright future in the new regime. Create a free but responsible marketplace of ideas on an even playing field (elites don't get the parachute here). In the long run, the enlargement of the zone of stable democracy will likely enhance peace, but in the short term it will be a chaotic transition.