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## Pugnacious Presidents: Democratic Constitutional Systems and International Conflict

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### Abstract

How do domestic political institutions affect international conflict? Democratic peace theorists argue that jointly-democratic dyads are less likely to engage in war than other types of states, but these explanations cannot account for the large number of militarized conflicts that fall short of full-scale war among democratic states. We hypothesize that presidential democracies place fewer constraints on the executive's ability to use force and are, therefore, more likely to engage in international conflict than other types of democratic states. Using standard international relations datasets on conflict, we demonstrate that jointly-presidential democratic dyads are between two and a half and four times more likely to become involved in militarized interstate disputes than other jointly-democratic dyads. Moreover, we find that when it comes to lower-level conflicts, jointly-presidential dyads are statistically indistinguishable from nondemocratic dyads. These results have important implications for our understanding of democratic peace theory and the causes of international conflict.

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The relationship between a state's domestic political institutions and its behavior in international politics is a central subject in the study of political science. Democratic peace theorists (e.g., Oneal and Russett 2001) have demonstrated that democratic states are less likely to engage in war with one another than pairs of autocratic states or dyads with one democratic and one autocratic state. Indeed, as Jack Levy (1988, 662) has argued "The absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations."

Yet, democratic peace theorists cannot account for the large numbers of conflicts among democracies that fall short of full-scale war. For example, in 1957 U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered covert action and threatened a military invasion in an attempt to topple Syrian President Adib Shishakli. In 1997, Botswana and Namibia clashed in a territorial dispute over a contested island in the Chobe River. And on August 11, 1987, Venezuela scrambled F-16 fighters to force a Colombian warship to withdraw from a maritime zone claimed by both states. These were not isolated incidents. Indeed, from 1945 to 2000, democracies came into conflict with other democracies in 89 Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) (See Table 1). While none of these disputes resulted in a major theater war and many were mere minor skirmishes, a full two thirds of these conflict resulted in a "use of force," the second-highest hostility level recorded in the MID dataset, and over one quarter of these conflicts resulted in at least one fatality. What explains this persistent conflict among democratic states?

International relations theorists have focused on the startling lack of war among democracies, but they have given less attention to explaining conflict between democratic states. Moreover, international relations scholars have fixated on the simple dichotomy between democracy and autocracy and have put less effort into exploring how institutional variation within regime type might affect international conflict behavior. Jessica Weeks (2012) has shown

that certain autocratic regimes, such as personalistic dictatorships, place fewer constraints on executives and that these autocracies are the most likely to engage in international conflict, but there has been surprisingly little research (e.g., Elman 2000) on how democratic constitutional design might affect patterns of international conflict.

Synthesizing insights from the study of democratic constitutional design in comparative politics and research on institutional constraints and conflict in international security studies, this article examines the effect of democratic constitutional systems on international conflict. We argue that presidential democratic systems place fewer constraints on the chief executive than either parliamentary or semi-presidential democratic systems and these relatively weak constraints are exacerbated in a dyadic context. We therefore hypothesize that dyads containing two presidential democracies will be more likely to engage in international conflict than other jointly-democratic dyads.

Using standard international relations datasets, we analyze the relationship between constitutional system and international conflict. We find that jointly-presidential dyads are between two and a half and four times more likely to engage in MIDs than other types of jointly-democratic dyads. Moreover, we find that when it comes to participation in MIDs short of war, jointly-presidential dyads are statistically indistinguishable from nondemocratic dyads. The results are highly robust in a broad range of tests, including in tests that exclude the United States and entire geographic regions, alleviating concerns that the findings are being driven by specific countries or areas of the world.

This research is novel in several respects and has important implications for our understanding of the relationship between domestic political systems and international conflict. First, we demonstrate that variations in democratic constitutional design matter for international

conflict. In particular, presidential democracies are more disputatious than other types of democratic states. Second, we suggest a new direction for international security studies, focusing on institutional variation within democratic states and its effect on a broad range of topics in international security. Third, this research speaks to an ongoing debate in democratic peace theory and provides additional evidence to suggest that institutional constraints, not norms of peaceful dispute resolution, account for the striking absence of war among democratic states. Fourth, and finally, this research has ramifications for how we think about constitutional design in newly democratizing states. Critics of presidentialism have long argued that presidential systems are less able to sustain a transition to democracy (Fish 2005). The findings of this article suggest that international peace and security might be another casualty of this seemingly innocuous institutional design choice.

### **Regime Type and War**

Few subjects have received as much attention in political science over the past several decades as the relationship between domestic political institutions and international conflict. Scholars have identified systematic differences between democratic and autocratic states with respect to crisis behavior (Fearon 1994), war outcomes (Reiter and Stam 2002), alliance formation (Leeds 2003), and many other international political phenomena. The subject generating by far the most interest and attention in this tradition, however, is democratic peace theory (Moaz and Russett 1993). Scholars have consistently shown that democracies are unlikely to engage in war with other democracies. Democratic peace theorists hypothesize that democracies are more pacific because their executives face greater institutional constraints on the use of force and because of shared values in which democracies externalize domestic norms of peaceful dispute resolution

into the international sphere. Although critics have persistently taken aim at the idea, (e.g., Gartzke 2007), the basic empirical finding remains one of the strongest in the study of international relations. As Allan Dafoe (2011, 248) has recently written, “despite decades of attempted critiques, there remains a strong, statistically significant association between joint democracy and peace.”

