

BOOK REVIEWS

Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, *Elections and War: The Electoral Incentive in the Democratic Politics of War and Peace*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. 220 pp. Cloth, \$45.00.

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In *Elections and War*, Kurt Taylor Gaubatz asks how the electoral process affects a democratic state's decision to go to war. The question is an interesting one, as it brings the fundamental trait of democracy—elections—squarely into the debate about the democratic peace. Moreover, to his credit, Gaubatz uses a combination of case study and statistical analysis to support his arguments. That the book raises more questions than it answers indicates the complex nature of the question at hand and illuminates a rich field for future research.

As this is a study of the interaction of domestic and international politics, Gaubatz employs a two-level model. For each level, he specifies the important actors, the structure, and the outcomes. Although the model includes arrows linking these six components and two levels, several of the proposed relationships get lost as the argument advances. This gives the book a bit of a choppy feel that detracts from the overall effectiveness of the work.

The main argument is that electoral politics tend to reduce incentives for state leaders to enter wars in the period just before an election. This is not because voters avoid imposing the costs of war on themselves. Indeed, democratic societies may become virulently war prone. Using case studies, Gaubatz shows that public mood in fact shifts between belligerence (the United States prior to the Spanish-American War) and isolationism (the United States between the two world wars). During an election period, government leaders become increasingly influenced by public mood. If conflict looms on the horizon, additional pressure emerges from "legitimate" antiwar elites, who use the political space opened by elections to air their views. Antiwar elites thus raise the costs to government leaders contemplating war entry by disrupting the social unity necessary for such an undertaking. The preelectoral period becomes a risky time for leaders to enter a war.

Gaubatz presents three cases to show that elite-level opposition emerges even when the public's mood is belligerent. He examines British attitudes leading up to the Crimean and Boer Wars and U.S. attitudes leading up to the Spanish-American War. The cases provide strong evidence about the aggressive tendencies of democratic citizens. As presented, however, they do a less effective job at illuminating the interaction between mass and elite views. For example, the antiwar opponents always lose—the war is entered, in line with public demands. Indeed, Gaubatz notes, "politicians who attempted to resist the tides of public passion did so at considerable risk to their politi-

cal careers" (p. 47). Yet, in the next paragraph, he concludes precisely the opposite: "The existence of legitimate antiwar views and the electoral institutions that create a space for their dissemination make warmongering a dangerous electoral strategy" (p. 48). True, perhaps, but the three cases did not support this conclusion.

Moreover, electoral institutions possibly affect only the Boer War. Great Britain entered the war 4 years after an election, meaning that another was due at any time. Thus, British leaders worked within the politically risky preelectoral period. Even so, given the nature of elections in parliamentary systems, the government was able to postpone the election until Britain's performance in the war improved. Leaders in parliamentary systems in fact have the opportunity to *exploit* success in war by *forcing* an election. This turns the causal arrow around (the effect of war on electoral politics).

Gaubatz address this observation in two ways. First, he largely dismisses it, stating that "even if the relationship runs from disputes to elections rather than the other way around, it would not significantly change the dynamics I describe here" (p. 91). He should convince the reader of this. Second, he notes that very few parliamentary democracies got involved in war when elections were expected—that is, when the maximum time allowed between elections neared completion (pp. 137-138). The Boer War violates this condition. The proposition is backed up only by the statement that of the "42 cases in which war entry came more than two years before an election," there are only five cases "in which the previous election was more than two years prior to war entry" (p. 138). Although the Boer War fits the latter category, it does not fit the former. It is thereby excluded from the list of cases signifying the "severity of the parliamentary problem" (p. 189, fn. 25, 26).

I do not mean to overstate the significance of the Boer War for the overall argument. Gaubatz is, after all, dealing in probabilities rather than deterministic patterns of cause and effect. It does seem, however, that the ability of prime ministers to manipulate the timing of elections demonstrates a fundamental difference between parliamentary and presidential systems that must be incorporated into a theory of elections and war.

Next, Gaubatz moves on to discuss the role of antiwar public mood on foreign policy decisions. He uses the period just before WWII to discuss how incumbent leaders in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States balanced domestic pressure for peace and isolationism against a growing international incentive for aggressiveness. The cases clearly show how electoral considerations shaped decisions about war entry. Nevertheless, the larger discussion, ostensibly about electoral *institutions*, fails to explore the *variety* of electoral institutions out there. In particular, the cases focus on incumbents seeking reelection. What if the rules prohibit reelection? Might second-term U.S. presidents make more aggressive decisions than first-term presidents? What about Latin American presidents, who, until recently, could not serve consecutive terms? Do the incentives differ for candidates in the pre-*primary* election period? How shall the "electoral period" be defined for countries using runoff systems? These questions must be addressed.

