Foreign Policy Analysis (2006) **2**, 137–156

Public Opinion as a Constraint against War: Democracies' Responses to Operation Iraqi Freedom

Steve Chan and William Safran

University of Colorado

A central logic of the democratic peace theory claims that public opinion acts as a powerful restraint against war. Democratic officials, unlike their autocratic counterparts, are wary of going to war because they expect to pay an electoral penalty for fighting even successful wars. Several democracies, however, recently joined Operation Iraqi Freedom despite substantial and even overwhelming domestic opposition. We argue that electoral institutions can heighten or lessen the impact of public opinion on democratic officials' concerns for their reelection prospects, thus pointing to an important dimension of variation that has been overlooked in the democratic peace literature. However, contrary to conventional attributions of a greater incentive motivating the parties and candidates in predominantly two-party systems with majority/plurality decision rules to respond to national public opinion, we suggest mitigating factors that tend to reduce such responsiveness. Conversely, we point out that multiparty competition in proportional representation systems can reduce electoral disproportionality without sacrificing responsiveness to public opinion. The pertinent electoral institutions therefore present varying opportunities (or, conversely, constraints) for democratic officials to override their constituents' sentiments when they are so inclined.

The Puzzles

Wars are momentous decisions for governments to make. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies occurred amidst considerable domestic skepticism and opposition in these countries. The public rationale presented by the Bush administration for invading Iraq—that the government in Baghdad had (or was about to have) weapons of mass destruction and that it supported Al Qaeda's terrorist network—was based on dubious intelligence that has since been widely discredited.

With advances in public polling, we have gained substantial insight into people's reactions to their countries' involvement in foreign conflicts (e.g., Brody and Page 1975; Kernell 1978). There is a tendency for the public to increase its support of incumbent officials at the initial stage of a militarized dispute. This popular support, however, declines sharply if the conflict becomes protracted and when its financial and human costs begin to mount. The so-called "rally around the flag" syndrome, responsible for the dramatic increase in a chief executive's popularity in the immediate aftermath of a foreign crisis, has been documented in a considerable number of instances. For example, Harry Truman's approval rating went from 37% to 46% when the United States joined the Korean War, Dwight Eisenhower's

Published by Blackwell Publishing, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK.

popularity rose from 48% to 58% when he introduced troops to Lebanon, and John Kennedy's support level increased from 61% to 74% at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Hughes 1978:38). There is also ample evidence that shows the erosion of this support over time as a conflict drags on without a resolution. The decline of a U.S. president's popularity during the Vietnam War, the Iranian hostage episode and, most recently, the campaign against Iraqi insurgents demonstrate this tendency (e.g., Mueller 1973; Sigelman and Conover 1981).

In contrast to these previous studies, in this article we are interested in a somewhat different question. We wish to study the effects of public opinion in restraining national leaders from going to war. Thus, we are not just concerned about popular reactions after a foreign conflict has already occurred. Rather, we are motivated to explore the extent to which pre-existing public opinion may discourage leaders from involving their country in such a conflict. Naturally, any deterrent effect that public opinion may have on war involvement will still be conditional on the politicians' anticipatory adjustment to the voters' reaction to a prospective war. To anticipate the following discussion, our major argument is that the politicians' sensitivity to popular antiwar sentiments is mediated by their country's electoral system.

This argument can be more easily sustained, or refuted, if one can establish a direct covariation between the politicians' sensitivity to their constituents' opposition to a prospective war and the nature of their country's electoral system. This path of inquiry, however, is hampered by the fact that there have been very few instances when a country introduces major changes in its electoral rules (thus making it difficult for a researcher to demonstrate the relationship just mentioned for the same country over time). Moreover, data on public opinion have become readily available for many established democracies only in the recent decades, and most of these countries have rarely encountered situations suggesting a possibility of going to war during this same time span. We are therefore rather seriously constrained in the number of historical cases that can help to illuminate the empirical relationship of interest to us. For instance, because the level of antiwar opposition was not generally high among those democracies that participated in the first Gulf War and the air campaign against Serbia, these episodes do not directly address our analytic concern in this article.

But why should we be interested in popular opposition to war and, more specifically, in the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and its democratic partners in the "coalition of the willing"? This episode pertains directly to the theory of democratic peace, which argues that public opinion in democracies provides a powerful disincentive for their officials to start or become involved in foreign wars. In many democracies there were widespread reservations about and even strong opposition to going to war against Iraq before the United States-led invasion was launched on March 19, 2003. In many of these countries, those who opposed the war commanded a majority. Even though they did not enjoy a majority in the United States, the antiwar segment of the American population constituted a substantial minority.[1] Yet, this popular opposition did not stop the United States and the United Kingdom from going to war. Their leaders asserted a unilateral right to strike another sovereign state pre-emptively and without the United Nations approval. Their actions seemed to contradict the expectation that democracies are generically more peaceful.[2] Rightly or wrongly, public and elite perceptions around

[1] In January–February 2003, before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 38% of those Americans surveyed were against the war and 57% were in favor of; see Table 1.

[2] This generic attribution represents the so-called monadic version of democratic peace theory, which claims that democracies are generally more peaceful than other types of governments. The empirical evidence for this claim is weaker than that for the dyadic version, which argues that democracies are only more peaceful in their relationship with each other. The monadic version overlooks the large variation in the incidence of war involvement by different

the world suggested that the Bush and Blair administrations were eager rather than reluctant to launch war and that they were ready to do so even in view of widespread domestic and international opposition.[3]

The democracies' participation in or abstention from the Iraq war highlights the different influence of public opinion impinging on their foreign policy. Public opinion plays an important causal role in the democratic peace theory. This theory's basic argument can be presented in terms of three propositions. First, the citizens of democracies tend to object to becoming involved in foreign wars. To paraphrase Immanuel Kant (1795), nothing is more natural than for those living under a republican form of government to oppose foreign military adventures because these citizens will have to bear the burden of war in blood, sweat, tears, and tax dollars.[4] Second, politicians in a democracy understand that they will have to be elected in order to retain political power. Therefore, they refrain from alienating or offending their constituents because they do not want to be sanctioned by the voters in the next election. Our article focuses mainly on this proposition. Third, and given the politicians' dominant motivation to get elected, public opinion restrains the leaders of democracies from taking their country to war absent a strong popular mandate. These leaders are wary of starting unpopular wars because they realize that they run the risk of being dismissed from office. In contrast, to the extent that autocratic leaders do not have to be concerned about being reelected by their constituents, they are supposed to be more willing to take their country to war.

Different studies support the view that wars can be hazardous to democratic leaders' political career. From John Mueller's (1973) pioneering work, for example, we learn that presidential popularity declines proportionately with mounting casualties (see also Gartner and Segura 1998). The studies by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his colleagues (Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller 1992; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; see also Chiozza and Goemans 2003, 2004) confirm that democratic leaders, even those who have fought successful wars, tend to have their political tenure cut short.[5] Moreover, Kurt Gaubatz (1999) discerned that democratic leaders are less likely to experience war in the period before an election than afterwards, thus suggesting a tendency for them and their opponents to avoid foreign belligerence that can be damaging to the incumbent officials' reelection prospects. The collective evidence from these and other studies points to the general conclusion that democratic leaders ought to be sensitive to the danger of a possible electoral backlash when considering a resort to war.

This being the case, it is pertinent to inquire why the leaders of some democracies were willing to override significant domestic opposition in deciding to join the "coalition of the willing" or, in the case of the United States, to start the war against Iraq in March 2003. Moreover, in view of the continuing and even rising unpopularity of the war, why have some democratic leaders succumbed to their domestic

---

democracies, with some (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel) having fought many more wars than others (e.g., the Nordic and Benelux countries). The dyadic version receives strong historical support, especially when the influence of joint democracy is further enhanced by increased bilateral trade and shared membership in international organizations as shown by Russett and Oneal (2001). For a recent critical discussion of the logic behind the democratic peace theory, see Rosato (2003).