While international relations theorists have fixated on the differences between autocratic and democratic states, comparative political scientists have studied domestic political institutions in much greater detail, focusing on institutional variations within states with similar political regime types. Barbara Geddes (1999), for example, has argued that variation in the type of authoritarian system can affect the probability and type of regime change. Similarly, comparative political scientists have explored the effect of constitutional design on political life within democratic systems, including the advantages and disadvantages of parliamentary, presidential, and mixed or semi-presidential systems (Shugart and Carey 1992, Linz 1990, Cheibub 2007, Fish 2005). It is often argued that that parliamentary systems: are more efficient in passing legislation, provide for the early removal of a poor chief executive, disperse power more broadly, and are more likely to result in democratic consolidation. Presidential systems, on the other hand, are thought to: be more stable, provide for direct election of the chief executive, provide checks and balances, and enable executives to take swift and decisive action. Semi-presidential or mixed systems contain a combination of these characteristics (Duverger 1980, Elgie 1999).

Despite the voluminous literature in international relations on the relationship between domestic politics and conflict, and comparative political scientists’ interest in more fine-grained variations within domestic political institutions, there has been surprisingly little research on how

institutional variation within regime type affects international politics. Rather, international relations scholars have studied broad differences between democracies and autocracies and comparativists, meanwhile, have focused almost exclusively on domestic political outcomes.

The research agenda of Jessica Weeks provides the most notable exception. She argues that autocratic systems that place fewer institutional constraints on the chief executive are less able to engage in successful coercive diplomacy (2008) and more likely to initiate international conflict (2012). She does not, however, conduct an analysis of variation among different types of democratic systems.

Indeed, there has been much less attention to the subject of democratic constitutional design and international conflict. Elman (2000) has argued that variation in executive constraints, the preferences of the executive, and the preferences of the legislature can combine to affect war initiation. She argues that executive autonomy is most likely to lead to war when the executive is belligerent, the legislature is moderate, and the executive is unconstrained. She demonstrates her argument through case studies of the U.S. decision to declare war on Great Britain in 1812 and Finland's alliance with Nazi Germany and its willingness to risk war with the Soviet Union in 1940. Reiter and Tillman (2002) also conduct a more detailed analysis on democratic institutions and conflict behavior and test their hypotheses on a dataset of 37 democracies from 1919 to 1992. They find that public participation in elections increases the likelihood of conflict among democracies, but that constitutional design has only a mixed effect.

There are several limitations, however, to the existing research on democratic constitutional design and conflict. First, these scholars did not theorize and empirically demonstrate which type of constitutional system places the greatest constraints on the executive and how this might affect the use of force. Second, these analyses are dated and rely on datasets

that contain relatively few observations of conflict among democratic states. Third, and finally, these studies do not examine how the effect of constitutional system might aggregate in a dyadic context.

In sum, despite a voluminous literature on domestic political institutions and international politics, scholars have not theorized or empirically tested how the effects of democratic constitutional design might aggregate in a dyadic context to affect international conflict. This is surprising because the central research agenda in this literature, the democratic peace theory, has found little support for democracy's monadic effect. Rather, scholars have shown that joint democracy between states reduces the probability of conflict. Yet, scholars have not explored whether jointly-presidential systems might increase the probability of conflict among democratic states.

### **Pugnacious Presidents**

This section develops a new theory, grounded in previous scholarship in international security and comparative politics, on the relationship between democratic constitutional design and international conflict. To advance the argument that jointly-presidential democracies are more conflict prone than other types of democratic dyads, we build on three propositions. First, states with fewer constraints on executive authority will be more likely to experience international conflict. Second, presidential democracies place fewer constraints on executives than other types of democratic systems and are, therefore, more likely to engage in international disputes. Third, and finally, these effects exacerbated in a dyadic context, making jointly-presidential dyads especially conflict prone.

To begin, we draw on a large international relations literature that argues that states with domestic political institutions that place fewer constraints on the chief executive will be more likely to use force abroad.<sup>2</sup> In nearly every state, it is the chief executive who retains the ultimate authority to decide whether to initiate international conflict and, when targeted in a dispute, whether to reciprocate. The institutional system and decision-making process that contributes to those decisions on matters of war and peace are thought to shape the probability that a state engages in armed conflict. In particular, states with domestic political systems that place greater constraints on executive power are less likely to experience conflict for a variety of reasons.

Ex-ante constraints stymie a leader's ability to mobilize for war and initiate conflict (Maoz and Russett 1993). Taking international action requires the mobilization of support from the relevant political actors within a society. Where the executive is unconstrained, he or she can initiate international conflict unilaterally with little regard to popular opinion, the preferences of other bodies of government, or due process. In systems with greater constraints on executive power, however, mobilizing support among the broader public and other governmental bodies is more difficult and cumbersome. In these systems, there are fewer foreign policy objectives for which the broader cross-section of relevant political actors will support the use of force rendering conflict less likely.

