

John Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace."

Owen seeks to establish a causal mechanism to account for the democratic peace proposition. He argues that, rather than constituting separate but insufficient, independent causal mechanisms, liberal ideas or ideology and institutions work "in tandem" to bring about the democratic peace. Liberal ideology itself is grounded in "enlightened self-interest." Freedom, in turn, is required to pursue self-preservation and individual well-being, and peace is required to preserve freedom (89).

Perceptions:

A crucial component of Owen's argument is the role assigned to perception: "Liberals must consider the other state democratic" (90). Previous attempts to explain the democratic peace in either structural or normative terms have failed; indeed, Owen acknowledges that "democratic structures were as likely to drive states to war as to restrain them from it" (91). Perceptions make the difference: If a state's peers do not believe that it is a liberal democracy, they will not treat it as one (96). The underlying premise is that liberal states understand and trust the intentions of other liberal democracies.

Democratic Institutions:

Liberal institutions are designed to protect the right of citizens to self-government. However, not all leaders hold the liberal view. In what Owen describes as "everyday" foreign policy, illiberal leaders of liberal democracies can bring their states into disputes with other liberal states, because the public is not greatly interested in this level of diplomacy. However, under the threat of war, the public begins to pay attention. If such leaders want war, they must persuade the public that war is necessary, and, in the process, the argument is often raised that the opponent is not democratic. "When the prior liberal consensus is that the adversary *is* a liberal democracy, however, these illiberal statesmen find that they cannot mobilize the public" (100). Conversely, if illiberal leaders of a liberal democracy oppose war with another illiberal state, the liberal constituency may force its leaders into war (Owen points to evidence that opinion changes precede policy changes).

The article sets out 6 hypotheses, which Owen tests against four cases (103 ff):

- (i) Liberals will trust states they consider liberal and mistrust those they consider illiberal
- (ii) When liberals observe that a foreign state becomes liberal by their standards, they will expect pacific relations with that state.
- (iii) Liberals claim that fellow liberal democracies share their ends and illiberal states do not.
- (iv) Liberals will not change their assessments of foreign states during crises with those states unless those states change their institutions.
- (v) Liberal elites will agitate for their policies during war-threatening crises.
- (vi) During crises, statesmen will be constrained to follow liberal policy.

Owen sets out four cases that conform to these hypotheses:

1. Franco-American relations during 1803-1812.

A quasi-war developed between the US and France over the French seizure of US merchant vessels on the high seas, in retaliation for the Jay Treaty, in which the US promised Britain not to trade with France. France was viewed by the US as a Republic, even though Owen, by his standards, would not consider it to have been one. The American Republicans trusted France, and took the view that the French “shared their ends,” while the British did not. Moreover, Republicans “agitated against” war with France, thereby constraining the President and congressional federalists.

## 2. Anglo-American Relations during 1803 - 1812.

The British seized US cargoes on the high seas. Owen takes the view that Britain cannot be considered to have been a liberal democracy during this time, and this relationship is thus often falsely portrayed as an instance of war between democracies. The Republicans mistrusted England, and openly defined it as non-democratic both before and during the crisis. This time, they agitated *for* war, and leaders followed republic ideology since republicans controlled both the executive and congress.

## 3. Anglo-American Relations during 1861-63.

Britain was still perceived as a monarchy (despotism). However, Owen defines 1860s Britain as a liberal democracy, because of the impact of the 1832 Reform Act. The *Trent* crisis (Union ship seized British mail packet) brought the nations to the brink of war. However, when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Declaration in September 1862, the dynamics changed. British liberals began to trust the Union and wanted better relations with it. They agitated *against* war after the Declaration and thus constrained the British Parliament from intervening in the Civil War.

## 4. Anglo-American Relations during 1895-96.

The British threatened to violate the Monroe Doctrine through their territorial expansion; the context was a boundary dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela. According to Owen, both nations were liberal democracies at this time. Although many Americans still saw Britain as a monarchy, others began to challenge this view. Britons saw the United States as liberal and thus trustworthy, primarily because of the abolition of slavery. More importantly for Owen, both states continued to see each other as liberal during the course of the crisis, and both American and British liberals agitated *for* peace. The crisis was resolved peacefully.

Owen accepts the relevance of “power politics” to foreign policy, but claims that the realist view implies that statesmen can ignore liberals or can persuade them to change their view (121). He suggests two potential approaches to synthesizing the realist and liberal theories: First, one must accept, as a premise, the claim that liberals define national interest in such a way that cooperation with fellow liberal democracies is required. Then, balance of threat theory (Walt) “could incorporate states’ estimates of regime type.” Secondly, one may use Wendt et al.’s “ideational framework” to build a model that acknowledges that “states must hold certain beliefs about each other before they fear each other.” Power, in this framework, would “simply be one of several forces, filtered through an ideational lens” (123).