[3] When asked which country posed a danger to world peace in a 2004 Eurobarometer survey, more Europeans tended to mention the United States, often by a substantial margin, than Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Syria, North Korea, Russia, and China. This survey, entitled "Iraq and Peace in the World," was commissioned by the Directorate General Press and Communication of the European Commission and can be found at www.eubusiness.com/links/. A similar 2005 survey of Australians also reported sagging U.S. popularity, with 57% of the respondents suggesting that U.S. policies were a danger to world peace equal to Islamic fundamentalism (see www.lowyinstitute.com).

[4] In reality, public opinion in democracies can be quite bellicose such as was the case during the Spanish–American War. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the public tends to support government's foreign policy, at least during the initial phases of a conflict.

[5] Leaders who undertake overly conciliatory policy toward a rival state also tend to suffer from electoral setback when their cooperation is not reciprocated (Colaresi 2004).

public opinion by announcing the withdrawal of their troops from Iraq whereas others have not?[6] We seek to explain these variations in terms of the differences in the democracies' electoral institutions. Simply put, we argue that it would be unwarranted to simply assume that public opinion would have a direct and undifferentiated impact on the politicians' electoral incentives regardless of the nature of rules governing political contest in their respective country.

Institutional Explanations

What conditions can enhance or dampen democratic politicians' sensitivity to public opinion? The timing of the next election comes to mind as a plausible factor. As already mentioned, Gaubatz (1999) noted that both democracies and their opponents are less likely to start a military conflict in the period before a general election than afterwards. More wars tend to occur during the first half than the second half of a chief executive's term of office. This statistical pattern implies a deliberate attempt by all sides of a conflict to avoid an ongoing war before and when democratic candidates have to campaign for public office. This being the case, one may infer that the closer a general election draws near, the more salient public opinion should become in the minds of would-be candidates.

It also stands to reason that the size of the incumbent chief executive's or ruling party's winning margin in the last election should make a difference. The slimmer this margin, the more the current office occupants should be concerned about winning the next election. These politicians should therefore be even more acutely sensitive to the public mood than otherwise given their desire to seek another term. They should also have more difficulty in claiming a political or moral mandate for taking their country to war. U.S. President George W. Bush won the 2000 election by a very narrow margin in the popular votes cast in Florida, a controversial outcome that in turn gave him a slim majority of votes in the Electoral College.

Everything else being equal, the larger the parliamentary majority enjoyed by a ruling party or coalition, the more the politicians in charge may be willing to go against the prevailing public opinion. Conversely, the more precarious a ruling majority's grip on power, the more inclined it and its opposition will be attuned to public opinion. In those systems where the legislature has a traditional and even constitutional role in determining foreign policy (such as the United States Senate), the extent of partisan balance in the legislature and between it and the executive branch should also matter.[7] Again, one would surmise that a divided government in the sense of a close balance of partisan forces should enhance the influence of public opinion in shaping foreign policy.

One may also infer that other things being equal, electoral contests in a two-party system should be more subject to the influence of national issues. The candidates of the two main (''catch-all'') parties can be expected to go after the median voter, and to be motivated to capture a larger number of popular votes than their opponents. In a plurality system (or a majority system with a second run-off election between

[6] See Table 1 for a summary of national responses to the question whether the Iraq war was justified or legitimate. Naturally, depending on the specific wording and timing of the questionnaire, survey responses can differ. There is little doubt, however, that there have been significant and widespread antiwar sentiments across both the established and more recent democracies. Even in the United States, a *Washington Post*/ABC News Poll conducted on the second anniversary of the war reported a majority of Americans (53%) thought that the war was ''not worth it'' (*Denver Post*, March 16, 2005:A17). Moreover, most Americans would not have approved going to war if the intelligence about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction or its alleged support for Al Qaeda's terrorist network turned out to be faulty, see Table 2.

[7] Naturally, actual practice may not conform exactly to constitutional provisions. Thus, for example, the last time the United States Congress formally declared war was after Pearl Harbor even though the country has participated in many armed hostilities since 1941. Similarly, in France, Charles de Gaulle and his successors have appropriated foreign and defense policy for the presidential domain despite the formality of a parliamentary system of government.

TABLE 1. Public Opinion on the Iraq War

	*January 2003**		*January–February 2003*†		*October 2003*‡	
	Con (%)	*Pro (%)*	*Con (%)*	*Pro (%)*	*Unjustified (%)*	*Justified (%)*
Australia			75			
Austria					86	12
Belgium					75	20
Canada	36	10	60	26		
Denmark			79		41	57
Finland					65	31
France	60	7	73		81	18
Germany	50	9	72		72	25
Greece					96	4
Ireland					59	40
Italy			73		60	36
Japan			79		60	26
Luxembourg					75	22
Netherlands					50	49
Portugal					67	28
Spain	74	4	80		79	15
Sweden					59	36
U.K.	41	10	52	27	51	44
U.S.	21	32	38	57		

*These polls, based on a survey by Taylor Nelson Sofres, the Gallup International Association and Leger Marketing undertaken on January 15–16, were reported by Jack Jedwab, "Canadian Opinion on the Possible Invasion of Iraq—Between Old and New Europe," no date (Association of Canadian Studies). The "cons" indicated that they were "against military action under any circumstances" whereas the "pros" said that they were "favorable to unilateral action by the United States and allies."

†These figures are based on J. Sean Curtin, "Japanese Anti-War Sentiment on Iraq in Accord with Global Opinion," February 24, 2003. Generally, the "cons" indicated that they would be opposed to war against Iraq absent United Nations approval, whereas the "pros" expressed a willingness to support such a war even without UN approval. The "pro" figures are not available for all the countries listed. Surveys were conducted at different times during January and February 2003.

‡The Eurobarometer figures are based on "Iraq and Peace in the World," commissioned by the Directorate General Press and Communication of the European Commission, and conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres in coordination with EOS Gallup Europe during October 8–16, 2003. The Japanese poll was conducted by the *Manichi Shimbun* during July 2003, and asked the respondents whether the Iraq war was "legitimate" or not.

the two candidates with the highest level of popular support in the first round), how many more votes one has over the other candidate is less important than the goal of gaining just more votes than the opposition. In contrast, in multiparty systems with proportional representation (PR), the size of votes received by each party is important because this factor goes into the determination of the number of legislative seats to be allocated to each party. The parties in a PR system should be less inclined to adjust quickly to every twist and turn in national public opinion because any such adjustment may alienate some of their traditional supporters, thereby leaving these voters vulnerable to the courtship of one or more other parties located next to them ideologically.[8] Given a relatively low barrier to entry, new parties can even form to take advantage of this electoral opportunity. This reasoning therefore suggests that

[8] The implication is that in a PR system, parties that are ideological neighbors tend to be one another's most worrisome source of competition for voters' support. As will be seen later, the expectation that PR systems are less subject to the nationalization of electoral forces than their majority/plurality counterparts is not necessarily true. On the contrary, Richard Katz (1980:70–71) remarked that electoral changes should be more highly nationalized in PR systems than in majority/plurality systems.

TABLE 2. Trend in U.S. Public Opinion on Going to War*

Do you think the United States made the right decision or the wrong decision in going to war against Iraq?