Ex-post constraints dissuade leaders from choosing force for fear of punishment after the fact. According to Weeks, (2012, 330) in order to understand how domestic institutions affect patterns of conflict, "the first question is what kind of regimes face a powerful domestic audience that can punish or, at the extreme, remove leaders who do not represent their interests." Leaders,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Howell and Pevehouse (2007), Maoz and Russett (1993), Schultz (1999), and Weeks (2012).



therefore, will be less likely to adopt risky or potentially unpopular foreign policies, such as the initiation of international conflict when ex-post constraints are present. Ex-post constraints can also contribute to peace due to successful coercive diplomacy through foreign policy signaling made possible by domestic audience costs (Fearon 1994, Schultz 1999). Foreign leaders understand that it is risky for constrained leaders to back down after making public military threats. When constrained leaders issue threats, therefore, they are inherently more credible, allowing constrained leaders to avoid conflict resulting from incentives to misrepresent private information (Fearon 1995).

In this vein, many scholars (e.g., Maoz and Russett 1993) have argued that the striking absence of war among democracies is due to greater constraints on executive power in democratic as compared to authoritarian states. Similarly, Jessica Weeks (2012) has demonstrated that authoritarian states with fewer constraints on executive power, such as personalistic dictatorships, are more likely to engage in international conflict than other types of authoritarian states.

Second, we contend that presidents face fewer constraints than chief executives in other types of democratic systems. There are three major, or classical, types of constitutional systems among democratic states: presidential, parliamentary, and mixed or semi-presidential (Elgie 2003). Comparative political scientists have debated the merits and demerits of the various democratic regime types and have frequently noted that a distinctive feature of presidential systems is a relative lack of constraints on the chief executive, which provides presidents with the ability to take bold and decisive action. The concentration of executive authority in the office of the president has certain advantages in domestic political life, such as an enhanced ability to push through unpopular, but needed, economic reforms in a time of economic crisis or

to bring order and stability in a situation of domestic or international instability, but it also comes with disadvantages, such as a tendency toward autocratic backsliding (Fish 2006).

According to Juan Linz (1990) there are two distinctive features of presidential systems: 1) the president's claim to legitimacy through popular vote and 2) the fixed term of office. As it relates to international conflict, these distinctive features translate directly into fewer ex-ante and ex-post constraints on presidential decisions to use force abroad.

Presidents face fewer ex-ante constraints than chief executives in other democratic systems. Because presidents are directly elected they can claim to have a mandate from the people and have less of a need to garner approval from other governmental bodies before implementing their agenda. According to Linz (1990, 61), "The plebiscitarian component implicit in the president's authority' is likely to make the obstacles and opposition he encounters seem particularly annoying...The doleful potential for displays of cold indifference, disrespect, or even downright hostility toward the opposition is not to be scanted." On the other hand, prime ministers understand that their authority derives from leading a majority of parliamentarians and are more willing to engage in bargaining, consensus building, and coalition-forming, before embarking on a new course of action. In sum, according to Linz, a president "will find the inevitable opposition to his policies far more irksome and demoralizing than would a prime minister, who knows himself to be but the spokesman for a temporary governing coalition rather than the voice of the nation or the tribune of the people." This ability of the president to set policy unilaterally may be especially strong in the foreign policy realm. As Reiter and Tillman (2002, 815) have argued, "the separation of the legislative and executive branch gives each branch rather exclusive control over certain policy domains. For example, the American president has considerable (and largely unchecked) authority in the use of force, despite the

mostly ceremonial War Powers Act...As a result, we might expect that presidents should face fewer constraints in their ability to initiate and escalate conflicts.”

Presidents also face fewer ex-post constraints on the use of force. Prime ministers can lose office through a simple vote of no confidence, but a president’s term in office is secure even if he or she adopts risky or unpopular policies. Presidents can be subject to removal through impeachment, but this is an extreme and rare procedure and it still renders presidents only criminally, but not politically, accountable to the legislature. Presidents therefore can initiate international conflict without fear of immediate removal from office, even if the conflict is unpopular or does not go according to plan. On the other hand, prime ministers will more likely be deterred from adopting such controversial and unpredictable courses of action due to the higher prospect of losing power in a vote of no confidence.

In mixed, or semi-presidential systems, we should also expect executives to be less conflict prone than in presidential systems. In semi-presidential systems executive authority is divided, providing an additional ex-ante constraint on the use of force. Moreover, as in parliamentary systems, at least one executive depends on the legislature’s support to retain power, providing some potential ex-post constraints.

Some might object to the idea that presidents are less constrained than prime ministers when it comes to the use of force because prime ministers, by law, maintain majority support of the legislature, and this provides the prime minister with great latitude to implement her preferred policies. Presidents, on the other hand, must contend with separate and co-equal branches that also share in power on matters of war and peace (Elman 2000). Therefore, it might be easier, not more difficult, for a prime minister to attain legislative approval for her actions, including the initiation of militarized disputes.

This objection overlooks the fact, however, that the prime minister's power is contingent on her retention of majority support and that this support can be revoked at any time. As Linz (1990, 52) argued in a parliamentary system, "the only democratically legitimate institution is parliament; in such a regime, the government's authority is completely dependent upon parliamentary confidence." While prime ministers might be able to easily push through mundane legislative items that are central to his party's or coalition's platform, obtaining support for the use of force in an international crisis is a much less routine or predictable matter. Members of parliament may have significant reservations about engaging in international conflict even when the government is from one's own party, and the parliament's willingness to approve military measures cannot be taken for granted. In addition, even if the parliament supported the use of force abroad, it might become politically expedient to hold the chief executive politically accountable if the conflict, as is often the case, does not go as well as initially planned. A PM's decision to use of force abroad therefore might as easily result in a vote of no confidence as unquestioning parliamentary support.