	"Right Decision" (%)	*"Wrong Decision" (%)*
~ July 2003	63	32
~ September 2003	62	33
~ November 2003	57	38
~ January 2004	55	41
~ March 2004	55	44
~ August 2004	46	49
~ September 2004	46	51

*These figures are based on various reports issued by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and the Knowledge Networks Poll. See their report "Americans and Iraq on the Eve of the Presidential Election" (August 28, 2004), p. 4.

elections in multiparty systems should be less attuned to public opinion than those in two-party systems where such contests can be decided by a small number of swing voters (i.e., those voters who may be persuaded to support one or the other party, thereby providing the necessary margin of victory to the candidate who "first passed the post").

One would furthermore suppose that in systems where voters have access to a separate branch of the government, public opinion should matter more than in other systems where there is not a constitutional separation of powers, thereby creating a situation of divided government affording an institutional basis for checks and balances. With rare exceptions (such as France and Norway), the head of the government and the cabinet are normally chosen from the legislative members in parliamentary systems. Conversely, in presidential systems with a strong legislature, one would expect public opinion to have access to the members of the national legislature in addition to the executive departments. A presidential form of government should accordingly be more receptive to the influence of public opinion.

A presidential system should be more open to the influence of national public opinion for two other reasons. First, because there can be only one president, there will be a strong tendency for political forces to combine into two main contesting parties in the pursuit of this national office.[9] Second, unlike congressional or parliamentary elections, the entire nation represents an at-large electoral district. One would expect that the larger an electoral district, the less likely special interests are able to dominate or capture an electoral campaign and, concomitantly, the more likely that the candidates will be compelled to address national issues.

Still another reasonable expectation relates to the longevity of democratic institutions in existence. The longer a country has enjoyed continuous democracy, the more likely that its politicians should have been socialized to live by the rules of compromise and to pay close attention to the views of their constituents. Formal and informal rules of consultation help to incorporate the citizens' sentiments in the policy process. In contrast, the more recent democracies (e.g., Spain, Portugal) have more fragile institutions and less robust civic norms. Officials of these recent democracies are perhaps less accustomed to adjusting to public opinion and more

[9] Gary Cox (1997), for example, has argued convincingly that there tends to be an upper bound limiting the number of viable candidates in any political contest for office. This limit is captured by the $M + 1$ rule, where M refers to the number of candidates who can win an office.

TABLE 3. Americans' Beliefs on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction and Support for *al Qaeda**

March 2004 Poll
Is it your belief that, just before the war, Iraq
Was involved in 9/11 or substantially supported *al Qaeda*: 57%
Had a few *al Qaeda* contacts or no connections: 40%

Is it your belief that, just before the war, Iraq
Had actual WMD or had no WMD but a major program for developing them: 60%
Had limited activities or had no WMD activities: 39%

July 2003 Poll
Since the war with Iraq ended, is it your impression that the U.S. has or has not found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction?
U.S. has: 21%
U.S. has not: 76%
Is it your impression that the U.S. has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the Al Qaeda terrorist organization?
U.S. has: 45%
U.S. has not: 49%

October 2004 Poll
If, before the war, U.S. intelligence services had concluded that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and was not providing substantial support to Al Qaeda, do you think the U.S.
Should not have gone to war with Iraq: 74%
Should still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons: 21%

*These survey data came from the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks Polls, specifically their reports entitled "U.S. Public Beliefs and Attitudes About Iraq" on August 20, 2004, p. 6; "Americans on Iraq" on July 23, 2003, p. 10; and "Americans and Iraq on the Eve of the Presidential Election," October 28, 2004, p. 3.

susceptible to succumbing to their authoritarian legacy by disregarding public opinion.

Finally, one may surmise that the traditional relationship between the state and society would be a pertinent factor in deciding the extent to which public opinion influences the formation of public policy, including that pertaining to war and peace. Conventional wisdom suggests that France has a strong bureaucracy and a dominant president who has almost exclusive authority in the domain of foreign policy. This country is therefore supposed to offer the best example of a strong, autonomous state, one that is insulated from societal influence. French society is customarily characterized as weak and fragmented. In contrast to France, the United States is often presented as an example of a weak state and strong society. According to the common stylized narrative, institutional separation of power and especially the Senate's role in ratifying treaties undermine executive autonomy. Intense bureaucratic rivalry within the executive branch and a decentralized party system are among the other institutional factors that facilitate easy access to and significant influence by social groups with a variety of competing interests. The standard characterizations would therefore have us believe that public opinion should have the greatest influence in shaping U.S. foreign policy and the least influence in influencing French foreign policy (e.g., Risse-Kappen 1991).

Between France and the United States, we are supposed to have intermediate cases represented by the other major mature democracies. Competitive politics, parliamentary oversight, and a tradition of responsible parties are among the commonly claimed factors making British politicians sensitive to the views of their constituents. With their institutions inherited from Britain, Australia, and Canada should also afford a greater opportunity for public opinion to influence their foreign policy in comparison with France. Japan is typically seen to have a strong state and a ruling coalition encompassing conservative politicians, big businesses, and powerful bureaucrats. Organized labor and consumer representation are excluded

from this ruling pact. In the realm of security policy, however, the Japanese government has been allegedly constrained by a strong societal consensus against military involvement abroad. German politicians and bureaucrats do not face to the same degree an "allergy" to militarism (a legacy of World War II), but social movements, "cause" groups, and civil institutions (such as the church) are arguably more active and prominent in German than in Japanese politics. The access and influence enjoyed by these private actors are mediated by Germany's party system and its federal arrangement although this mediation effect is more palpable in domestic than in foreign affairs. Italy offers an interesting mixture. It has a tradition of prime ministerial primacy in foreign policy and also a tradition of societal penetration of government institutions. Accordingly, the influence of public opinion in Italy's foreign policy should be somewhere between France and Germany.

Problematic Fit

The democracies' policies on the Iraq war do not quite correspond with the stylized expectations sketched in the last section about the influence of public opinion in their respective foreign policy process. Intriguingly, those that joined the "coalition of the willing" generally have institutions that are supposed to promote their officials' sensitivity to popular sentiments. Conversely, those that declined tend to be the ones commonly characterized as having more executive discretion and autonomy. Next to the United States, the United Kingdom made the largest foreign military contribution to Operation Iraqi Freedom.[10] Italy, Australia, and even Japan took on a symbolic presence, although the latter country's contribution was relatively small and was supposed to be confined to noncombatant missions. In contrast, France and Germany were opposed to attacking Iraq. Canada also declined to support this military operation. Ottawa's stance is noteworthy because one would have expected Canada to be more, not less, supportive of the United States-led invasion than the United Kingdom and Australia, given its closer economic and cultural ties with the United States.