This is a dispute, however, that cannot be definitively settled in the theoretical realm. Turning to the evidence, we can see that presidents do in fact face fewer constraints than executives in other democratic systems. Table 2 presents information on executive constraints in different types of democratic constitutional systems as measured by Polity IV, the most widely-used measure of executive constraints in the political science literature. The executive constraint measure varies from 0 (lowest) to 7 (highest) and in order to qualify as a democracy a state must receive an executive constraint score of 5 or higher. As Table 2 illustrates, there is a significant variation in the distribution of executive constraints among the three subtypes of democracy. While the vast majority of parliamentary and semi-presidential states receive an executive

constraint score of 7 (95% and 68%, respectively), only 44% of presidential democracies receive the maximum score. Furthermore, presidential democracies receive a 5, the lowest possible executive constraint score for democracies, nearly twice as often as semi-presidential states and over ten times as often as parliamentary democracies. The chi-squared statistic reveals that the probability of observing these differences if there is no relationship between democratic constitutional system and constraints on executive authority is less than 0.000. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis that presidents are not less constrained than executives in other democratic systems.

Third, we propose that institutional constraints have their most significant effect on conflict in the dyadic context. Greater constraints on both states in the dyad aggregate to have a dampening effect on conflict. Democratic peace theorists advancing the institutional constraint mechanism (Maoz and Russett 1993) hypothesized that executive constraints in democracies make it difficult and time consuming to acquire a broad base of support for conflict, providing more time and space for states to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis. On the other hand, among autocracies, or between a democracy and an autocracy, disputes are more likely to escalate because leaders understand that autocratic counterparts operate under few constraints and, therefore, they might be forced to bypass normal processes and rally support rapidly in order to respond expeditiously to the crisis.

Similarly, varying levels of constraints within different types of democratic systems might also be amplified in the dyadic context. This expectation is borne out in Figure 1, which reveals that the average level of aggregate executive constraints on the dyad is greater in jointly-presidential dyads than in other jointly-democratic dyads. The more significant constraints imposed on dyads that include at least one parliamentary or semi-presidential democracy provide

statesmen more time and space to find acceptable diplomatic compromises to conflicts of interest that preclude the use of force. Contrarily, in presidential-presidential dyads, leaders in both states understand that they and their opponent face fewer constraints. In such dyads, leaders must expect that the timeframe for resolving any dispute peacefully will be compressed and must be willing to resort more quickly to the use of force.

Taken together, these propositions bring us to this article's central hypothesis.

**H1:** *Jointly-presidential dyads will be more likely to engage in international conflict than other jointly-democratic dyads.*

### **Empirical Analysis**

To test this hypothesis, we employ a directed-dyad data set that contains information on the constitutional systems of democratic states and militarized interstate disputes (MID) from 1946-2000. Following convention, we use Maoz's recoded dyadic version (2005) of the MID dataset.

The dependent variable of interest is *conflict*, which measures the occurrence of a MID between countries. The variable is coded "1" if in a given year country A initiated a MID against country B and "0" otherwise. To assess whether jointly presidential dyads are more prone to MIDs that escalate to greater hostility levels, we create two additional measures of the dependent variable. *Display* is coded as "1" if in year x country A initiated a MID against country B and the highest action taken was at a minimum a display of force (Jones, Bremer,

Singer 1996). *Force* is coded “1” if the highest action taken in the dyad was, at a minimum, a “use of force.” And *Fatal* is coded “1” if the MID resulted in at least one fatality.<sup>3</sup>

The key independent variables gauge variation in constitutional system among democratic states. To code these variables, we first identified the democratic states in the sample. Using Polity IV data, we code a country as a democracy if it has a Polity Score between 7 and 10 (Marshall and Jaggers 2002).<sup>4</sup> We then categorized each of these states by their constitutional system, using data from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010). As the Cheibub et al. (2010) coding rules differ from those used by Polity IV, there were some country-years that qualify as democracy according to Polity IV but that did not receive a democratic constitutional system subtype classification from Cheibub et al. (2010). We coded the constitutional system of these observations ourselves by consulting national constitutions and secondary sources.<sup>5</sup>

From the indicator variables categorizing all democratic regimes as *parliamentary*, *semi-presidential*, or *presidential*, we created the corresponding variations in jointly democratic dyad types, also coded dichotomously. This generated nine directed-dyad types—*presidential-presidential*, *presidential-parliamentary*, *presidential-semi-presidential*, *parliamentary-presidential*, *parliamentary-parliamentary*, *parliamentary-semi-presidential*, *semi-presidential-presidential*, *semi-presidential-parliamentary*, and *semi-presidential-semi-presidential*. To isolate how jointly presidential dyads compare to these other jointly democratic dyads, we created an aggregate category, *other jointly democratic*, which includes all jointly democratic

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<sup>3</sup> Since there are zero, or depending on one’s coding, very few, instances of the highest hostility level, war, among democratic states, we can safely assume that jointly presidential systems are not more prone to such intense conflicts.

<sup>4</sup> The Polity IV documentation identifies democracies as having a score of between 6 and 10. Following convention in the international relations literature (e.g., Gartzke 2007), we use 7 as the threshold for democracy. The results are robust to using the lower democracy threshold.