Among the established democracies, the size of antiwar opposition was the weakest in the United States, although this opposition was still substantial as it represented almost 40% of the electorate on the eve of the Iraq war. Those hypotheses introduced in the last section would have led one to expect that among the democracies listed in Table 1, the United States should be most susceptible to popular antiwar sentiments, to be followed by the United Kingdom and Australia. Furthermore, one would infer from the last section that PR or mixed systems such as those of Spain and Italy (especially the former country, given its more recent achievement of democracy) should be generally less susceptible to public opinion. This being the case, once the Spanish and Italian politicians make a decision to commit troops to Iraq, one would expect them to be less likely to reverse this decisions than, say, their counterparts in the United Kingdom and Australia. Given Japan's strong social "allergy" to undertaking foreign military operations, one would also be inclined to suppose that the ruling politicians of this country face substantial political difficulty in justifying a decision to send troops abroad and,

[10] South Korea has the third highest number of foreign troops (3,300) in Iraq after the United States and the United Kingdom (8,000), while Italy ranks fourth with about 3,000 troops. With 1,500 troops deployed, Poland has the fifth largest foreign military presence in Iraq. Australia has currently about 750 military personnel there. Polls reported in mid-October 2005 indicate significant opposition among the people of all these countries to deploying troops in Iraq. Fifty-seven percent of the British surveyed favored military withdrawal from Iraq, 42% of South Koreans wanted to draw down their troops and 24% wanted to withdraw them completely, and 60% of Italians opposed extending their country's troop presence in Iraq while the comparable figure was 56% among the Japanese voters. Fifty-three percent of the Australians wanted to bring their forces back home, and this figure was 59% among the Poles. See Program on International Policy Attitudes, "Among Key Iraq Partners, Weak Pubic Support for Troop Presence," at www.pipa.org/analyses/10_13_2005/ReadMoreOct13.html

after making this decision, to come under intense pressure to reverse it.[11] In short, in those democracies with a stronger tradition of a (relatively) strong state and a weak society, one should expect the politicians to have an easier time in prevailing over a substantial minority or even a majority of their people opposed to the war in Iraq, whereas in others with a strong society and a weak state, public opinion should have greater access to and influence in shaping the policy process.

Our a priori suppositions do not correspond well with the established democracies' actual policies in the Iraq war. The United States and the United Kingdom went to war despite the fact that about 40% and 50% of their respective public was opposed to this undertaking. Yet, according to conventional wisdom, these two leading democracies should be most sensitive to public opinion given their institutional arrangements and legacies. Their unexpected behavior poses a seeming challenge to the democratic peace theory. How effective *can* one expect public opinion to be in restraining democratic leaders from going to war? The United States and the United Kingdom should offer the "easiest cases" for demonstrating the influence of public opinion in restraining their leaders from going to war. If public opinion is unable to stop war in these cases, should one be more pessimistic, or skeptical, about its influence in preventing war in other countries that offer a less conducive setting for this influence?

One can, of course, invoke a number of extraneous factors to explain away the puzzles suggested by the discussion thus far by, for example, calling attention to Britain's special relationship with the United States, the conservative ideology of Italy's and Japan's ruling coalitions, or the presence of a large number of Muslims living in France or Germany. Such factors are plausible but represent ad hoc observations that are irrelevant to the argument about the force of public opinion presented by the democratic peace theory. If one wants to address this theory directly, one would have to look for factors that have the effect of heightening or lessening the politicians' concern for electoral retribution. That is, what institutions facilitate policies that override public opinion even at the apparent risk of losing votes in the next election? Naturally, politicians who decide to go against a substantial minority or even a majority of their people opposed to the Iraq war may succeed or fail in their gambit as shown by the outcomes of general elections held since March 2003 (victories for U.S. President George W. Bush, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder but defeat for Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar). Our concern, however, is not with the wisdom or perspicacity of their decision to join Operation Iraqi Freedom, as it is to discern the opportunities or constraints offered by their respective electoral system given an inclination to defy public opinion. For reasons that do not need to concern us in this article, the politicians in different democracies may be disposed to support or oppose the war in Iraq. Regardless of the nature of this disposition (or what Most and Starr 1989, called "willingness"), we ask how the electoral institutions of different countries define the rules of political contest (the concept of "opportunity" in the terminology of Most and Starr). The democratic politicians can be disposed to support or oppose the Iraq war. Whether a disposition to go against public opinion is actually carried out as policy, however, depends in part on the extent to which the existing electoral rules tend to protect the relevant officials from voters' sanction.[12]

[11] Of course, to the extent that the Australians, Italians, and Japanese have not suffered heavy casualties in Iraq helps to explain in part why their domestic opposition against the war has not been even more intense.

[12] Note that the critical point that the electoral institutions existing in some countries can be "forgiving" or "permissive" suggests only that the penalty for their politicians to challenge public opinion tends to be more limited. That politicians *may* be able to limit this penalty does not necessarily imply that they *will* go against public opinion. The basic argument advanced here is that politicians take the risk of offending public opinion when they have *both* the necessary willingness and opportunity. The opportunities (or, conversely, constraints) of interest to us are the democracies' electoral institutions.

Majority/Plurality Systems

Naturally, when Kant remarked that a republican form of government is more peaceful than monarchy, he was speaking about how public opinion would and could check government leaders from undertaking unpopular wars. The Kantian logic suggests the expectation that among the established democracies, the governments' policies should correspond with the prevailing public opinion. When a refusal to join Operation Iraqi Freedom was supported by public opinion, this case accords with the Kantian logic. These occurrences feature the basic expectation and enable us to highlight their contrast with other cases where the Kantian logic appears to have failed; that is, when a government went to war despite substantial public opposition. We look for clues in the nature of electoral institutions that determines how popular sentiments (or votes) are translated into political representation.

Ever since Douglas Rae's (1967) classic study, it has been widely understood that electoral laws generally favor the larger parties at the expense of the smaller ones. That is, the larger parties are allocated more legislative seats than the actual share of popular votes received by them, whereas the smaller parties are given fewer seats than their proportional share of the popular vote. This bias exists in systems with majority or plurality electoral rules for determining the winner of an electoral contest as well as in systems that provide for PR. The extent of this bias, however, is less pronounced in PR systems.

In majority/plurality systems,[13] this disproportionality (i.e., the gap between the votes received by a party and the number of seats it is accorded in the legislature) can sometimes be rather exaggerated. There have been instances when a candidate or party receiving fewer popular votes was declared the winner. The 1993 election in New Zealand offers an extreme example. Although the Nationalist Party received only 35% of the popular vote, it was accorded a parliamentary majority. It was able to achieve this feat because the center-left votes were divided between the other two competing parties.[14] In the United States presidential race of 2000, George W. Bush received fewer popular votes than Al Gore in the national election, but had more votes in the Electoral College. These occurrences suggest the need to introduce an important caveat in a discussion of the link between public opinion and electoral return.

British elections have, on several previous occasions, produced a parliamentary majority for the Conservative or the Labour Party even though each had received fewer popular votes nationwide than the opposition. For instance, in the most recent general election, held on May 5, 2005, Tony Blair's Labour Party received only 35.2% of the popular vote but was allocated 356 parliamentary seats (or 55% of the total number of parliamentary seats).[15] Thus, owing to the nature of the British system of single-member, plurality rule, the Labour Party received a bonus of 20% more parliamentary seats. Conversely, the Conservative Party suffered an underallocation of parliamentary seats (197, or 30.7%) compared with its share of the popular vote (32.3%). The effects of disproportionality were most pronounced for the Liberal Democrats who, in contrast to both the Labour and Conservative Parties, consistently opposed the Iraq war. Although the Liberal Democratic Party received 22% of the popular vote, its presence in the parliament was limited to 9.6% (or 62 seats). Even though Britain's participation in the Iraq war was arguably a

[13] Among countries with these systems, those that have multi-member districts tend to produce more distorted election results than others that have single-member districts (Katz 1997:134). As we will argue later, this distinction between multi- and single-member districts can have an effect on responsiveness to public opinion.

[14] Significantly, this example illustrates that the party receiving a plurality of votes in a national election can be farther away from the median voter than its opponents that have divided the remaining vote.

[15] It takes 324 seats to command a parliamentary majority. The total number of seats in the British parliament is 646.

highly salient (and unpopular) issue in the 2005 general election,[16] the prime minister was able to win an unprecedented third term in part owing to the effects of the existing electoral rules. Voters who were inclined to support Liberal Democratic candidates were restrained by the prospect that their vote would not only be "wasted" in most constituencies but, worse still, would also result in the election of their least preferred choice—namely, a Conservative government.

Although public opinion in majority/plurality systems tends to be distorted by the bias introduced by disproportionality, these systems should in theory be more responsive to the popular mood. Richard Katz (1997:138–143), citing a 1988 article by Gary King, was concerned about how well elections are likely to reflect changes in public opinion, and discussed a possible inverse relationship between disproportionality (or what he called bias) and responsiveness.[17] It seems understandable that in competing for office, the parties and candidates in majority/plurality systems should seek to situate their issue positions close to the median voter. As national sentiments shift, the parties and candidates can be expected to adjust their positions accordingly. Conversely, because parties in the PR systems have each developed a niche of supporters and because they are not faced with a winner-take-all situation, they have less incentive to be attuned to the turns and twists of public opinion. If responsiveness is to be understood in terms of the extent to which marginal shifts in popular votes can be magnified into large swings in the allocation of legislative seats, plurality systems with multimember districts should be the most responsive (Katz 1997:141). The tendency for such systems to foster high responsiveness appears to be the flip side of their tendency to produce high disproportionality.

One would surmise that the politicians' sensitivity to public opinion would be even further enhanced in those countries with a presidential system of government.[18] By definition, there can be only one winner in a presidential race. Therefore, in a presidential system, the election for the chief executive tends to be dominated by the competition between two dominant parties (or ad hoc coalitions as in France's run-off race). This means that minor parties are removed from the competition for the presidency. To the extent that the presidential race has a strong influence on legislative campaigns (especially when both elections are held concurrently), the latter competition again tends to be waged between two dominant parties or coalitions.

That presidential campaigns address a national constituency should also be consequential. Whereas parliamentary members (including the prime ministers and their cabinet ministers) are elected from district constituencies, the winning presidential candidate must address a national electorate. As a result, the latter office should be more responsive to national public opinion, whereas parliamentary members (or congressional members in the United States) are more likely to be elected by local interests and sentiments that are out of step with the national mood.

The reasoning just presented would argue that the United States, where the president dominates the formation and conduct of foreign policy, should be most responsive to public opinion. That the antiwar voters never commanded a plurality over their pro-war fellow citizens before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom surely helps to explain George W. Bush's decision to go to war. Three other factors,

[16] The Labour Party suffered a net loss of 47 parliamentary seats in the 2005 election, in which Tony Blair was accused of lying to the public in the justifications given by him for taking the country to war in Iraq. After the election, Blair reportedly said "I have listened, and I have learned." However, he did not suggest that any change in Britain's policy on Iraq would be forthcoming.

[17] The concept of responsiveness used in this context refers to the extent to which changes in popular votes can produce changes in legislative seats. Responsiveness is magnified when a small change in the former translates into a large change in the latter.

[18] Only the United States among the established democracies has a pure presidential system. France may be described to have a semi-presidential system. Switzerland's president is merely the chairperson of a collegial executive and this official is replaced annually.

however, further reduced the impact of antiwar voices as an electoral concern for Bush's reelection campaign.

First, although we tend to think of the United States presidential race as a national campaign, the decisive battle is fought over the competition for electoral votes. Disregarding minor exceptions such as Nebraska, the winner of each state's popular contest takes all of this state's electoral votes. The electoral votes allocated to the states favor the less populous (and more rural and conservative) ones, giving them more representation in the Electoral College than the more populous (and more urban and liberal) states.[19] Given the winner-take-all rule for assigning each state's electoral votes, the two presidential candidates tend to concentrate their resources on a dozen or so critical states where the election returns can determine victory or defeat in the Electoral College. They tend to bypass other states where one or the other candidate appears to have an insurmountable edge in the polls (such as California, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas) or where the number of electoral votes is too small to be consequential in determining the outcome of the presidential race. The candidates are therefore more concerned about winning the largest number of electoral votes, and not the largest number of popular votes.[20] Moreover, their attention is drawn to voter sentiments in the key "swing" states rather than nationally.

Second, the tendency for two-party competition to focus on national public opinion assumes strong party discipline whereby district candidates run for office in support of their parties' national platform. With the help of strong party leadership and coherent programs, such competition orients the voters' attention to national issues. To the extent that parties in the British Westminster model share these characteristics, they encourage more responsiveness to national public opinion. In the case of the United States, however, a decentralized party system means that the legislative candidates are inclined to wage their own separate campaigns with a greater concern for local issues and sentiments.

Third, whereas the separation of power provided by the United States constitution offers access for public opinion to influence the policy process taking place in both the executive and legislative branches, this provision also cuts in an opposite direction in that, unlike in parliamentary systems, the president is immune to a legislative vote of censure (except, of course, in the case of impeachment). Unlike a prime minister, a president's term of office is not dependent on the maintenance of a legislative majority.

But what "opportunities" exist in the British and Australian systems for adopting unpopular policies? Next to the United States, these democracies should be more responsive to public opinion than others with a PR system of election. These countries' expected responsiveness to public opinion, however, is based on the supposition that their parties are motivated to capture the median voter as a strategy to maximize electoral support.[21] In reality, however, the parties' ideological

[19] As pointed out by Arend Lijphart (1994:128–129), elections held at the national level have an important advantage in avoiding biases caused by malapportionment and gerrymandering. Proportional representation in the sense of "one person, one vote" was obviously not the chief motivation behind the creation of the Electoral College.

[20] It takes 269 electoral votes to win the United States presidential race. In the 2004 election, George W. Bush won 286 electoral votes compared with John Kerry's 251. Those states whose electoral votes were "up for grabs" became the so-called battleground states. In the 2004 election, they were generally acknowledged to be Iowa (7 electoral votes), Ohio (20), Florida (27), New Mexico (5), Michigan (17). Pennsylvania (21), and Wisconsin (10). George W. Bush won the first four states, and John Kerry carried the other three. In case of a tie in the Electoral College, each state delegation casts one vote in the House of Representatives. Consequently, the party that controls at least 26 state delegations will win the presidential race. Because each state delegation is given one vote, no provision is made to adjust for the number of citizens living in each state. This arrangement creates a huge bias against the more populous states.

[21] Anthony Downs's book (1957) offers the classic treatment of electoral competition and partisan formation. Maurice Duverger (1954:217) is also widely known for his generalization that "*the simple-majority, single-ballot system favours the two-party system*."

positions often fail to correspond to that of the median voter, sometimes by a rather large margin (Powell 2000).

That on the issue of Operation Iraqi Freedom, both the Labour and the Conservative Parties in Britain took a position to the right of the median voter suggests the limits to electoral responsiveness even in a predominantly two-party system. Tony Blair's government can afford to be more dismissive of the antiwar opposition because its main competition, the Conservative Party, happens to also support the Iraq war. Voters who are disenchanted with Labour's position on this issue are then given little electoral choice except to cast their ballots for a third (minor) party (the Liberal Democrats), an act that is likely to be under-or unrewarded because of Britain's single-member, plurality system for electing parliamentarians.[22] As Gaubatz (1999:55) pointed out, it is not so much public opinion per se, but rather the potential for it to be exploited by the opposition, that motivates politicians to be on guard against an electoral backlash.

Australia's alternative-vote system offers a variant of majority rule for electing officials, with practical consequences similar to those of the other majoritarian/plurality systems.[23] John Howard's Liberal Party has little incentive to move to the left in order to compete with Labour for the antiwar votes. The smaller National Party is located to the right of the Liberal Party, and its supporters are likely to pick Liberal candidates as their second choice over Labour's nominees. Disproportionality in translating the number of popular votes into the number of parliamentary seats provides the Liberals with an electoral edge. The victory of the Liberals also points to another obvious factor, namely, voters can be concerned with other issues that trump the salience of the Iraq war. In this case, taxation for social spending turned out to be an even more salient issue for the average Australian voter.