<sup>5</sup> See the data appendix for the full list of countries recoded.

dyads with the exception of jointly presidential dyads. To account for those dyads that are not *jointly democratic*, i.e., dyads that include non-democratic regimes, we created a dichotomous *non-jointly democratic* variable. This variable is coded as “1” if the dyad has at least one nondemocratic state. Lastly, we generated a dichotomous variable *jointly autocratic* coded “1” for dyads where both state A and state B have a polity score of -5 or less.

### *Control Variables*

To account for potentially confounding factors, we included a number of control variables that are thought to influence the likelihood of international conflict. Following Weeks (2012) and others, we control for military capabilities, trade dependence, contiguity, and regime instability.

*Capabilities.* Scholars have proposed that more powerful states are more likely to engage in international conflict (Waltz 1979; de Mesquita 1981; Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1982). Using the Correlates of War’s Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) we control for the military capabilities of the states in the dyad. *Cap1* assesses the power of State A and *cap2* gauges the power of state B. Additionally, following Weeks (2012), and to account for the fact that dyads with major powers are more likely to experience conflict, we control for whether states in the dyad are major powers (defined as Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States) or minor powers (all other states), using dummy variables *maj-maj*, *maj-min*, *min-maj*, and *min-min*.

*Geographic Proximity.* Proximity will affect the cost and logistics of mobilization and the opportunities for conflict. Past research has shown that contiguous countries experience more territorial disputes (Stinnett, Tir, Schafer, Diehl, and Gochman 2002). *Contiguity* is a binary variable coded “1” if state A and State B share a land border or if they are separated by no more



than twenty-four miles of water. Furthermore, since subtypes of democracy are not evenly distributed internationally (presidential democracies are more common in the Western Hemisphere and Africa, while parliamentary democracies are more common in Europe), we create six regional dummy variables (Europe, Latin America, Asia, North America, the Middle East, and Africa) coded “1” if both states in the dyad are in the region and “0” otherwise.

*Trade Dependence.* Many theorists argue that trade interdependence has a pacifying effect on international politics (Angell 1912[2010]; Keohane and Nye 1977; Oneal and Russett 1997; Gartzke 2007). We, therefore, control for trade dependence using data from Gleditsch (2002). *Trade dependence* is measured as state A’s total imports from and exports to state B as a percentage of state A’s GDP.

*Transitional States.* Previous analyses have indicated that new regimes, including new (or transitional) democracies, are more likely to initiate conflict than more consolidated regimes (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005). Similarly, existing regimes may attempt to take advantage of a recent transition in another country by initiating conflict against it (Skocpol 1979; Walt 1996). To account for this, we control for significant domestic upheaval with a dummy variable for new and unstable regimes coded “1” if the regime has a Polity IV “durable score” of less than 3.

## *Results*

We began with a simple cross-tabulation of constitutional systems and MID occurrence. Our hypothesis led us to expect that jointly-presidential dyads, due to their lower levels of executive constraint, engage in MIDs more frequently than other types of jointly-democratic dyads. This is borne out by the evidence. Turning to Table 3, we can see that jointly-presidential dyads experience conflict in 0.25% of dyad-years. This compares to 0.06% in jointly-parliamentary

dyads, 0.05% in jointly-semi-presidential dyads, 0.07% in dyads with one presidential democracy and one parliamentary democracy, 0.07% in dyads with one semi-presidential democracy and one parliamentary democracy, 0.01% in dyads with one semi-presidential democracy and one presidential democracy, and 0.22% in dyads with at least one nondemocracy. In other words, jointly presidential dyads are about five times more likely to engage in MIDs than other types of jointly democratic dyads and they are largely indistinguishable from nondemocratic dyads. The chi-square test demonstrates that the probability of observing this difference between jointly-presidential dyads and MID initiation, if constitutional system has no bearing on conflict behavior is less than 0.000. This test permits us to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between democratic constitutional system and militarized instate disputes.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Next we proceed to the regression analysis. We employ logistic regression to test the correlates of MID initiation. We include cubic polynomials to account for potential temporal dependence in the dependent variable as recommended by Carter and Signorino (2010). Robust standard errors are adjusted for clustering by dyad.

We begin with an analysis of conflict among the universe of democratic states. We expect jointly-presidential dyads to be more likely to engage in international conflict than other jointly-democratic dyads. Turning to Table 4, we find support for this hypothesis. We see that *jointly presidential* is positive and statistically significant in a: simple bivariate model (model 1), a fully-specified model with all covariates (model 2), and a trimmed model (model 3).

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Using *Clarify*, we estimate the substantive effect of *jointly presidential* on *conflict* while holding other variables constant. We find that jointly presidential dyads are between two and a half and four times more likely to engage in militarized interstate disputes than other jointly democratic dyads.<sup>6</sup> This test demonstrates that jointly-presidential dyads have a substantively, as well as a statistically, significant effect on international conflict.

The analysis of jointly-presidential dyads on conflict among democratic states, however, is only the first step. Next we analyze the effect of jointly-presidential dyads among a sample of all states, including nondemocratic regime types. As we can see in Table 4, models 4-6, *other jointly democratic dyads* is negative and statistically significant, but *jointly presidential* does not reach statistical significance. This finding holds in: a simple bivariate (model 4), a fully-specified model with all covariates (model 5) and a trimmed model (model 6). Consistent with our hypothesis, and as in models 1-3, these tests demonstrate that jointly-presidential dyads are more conflict prone than other jointly-democratic dyads. In addition, these tests reveal that jointly-presidential dyads are statistically indistinguishable from the baseline category of nonjointly-democratic states. For MIDs that fall short of full-scale war, therefore, jointly-presidential dyads are just as conflict prone as any other type of dyad. This suggests that the consistent differences researchers find in MID behavior between democratic and autocratic states is driven largely, if not entirely, by parliamentary and semi-presidential democratic systems.