As already remarked, Rae's (1967) seminal study established that district magnitude (the number of candidates to be elected from each district) is the leading cause for electoral disproportionality. Single-member constituencies (SMC) tend to have another consequence. In polities with SMC, the distinction between the government and the opposition is more sharply marked,[24] and the former tends to be more clearly in control of policy decisions and more insulated against sudden shifts in public opinion. This insulation in part reflects the government's margin of victory in the previous popular election and the size of its legislative majority. As already noted, however, both the margin of electoral victory and the size of legislative majority tend to be exaggerated by the dispoportionality tendency inherent in the SMC systems. The converse of this advantage enjoyed by the government is a weaker and, often, more divided opposition, which in turn lessens the pressure on the government to adjust its policies in accordance with public opinion. As we will argue shortly, in contrast to the coalition dynamics prevalent in PR systems with multimember constituencies, these factors tend to reduce the government's responsiveness to changing national mood *between* elections (that is, during periods when politicians are not actively campaigning for political office).

Canada shares some important institutional features of the British and Australian systems, but did not join Operation Iraqi Freedom. This case recalls an important distinction made earlier between "willingness" and "opportunity." The electoral institutions do not themselves create a disposition for politicians to support or

[22] In contrast to the Labour and Conservative Parties, the Liberal Democratic Party has consistently opposed the war in Iraq.

[23] As Rae (1967:108) remarked, "all of the properties associated with plurality formulae are also associated with the Australian majority formula."

[24] It again seems pertinent to return to Rae's (1967:143) classic study. To quote him, "what electoral law provisions intensify the defractionalization pattern and therefore seem likely to exert pressure toward two-party competition? The answer is simple: the single-member district. . . . "

oppose a public policy. However, given a politician's disposition to go against a substantial minority or even a significant majority view, electoral rules set the stage for political competition and representation. They can therefore facilitate or hinder this disposition from being actually carried out.

Proportional Representation Systems

Kant and his intellectual successors pointed to public opinion as a constraint against leaders who might otherwise be reckless in their impulse to get into war. By its very nature, a political constraint operates when politicians are diverted or blocked by public opinion from doing something that they would have otherwise been inclined to do. Although such counterfactual assertions are by their very nature difficult to prove, we can look to cases where politicians were forced to reverse a prior decision as prima facie instances demonstrating the influence of public opinion.

We have one clear case of such policy reversal and possibly a second pending one.[25] In March 2003, the Spanish voters rejected Jose Maria Aznar's *Partido Popular*, and chose instead a Socialist government (led by Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriquez Zapatero) that had pledged to remove Spain's 1,300 troops from Iraq. Following immediately the terrorist bombing in Madrid, the Iraq war was clearly a dominant issue in the Spanish election. Italy introduces a second case of (pending) policy reversal. After an Italian security officer was shot to death by U.S. soldiers in March 2005, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced an intention to consider the withdrawal of Italian troops by the following September.[26]

The Spanish and Italian examples challenge our conventional wisdom, which argues that in states with PR and multiparty electoral competition, politicians should be more protected from shifts in the public mood. In contrast to two-party systems with majority/plurality electoral rules, PR systems are supposed to lack the principal virtue of forging a national electoral mandate or changing decisively the direction of public policy. Under the circumstances of PR systems, the electorate is supposed to be fragmented and minor parties are supposed to cater to particularistic niche issues. As mentioned before, compared with two-party majority/plurality systems, multiparty competition in PR systems is not expected to be conducive to the politicians' responsiveness to public opinion. If so, how can one explain Spanish and Italian policy reversals in the face of popular opposition to the Iraq war in contrast to the continuation of existing policies in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States?

With respect to the United States, the term limit for the presidency would presumably remove the fear of electoral sanction during a chief executive's second term. Because the democratic vision includes both *ex post* accountability (throwing the rascals out) and *ex ante* mandate (instructing officials of popular wishes), this constitutional provision removes the former popular constraint on government officials. Given the dominant role played by the United States president in the foreign policy process, this circumstance creates a particular challenge to the democratic peace theory.

Setting aside this U.S. exception, Bingham Powell's analysis points to another factor that is applicable to majority/plurality systems more generally. His study shows that, contrary to conventional expectation, majority/plurality systems tend to produce legislatures, governments, and policy-making coalitions that are farther

[25] We ignore in this paper some other cases where troops committed to Iraq were or could be withdrawn, such as for the Philippines, Poland, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine.

[26] At this writing, Italy has yet to hold a general election since the Iraq war. However, Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* suffered a serious defeat to the left-center opposition led by Romano Prodi in the regional elections held in April 2005. It lost 12 of the 14 regional contests. Berlusconi was subsequently forced to form a new cabinet in the face of mounting criticisms.

away from the median voter than their PR counterparts.[27] Powell (2000:245) remarked that "contrary to expectations from a Downsian image of two-party competition and majorities, competition even in majoritarian design systems is rarely confined to only two parties, seldom results in vote majorities for one of them, and infrequently finds both main contenders offering policy commitments close to the median voter." The entry of a small third party can change the electoral configuration, and the division of votes among several parties closer to the median position can produce a manufactured legislative majority for the party winning electoral plurality even though it is farther away from the median position than some of its competitors. Powell (2000:138) moreover found that the average plurality party or coalition won 45% of the popular vote, 55% of the legislative seats, but 74% of "government shares" and 72% of "effective representation" in policy making in 45 elections conducted in six countries with a "majoritarian" system.[28] The comparable figures are 39%, 41%, 66%, and 66% in 80 elections held in nine countries with a PR system.[29] Thus, it appears that PR systems have the virtue of not only reducing the extent of electoral disproportionality but also bringing effective representation closer to the median voter.

The Spanish and Italian electoral rules suffer less from the electoral bias operating in favor of the major parties in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States Spain's list system promotes the coherence of party agenda and the influence of party leaders who control the candidates' placement on the ballots. Concomitantly, the more the party discipline and the greater the party leaders' control of candidate nomination, the more one can expect national issues to dominate elections. The nationalization of electoral forces is moreover promoted by the fact that candidates from each competing party tend to adopt the same ideological position.

Italy has a mixed electoral system whereby three quarters of its legislative winners are chosen from single-member local districts and the other quarter are selected on the basis of PR lists.[30] Thus, this country shares, to some extent, the tendency toward disporportionality characteristic of all systems with SMC. In the 2001 election for the Chamber of Deputies, the *Casa delle Liberta* (House of Liberty), Silvio Berlusconi's right-center coalition, received 49.57% of the popular vote compared with the 34.92% received by *L'Ulivo* (Olive Tree). The distribution of popular votes for the Senate was 42.52% and 38.69%, respectively. Given the nature of SMC system, the right-centrists were able to win relatively more district seats (282 deputies and 152 senators) than their popular votes shares, and the left-centrists won fewer district seats (184 deputies and 74 senators) than their popular vote shares. This disproportionality afforded Berlusconi some measure of insulation against public opinion, which was solidly against the war in Iraq.

This bias is offset to some extent by the provision that 25% of the deputies and senators are selected from PR lists.[31] As a result of this provision, smaller parties that have a slim chance of winning in single-member districts stand a better chance of gaining some representation. Moreover, even the larger parties are encouraged

[27] Powell used the concept of responsiveness in the following sense. How well are popular votes translated into the formation of government coalitions and the selection of officials? Are all groups of voters accorded influence proportional to their votes (compared with the emphasis given by majoritarian systems on responding to only the largest group of voters in the interest of decisiveness)?

[28] As noted by Powell, the majoritarian systems often accept plurality in practice as a criterion for deciding elections.

[29] Powell excluded several ambiguous cases from this analysis.

[30] Like Italy, Germany and Japan have a mixed electoral system. These countries reserve 50% and 40%, respectively, of their legislative seats for allocation by regional PR lists. David Farrell (2001) offers a good overview of different electoral systems.

[31] On the basis of PR lists, the right-centrists won 86 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 25 seats in the Senate in the 2001 election. The left-centrists won 58 and 51 seats, respectively.

to maximize their popular votes beyond just winning the local races. As election districts become larger, parties and candidates are naturally less subject to capture by local interests and more compelled to address larger regional or national issues.[32] In the Netherlands and Israel, the nation as a whole serves as an at-large district from which all legislators are selected in accordance with the proportional share of votes received by their parties.[33]

Beyond their direct effects in shaping the outcome of elections, electoral institutions can influence the manner in which the parties and legislatures mediate between government officials and citizens in the policy process. Specifically, multimember PR systems offer more delicate and more conducive instruments of mediation than majority/plurality systems with SMC. Parliamentary democracies of the former kind are generally governed by multiparty coalitions. The composition of these coalitions can be easily affected by a relatively small shift in the party position of one of the crucial partners (Sartori 1976). Changes in the public mood, born of dissatisfaction with public policy, can be quickly reflected in adjustments to a governing coalition's composition and threats to its demise.[34] This being the case, these PR systems can be sensitive to and responsive to public opinion *between* general elections.

Another indirect effect of PR systems in promoting greater responsiveness relates to the deputies' incentives for supporting the executive. These incentives are weaker in coalition governments than in "bipolar" government-opposition constellations, because payoffs to the deputies (in the form of ministerial posts, pork-barrel projects, and patronage to constituents) are more widely distributed and hence much less concentrated. Consequently, risk-averse deputies have more to fear from their electoral base or from the leadership of their party (which controls their placement on the electoral list) than from an incumbent prime minister. Although lacking a formal separation of powers as in the United States, this situation nevertheless limits the extent to which the prime minister in PR systems can effectively restrain or retaliate against recalcitrant deputies for acts of political dissent or defection.[35]

In a prior research effort to account for the marked variation in the propensity of mature democracies to start or become involved in wars, Leblang and Chan (2003) found one consistent pattern.[36] Countries with PR systems have been much less likely to become engaged in foreign wars than those with majority/plurality systems. Only this institutional distinction appears to be statistically significant, whereas other factors—such as the timing of the electoral cycle, the difference between presidential and parliamentary governments, the partisan balance of the govern-

[32] Concomitantly, biases introduced by malapportionment or gerrymandering tend to be reduced with the introduction of larger election districts. As already mentioned, the design of the United States Electoral College deliberately favors the less populous states. The Japanese electoral system has also been designed to favor heavily rural constituencies.

[33] Whereas Rae (1967) reported district magnitude (i.e., the number of candidates to be elected from a district) to be the most important factor in reducing disproportionality, Lijphart (1994) added that the size of the national assembly also makes a large difference, so that larger assemblies tend to promote greater proportionality or, more accurately, to limit the extent of disproportionality.

[34] Thus, for example, in the Fourth French Republic, the potential partners to a governing coalition could easily disagree over issues such as socio-economic redistribution, education policies (including the role of religion), and the nature of the constitution system itself. Similarly, the fragility of governing coalitions in Spain reflects in part the need by parties on both the left and the right to seek cooperation from the Catalan and Basque parties.

[35] We note another phenomenon that is not related, directly or indirectly, to electoral rules. In some PR or mixed systems such as France and Italy, massive street demonstrations and general strikes are so frequent as to become virtually institutionalized as a form of political participation and communication. Such anomic action, typically used to articulate opposition to domestic rather than foreign policy, tends to be more rare in majority/plurality systems with single-member constituencies (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia).

[36] See Palmer, Regan, and London (2001), Partell (1997), and Prins and Sprecher (1999) for additional examples of this line of research focusing on the institutional differences among the democracies.

ment, and the size of the ruling coalition—do not seem to matter. The discussion of electoral institutions in this article begins to point to the reasons behind this difference in the war experience between PR and majority/plurality systems observed earlier.[37] This difference points to a strong and persistent tendency for the latter systems to be much more war prone than the former systems, even after appropriate statistical controls were introduced for possible confounding factors such as a country's international status and its regime's ideology.

Conclusion

The literature on democratic peace seeks, at least in part, to explain the behavior of states by way of the incentives of politicians. This analysis follows other recent studies trying to bridge these two levels of analysis (Chiozza and Goemans 2004). Moreover, it attempts to account for the sharp differences in the frequency of war involvement on the part of democracies. Why are some democracies more prone to war than others?

The accumulating evidence on the connection between officials' tenure and their propensity to engage in war or crisis offers a fruitful starting point to answer this question. Leaders tend to risk their tenure when they get involved in an international conflict, and leaders who already face a high risk of losing their office tend to avoid international conflict (Chiozza and Goemans 2003; see also Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; and Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999). These empirical patterns suggest that the more politically secure or, less politically vulnerable, leaders are more willing to risk war or crisis, everything else being equal. As the risk of losing their office increases, leaders would be more reluctant to risk war or crisis. This being the case, we are naturally led to ask which institutions among the democracies are likely to make their officials more, or less, sensitive to the risk of losing their office. Given our assumption that leaders wish to retain power, we are drawn to the nature of electoral systems that can enhance or diminish the leaders' exposure to being sanctioned by the voters for unpopular policies, including the initiation of or participation in foreign wars.

We thus argue that it is problematic for the prevailing formulation of the democratic peace theory to assume or treat politicians in all democracies as equally sensitive to public opinion when it comes to public policies on whether to fight a foreign war. We contend that the influence of public opinion varies across different democracies, and that this influence—to the extent that it is tied to the politicians' concern for their reelection chances—is mediated by the nature of electoral institutions in place in each democracy.

It seems that the customary attributions of the different extent to which various democracies' foreign policies are subject to the influence of public opinion do not correspond well with the patterns revealed by the Iraq war. The United States and the United Kingdom, which are supposed to be most accessible to antiwar sentiments, actually offered the sharpest examples of politicians going against a substantial minority or even a majority of voters expressing opposition to the Iraq war. Conversely, Spain and Italy, which are expected to be less sensitive to public opinion, actually provided the best examples of public opinion forcing their governments to reverse an unpopular policy. The differences between these democracies

[37] Naturally, we do not imply that electoral institutions are the only explanation. Japan has a mixed electoral system like that of Italy and Germany. Junichiro Koizumi's government, however, has apparently not encountered the same extent of domestic resistance to the presence of 600 Japanese military construction personnel in Iraq that Silvio Berlusconi has faced. Japan's electoral system explains the traditional emphasis placed by its politicians on attending to constituency service and on joining rival factions within the Liberal Democratic Party. These incentives stem in large part from the fact that their most formidable electoral opponents often turn out to be other members of the LDP. These tendencies make Japanese electoral politics less oriented toward national issues. In this regard, Japanese politicians share the local and personalist orientation of their Irish and Italian counterparts.

invite us to re-consider the customary expectation that majority/plurality systems tend to be more responsive to national public opinion than PR systems. We suggest some factors that undermine this responsiveness on the part of majority/plurality systems, and other factors that tend to enhance this responsiveness by the PR systems. To the extent that the difference between these systems is not limited to cross-national variation in just the Iraq war (Leblang and Chan 2003), we have a general pattern of both empirical and theoretical significance that calls for further analytic attention.