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<sup>6</sup> Holding contiguity at zero and all other variables at their mean, jointly presidential dyads are nearly four times (3.78) as likely to engage in a MID as other jointly-democratic dyads. If we hold contiguity at one and all other variables at their mean, we find that jointly presidential dyads are about two and a half times (2.44) more likely to engage in MIDs than other jointly-democratic dyads.

These tests reveal strong support for our central hypothesis: jointly-presidential dyads are more likely to engage in MIDs than other jointly-democratic states.

We briefly comment on the control variables. As expected, more powerful states and contiguous states are more likely to engage in international conflict. The other control variables do not consistently reach standard levels of statistical significance.

### **Robustness Tests**

We conduct a number of tests to determine whether the observed relationship between constitutional systems and international conflict is robust to alternative coding and modeling decisions. In particular, we tried: altering our coding of democratic states to include all states with Polity scores of 6 or higher and, separately, using Cheibub et al.'s (2010) coding of democracy; defining conflict as MIDs that at least reached the hostility level of show of force, use of force, or that resulted in at least one fatality, respectively; controlling for region, and dropping Latin American and European dyads; dropping the United States; propensity score matching; a rare-events logit estimator; a test on politically-relevant dyads; an expanded universe that includes observations from 1816 to 2000. In all of these tests, the core results held. Jointly-presidential dyads were more likely to experience international conflict than other jointly-democratic dyads. More details on each of these tests can be found in the data appendix.

### **Conclusion**

This article examined the relationship between democratic constitutional systems and international conflict. We found that jointly-presidential dyads are more likely to experience militarized interstate disputes than other jointly-democratic dyads. Moreover, we found that

when it comes to international conflict short of full-scale war, jointly-presidential dyads are statistically indistinguishable from nonjointly-democratic dyads. This finding holds in a variety of robustness tests and even after excluding the United States and entire geographic regions, alleviating concerns that the results might be sensitive to the inclusion of any particular country or region. We propose a simple theoretical argument to account for the observed relationship between democratic constitutional design and international conflict. We argue that executives in presidential systems face fewer institutional constraints than their counterparts in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems and are, therefore, more likely to engage in international conflict. These permissive institutional conditions are compounded in a dyadic context, making jointly-presidential dyads the most conflictual democratic dyads.

This study suggests a new direction in the study of international relations, focusing on how different types of democratic states interact differently in the realm of international security affairs. For the past several decades, international relations scholars have fixated on the dichotomy between democratic and autocratic states and their differential patterns of conflict and cooperation in the international system. Meanwhile, students of comparative politics have studied domestic political institutions in greater detail, including institutional variation within autocratic and democratic systems. Only recently have scholars (Weeks 2008, 2012) begun to examine how variation in autocratic systems shape international security. This article makes a similar move for democracies. The present article focuses on constitutional system and international conflict, but future research could explore a broader range of domestic political institutions within democracies, including electoral laws, electoral history, legislative strength, party fractionalization, and other factors, and their effects on other important international

security outcomes, such as crisis bargaining, war outcomes, nuclear proliferation, counterinsurgency, and terrorism.

The findings of this research also speak to an ongoing debate about the root causes of the democratic peace. For decades, scholars have debated whether the remarkable absence of war among democracies is the result of greater institutional constraints on executives or of shared norms of peaceful dispute-resolution that are externalized into the international sphere. This study found that democratic executives with the fewest constraints on their power behave no differently than autocrats when it comes to participation in lower-level militarized conflicts, but that more constrained democratic executives in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems are less bellicose. This would suggest that the causal mechanism linking shared democracy to peace is not shared norms, but executive constraints. Of course, it is possible that pacific norms are weaker in presidential democracies than in other types of democratic systems, but it is not immediately obvious as to why this might be the case. Moreover, the present study linked constitutional systems to international conflict, both theoretically and empirically, through executive constraints. Unless and until scholars can produce systematic research demonstrating normative differences among different types of democracies as it relates to the use of force, then there is strong reason to believe that institutions, not norms, account for the observed pattern of reduced conflict among democratic states.

Since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, the promotion of democratic forms of government to other states has been a central pillar of American foreign policy. At the end of major international and civil wars, during decolonization and the creation of newly-independent states, and following regime changes resulting from any other of a myriad of causes over the past century, U.S. officials have strongly encouraged new leaders to adopt democratic forms of

government. In recent years, American officials have been joined in this effort by elites from other states, international organizations, and academic institutions from around the world. It has long been believed that the spread of democracy, regardless of the precise constitutional system, brought with it a number of domestic and international benefits, including more pacific relations in the international sphere. In recent years, officials in the administrations of William Jefferson Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have all cited democratic peace theory as a reason to encourage the development of democratic institutions in nondemocratic states. In this time, American advisors have played a prominent role in drafting new democratic constitutions in many countries around the world. Leaders in some of these countries, including Afghanistan and Egypt, perhaps inspired by and emulating the successful American model, adopted presidential systems of government. Some political scientists (Ackerman 2013) criticized these decisions, citing presidentialism's poor record in making the transition from autocracy to democratic consolidation, but the pacific credentials of presidential democracy went largely unquestioned.

The findings of this article suggest that if we genuinely hope that the spread of democracy might lead to increased international peace and security, we would be wise to encourage constitutional conventions in fledgling democracies to avoid presidentialism and to craft parliamentary or semi-presidential forms of government.

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**Table 1. Militarized Interstate Disputes between Democracies, 1945 to 2000**

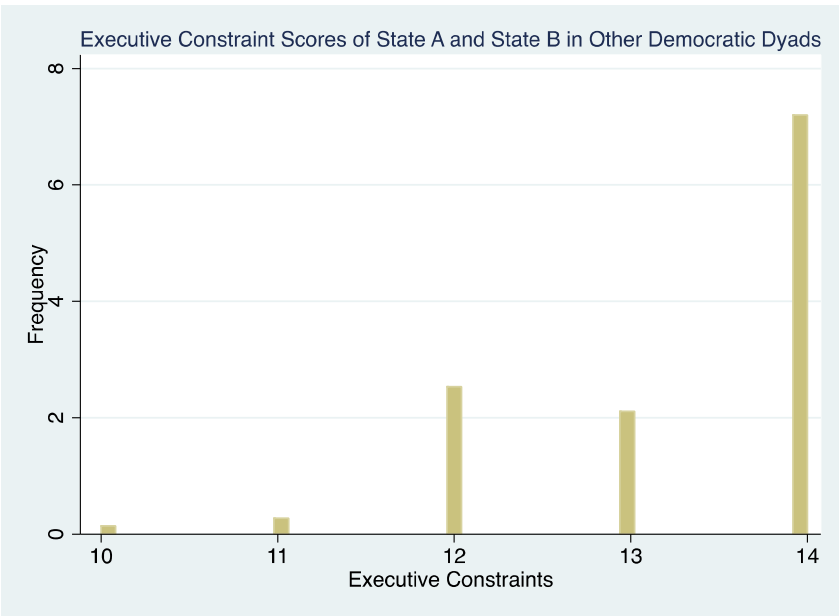
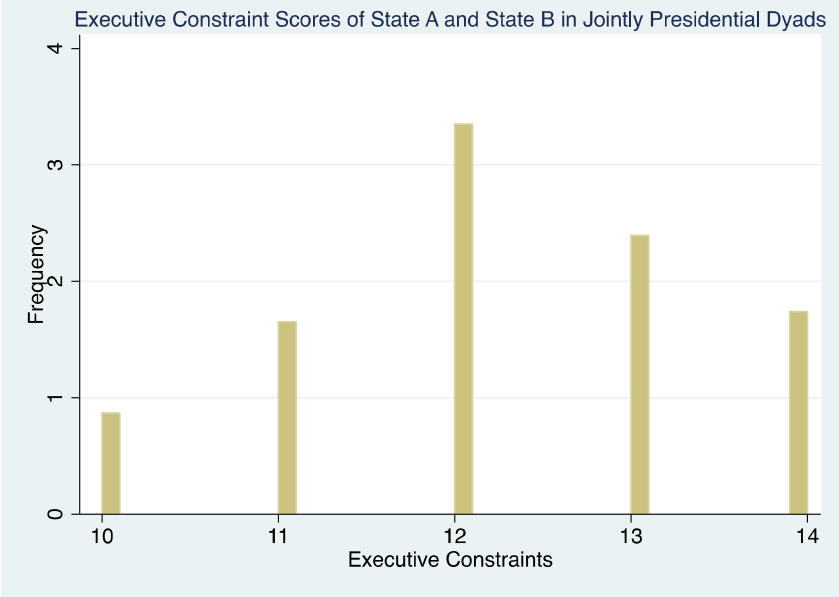
<b>Year</b>	<b>State A</b>	<b>State B</b>
1949	Israel	United Kingdom
1954	Syria	Israel
1954	United States	Switzerland
1955	Syria	Israel
1955	Israel	Syria
1956	Pakistan	India
1956	Israel	United Kingdom
1957	Syria	United States
1957	India	Myanmar
1957	Pakistan	India
1959	United States	Switzerland
1960	Austria	Italy
1960	United States	Austria
1960	South Korea	Japan
1961	Denmark	United Kingdom
1969	Norway	Denmark
1974	United States	Canada
1974	Turkey	Cyprus
1975	Greece	Turkey
1975	United States	Canada
1976	Israel	Turkey
1976	Turkey	Greece
1976	Israel	Greece
1976	Israel	United States
1978	Turkey	Greece
1979	Canada	United States
1980	Ecuador	United States
1981	Peru	Ecuador
1981	Norway	Denmark
1982	Venezuela	United Kingdom
1982	Venezuela	Colombia
1983	Argentina	United Kingdom
1983	United States	Greece