There is a tendency to suppose that elections in majority/plurality systems are more sensitive to national forces than those in PR systems. One can, however, advance an opposite hypothesis, one that seems more congruent with the patterns observed in this article. In his study of three electoral systems (the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Italy), Richard Katz (1980:70–71) suggested that "parties and their candidates operating in PR systems would tend to adopt the same ideological position in constituencies throughout the country, while under plurality systems candidates in different constituencies would adopt different, although not inconsistent, stands." According to this logic, electoral changes should be more nationalized in PR systems than in majority/plurality systems. If true, this tendency offsets those forces that are supposed to make politicians in the latter systems more responsive to changes in the national mood.

The supposed responsiveness of politicians in majority/plurality systems is based on the assumption of competitive parties that adjust their issue positions to reflect the median voter. Bingham Powell's (2000) analysis shows that this assumption is dubious. Moreover, parties in majority/plurality systems do not necessarily situate themselves closer to the median voter than their counterparts in PR systems. If anything, they have tended to be farther away. In a similar vein, Arend Lijphart (1994:144) remarked that "there is no evidence that coalition cabinets in multiparty systems are less responsive than one-party majority cabinets; on the contrary, coalition cabinets are usually closer to the centre of the political spectrum—and hence closer in their policy outlook to the average citizen—than one-party cabinets representing either the left or the right."

Even if one accepts the hypothesis that electoral competition in majority/plurality systems should be more responsive to changes in public opinion, one is still left with the question of the government's responsiveness to public opinion between elections. What are the incentives for incumbent politicians to be concerned about popular sentiments, when the next election is still some time in the future or when they are legally barred from seeking another term of office? For reasons already explained, coalition governments are likely to be more responsive to public opinion than single-party governments between elections.

Our discussion of the influence of British and American public opinion on the Iraq war underscores an observation made by V. O. Key (1961) some time ago. In his view, the political salience and relevance of public opinion depends ultimately on the incumbent politicians' concern for the voters being mobilized by the opposition. That is, the incumbent politicians' perception is critical. Are they concerned about the potential for their opponents to exploit public opinion? Absent this potential, they have less incentive to adjust their unpopular policies. To the extent that the main opposition party in the United States and the United Kingdom fails to offer a clear and sharp alternative policy, the government has less to be worried about being challenged in the election. Citizens unhappy with the incumbent's Iraqi policy face a quandary because a vote for an antiwar third party is "wasted." The nature of the electoral system therefore induces voters not to support their top preference but to cast their ballot in the hope of defeating the candidate or party that is most objectionable to them.

Those who advocate the theory of democratic peace tend to rely on the peaceful disposition of masses and the influence of public opinion to restrain leaders from

going to unpopular war. Each of these propositions represents a necessary condition and jointly they constitute the sufficient condition for confirming this theory. Neither of these propositions, however, can be taken for granted. We know, for example, public opinion can be "permissive" and even belligerent, urging officials to take military action such as when the United States public demanded war against Spain in 1898. The 2003 invasion of Iraq showed that the major democracies pursued rather different policies even though their citizens were generally against the war or at least had serious reservations about it. Thus, in the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the first but not the second condition stipulated by the democratic peace theory appeared to have been largely met. Given the widespread and significant popular opposition to war in all the established democracies, the discrepant responses from their governments offer us an opportunity to study how electoral institutions can matter for the officials' responsiveness to public opinion. Contrary to the conventional view, we suggest that PR systems tend to be more responsive to the prospect of voter sanction than majority/plurality systems.

References

BRODY, RICHARD, AND BENJAMIN PAGE. (1975) The Impact of Events on Presidential Popularity. In *Perspectives on the Presidency*, edited by Aaron Wildavsky. Boston: Little, Brown.

BUENO DE MESQUITA, BRUCE, AND RANDOLPH M. SIVERSON. (1995) War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability. *American Political Science Review* 89:841–853.

BUENO DE MESQUITA, BRUCE, JAMES D. MORROW, RANDOLPH M. SIVERSON, AND ALASTAIR SMITH. (1999) An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace. *American Political Science Review* 93: 791–807.

BUENO DE MESQUITA, BRUCE, RANDOLPH M. SIVERSON, AND GARY WOLLER. (1992) War and the Fate of Regimes: A Comparative Analysis. *American Political Science Review* 86:638–646.

CHIOZZA, GIACOMO, AND H. E. GOEMANS. (2003) Peace Through Insecurity: Tenure and International Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47:443–467.

CHIOZZA, GIACOMO, AND H. E. GOEMANS. (2004) International Conflict and the Tenure of Leaders: Is War Still *Ex Post* Inefficient? *American Journal of Political Science* 48:604–619.

COLARESI, MICHAEL. (2004) Why Doves Cry: International Rivalry, Unreciprocated Cooperation, and Leadership Turnover. *American Journal of Political Science* 48:555–570.

COX, GARY W. (1997) *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DOWNS, ANTHONY. (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.

DUVERGER, MAURICE. (1954) *Party Politics*. London: Methuen.

FARRELL, DAVID M. (2001) *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*. New York: Palgrave.

GARTNER, SCOTT S., AND GARY M. SEGURA. (1998) War, Casualties, and Public Opinion. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42:278–300.

GAUBATZ, KURT T. (1999) *Elections and War: The Electoral Incentive in the Democratic Politics of War and Peace*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

HUGHES, BARRY B. (1978) *The Domestic Context of American Foreign Policy*. San Francisco: Freeman.

KANT, IMMANUEL. (1957 [1795]) *Perpetual Peace*, translated by Lewis White Beck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

KATZ, RICHARD S. (1980) *A Theory of Parties and Electoral Systems*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

KATZ, RICHARD S. (1997) *Democracy and Elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.

KERNELL, SAMUEL. (1978) Explaining Presidential Popularity. *American Political Science Review* 73: 506–522.

KEY, V. O. JR. (1961) *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf.

KING, GARY. (1988) Electoral Responsiveness and Partisan Bias in Majoritarian Democracies. Manuscript.

LEBLANG, DAVID, AND STEVE CHAN. (2003) Explaining Wars Fought by Established Democracies: Do Institutional Constraints Matter? *Political Research Quarterly* 56:385–400.

LIJPHART, AREND. (1994) *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Survey of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945–1990*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MOST, BENJAMIN A., AND HARVEY STARR. (1989) *Inquiry, Logic and International Politics*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

MUELLER, JOHN. (1973) *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. New York: Wiley.

PALMER, GLENN., PATRICK M. REGAN, AND TAMAR R. LONDON. (2001) What's Stopping You? The Sources of Political Constraints on International Conflict Behavior in Parliamentary Democracies. Manuscript.

PARTELL, PETER J. (1997) Executive Constraints and Success in International Crises. *Political Research Quarterly* 50:503–528.

POWELL, G. BINGHAM. (2000) *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

PRINS, BRANDON C., AND CHRISTOPHER SPRECHER. (1999) Institutional Constraints, Political Opposition, and Interstate Dispute Escalation: Evidence from Parliamentary Systems, 1946–89. *Journal of Peace Research* 36:271–287.

RAE, DOUGLAS W. (1967) *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

RISSE-KAPPEN, THOMAS. (1991) Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies. *World Politics* 43:479–512.

ROSATO, SEBASTIAN. (2003) The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory. *American Political Science Review* 87:585–602.

RUSSETT, BRUCE, AND JOHN ONEAL. (2001) *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. New York: Norton.

SARTORI, GIOVANNI. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

SIGELMAN, LEE., AND PAMELA JOHNSTON CONOVER. (1981) The Dynamics of Presidential Support during International Conflict Situations: The Iranian Hostage Crisis. *Political Behavior* 3:303–318.