1984	Peru	Ecuador
1984	Turkey	Greece
1984	Ireland	Spain
1984	France	Spain
1985	France	New Zealand
1985	Ireland	Spain
1986	Spain	United Kingdom
1986	Turkey	Greece
1986	Venezuela	Colombia
1986	Turkey	Cyprus
1987	Argentina	Japan
1987	Canada	France
1987	Israel	Cyprus
1987	Colombia	Venezuela
1988	Canada	France
1988	Turkey	Cyprus
1988	Colombia	Venezuela
1989	Panama	United States
1989	Turkey	Greece
1989	Canada	United States
1990	India	Pakistan
1991	Peru	Ecuador
1991	India	Pakistan
1991	United States	Canada
1993	Pakistan	India
1993	Niger	Mali
1993	Italy	Slovenia
1993	Turkey	Cyprus
1993	Cyprus	Turley
1994	Turkey	Cyprus
1994	Turkey	Greece
1994	Venezuela	Colombia
1994	Taiwan	Philippines
1994	Lesotho	South Africa
1994	South Africa	Lesotho
1995	Costa Rica	Nicaragua
1995	Canada	Spain
1995	Venezuela	Colombia

1995	Turkey	Greece
1995	Taiwan	Japan
1996	Japan	Taiwan
1996	Venezuela	Trinidad and Tobago
1996	United Kingdom	Chile
1996	Turkey	Cyprus
1997	Turkey	Greece
1997	Greece	Turkey
1997	Venezuela	Colombia
1997	Venezuela	Trinidad and Tobago
1997	Ukraine	Romania
1997	El Salvador	Nicaragua
1997	Canada	United States
1998	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
1999	Venezuela	Trinidad and Tobago
1999	Turkey	Greece
1999	Nicaragua	Honduras
1999	Japan	South Korea

<b>Table 2: Executive Constraints by Democratic Constitutional System</b>				
Executive Constraints	Parliamentary Democracy	Semi- Presidential Democracy	Presidential Democracy	Total
5	4,262 (2.52%)	7,728 (15.67%)	32,110 (30.45%)	44,100 (13.61%)
6	3,715 (2.19%)	7,662 (15.45%)	27,096 (25.69%)	38,433 (11.86%)
7	161,297 (95.29%)	33,979 (68.88%)	46,260 (43.86%)	241,536 (74.53%)
Total	169,274 (100%)	49,329 (100%)	105,466 (100%)	324,069 (100%)
Pearson chi2(4) = 9.2e+04 Pr = 0.000				
Note: Executive constraints range from 0(lowest) to 7(highest). Five is the minimum executive constraint score for a democratic state. Data from Polity IV.				

**Figure 1: Variation in Executive Constraint between Jointly-Presidential Dyads and Other Jointly-Democratic Dyads. Data from Polity IV**



<b>Table 3: Frequency of MIDs among Dyads with Varying Constitutional Systems</b>								
MID	Par-Par	Semi-Semi	Pres-Pres	Par-Pres/Pres-Par	Semi-Par/Par-Semi	Semi-Pres/Pres-Semi	Non-Jointly Democratic	Total
No	45,047 (99.94%)	3,364 (99.94%)	11,653 (99.75)	49,807 (99.93%)	24,938 (99.94%)	11,041 (99.99%)	765,232 (99.78%)	911,084 (99.81%)
Yes	27 (0.06%)	2 (0.06%)	29 (0.25%)	34 (0.07%)	14 (0.06%)	1 (.01%)	1,652 (0.22%)	1,759 (.19%)
Total	45,074 (100%)	3,366 (100%)	11,682 (100%)	49,841 (100%)	24,952 (100%)	24,952 (100%)	766,886 (100%)	912,843 (100%)

Pearson chi2(6) = 150.6189 Pr = 0.000



**Table 4. Probit Regressions on the Determinants of Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1946 to 2000.**

VARIABLES	Model 1 Bivariate (Among Democracies)	Model 2 All Covariates (Among Democracies)	Model 3 Trimmed Model (Among Democracies)	Model 4 Bivariate (Among All States)	Model 5 All Covariates (Among All States)	Model 6 Trimmed (Among All States)
Jointly Presidential Dyads	1.659** (0.416)	1.048* (0.407)	1.050** (0.403)	0.615 (0.363)	0.183 (0.286)	0.214 (0.297)
Other Jointly Democratic Dyads				-0.616** (0.213)	-0.914** (0.219)	-0.891** (0.225)
Capabilities State A		7.562** (2.720)	7.992** (2.371)		7.793** (1.787)	10.52** (1.195)
Capabilities State B		3.554 (2.552)	7.254** (2.253)		9.239** (1.778)	10.52** (1.334)
Trade Dependency		-27.59 (21.54)	-20.90 (19.87)		-5.329 (7.965)	-3.416 (7.299)
Contiguity		3.830** (0.372)	3.769** (0.377)		3.543** (0.112)	3.710** (0.111)
Power Configuration Min-Maj		0.877* (0.362)			0.322 (0.240)	
Power Configuration Maj-Min		0.314 (0.417)			0.541* (0.238)	
New Regime State A		0.276 (0.314)			-0.202* (0.0841)	
New Regime State B		-0.0980 (0.300)			-0.250** (0.0832)	
Peace Years	-0.107** (0.0248)	-0.0706** (0.0236)	-0.0773** (0.0217)	-0.145** (0.00942)	-0.118** (0.00878)	-0.107** (0.00834)
Constant	-5.441** (0.356)	-7.020** (0.398)	-6.899** (0.303)	-4.850** (0.109)	-5.842** (0.115)	-6.195** (0.0945)
Observations	84,926	78,292	83,226	967,520	824,524	939,254

Note: Robust standard errors, adjusted for clustering by dyad, in parentheses. \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.