Moving from case study to statistical analysis, Gaubatz considers the effects of electoral politics on foreign-policy choices. Still working at the domestic level, he

uses militarized interstate disputes to indicate "foreign policy," leaving wars aside for the moment. Gaubatz compares the date of each dispute entry between 1816 and 1976 to its position in the election cycle. He finds no systematic relationship. Liberal states are just about as likely to get involved in a dispute after one third of the election cycle has passed as they are after two thirds of the election cycle has passed.

To reintroduce the effect of public mood, Gaubatz limits the analysis to 1920 to 1938, when populations of major democracies held distinctly antiwar sentiments. The data show that when the public prefers isolationism, state leaders are significantly less likely to enter disputes during the last fifth of the electoral cycle. The data cannot capture the role of antiwar elites, however. Had Gaubatz selected a period of belligerent public mood, elite opposition—a main component of the model—would have to have been included.

Addressing domestic concerns is only half the battle. The main argument at the international level is that the transparent nature of elections in liberal regimes reduces the likelihood of war in the electoral period. Gaubatz makes three specific points: first, that foreign leaders can discount aggressive campaign rhetoric by monitoring public opinion; second, that election pressures constrain the negotiating power of democratic leaders in observable ways; and third, that democratic states make more credible commitments when they are linked to specific costs at home.

In the two case studies, however, transparency seems to have the opposite effects. For example, before the Gulf War, Kuwaitis were able to observe the U.S. public's reluctance to get involved overseas. Kuwait hired public relations firms to rally the public to action. Saddam Hussein also upped the ante by observing (mistakenly) that the U.S. public lacked the resolve to stand up to his challenge. Liberal transparency in this case intensified the level of conflict rather than mitigating it.

The use of the Falklands/Malvinas War is also questionable. Again, despite the conditions of transparency, the Argentine generals failed to predict that the British would so forcefully defend the islands. This belief encouraged the generals to attack. The case further raises the point that *non*democratic leaders must balance domestic and international pressures. The Argentine junta launched the attack on the islands as a response to increasing turmoil and calls for democracy at home. The generals did not face electoral incentives, but their entry into war had political consequences nonetheless—they were forced out of power by 1983.

Moving again from case study to statistical analysis, Gaubatz tests for a relationship between war entry and election cycle. The data include 69 cases of war entry between 1815 and 1980, taken from the Wages of War data set. Gaubatz finds a statistically significant difference in the rate at which liberal states enter wars during the last fifth of the election cycle as compared to the first four fifths. States tend not to enter wars in the preelectoral (i.e., last fifth) term. The significance increases for "serious" wars with 1,000 battle deaths or more. Indeed, only three times between 1815 and 1980 did democratic states enter a war during this preelectoral period. Moreover, democratic states are considerably more likely to get involved in war just after an election, when the public pressure has subsided.

The argument thus develops into the following: democracies may get involved in disputes at any point in the electoral cycle, but domestic and international forces particular to elections keep disputes from escalating to war. Gaubatz seems to weigh this (temporary) pacifying effect of electoral politics as a "limitation" on decision making. In other words, democratic pressures can lead states away from optimal policies. Unless democratic publics are willing to become more educated about international relations, he reasons, we may have to rely on other states' adjustments to keep conflict levels down. These conclusions, like the propositions from which they derive, are provocative. Despite some of the flaws I have described, the work should be used to challenge others to continue this line of inquiry, as the role of elections cannot be ignored.

Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 224 pp. Cloth, \$55.00; paper, \$17.95.

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Very often, when a book centers on the intersection between international relations and comparative politics, the result is international political economy. With Jeffrey Herbst's book, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, the result is political geography. He uses an interesting mix of theory, history, political science, and political geography to characterize the limits to state formation for most of the region. According to Herbst, to understand state formation in Africa, or anywhere for that matter, one has to examine the costs of extending power, the nature of the state's boundaries, and the nature of the state system. Dating back to precolonial times through the present, Herbst argues that African states projected power primarily through their management of people rather than through their maintenance of defensible borders.

Herbst's basic argument is that most literature on state formation uses the prism of the West as the primary means through which all state formation is viewed. In the case of Europe, states guarded their borders jealously, as land was their chief source of revenue. Thus, invasions in early Europe were to expand territory, or to obtain important pieces of territory. Out of the cauldron of war that was Europe emerged the early states. By contrast, in Africa, the scarce resource was more often population than territory. Moreover, given the high costs of projecting power—transportation and information costs in Africa have been quite high—African states tended to exert strong control near the capitals and indirect control at the peripheries. Moreover, with the advent of colonialism, the boundaries forged at the Berlin conference became essentially sacrosanct in the colonial and postcolonial periods. The norms of sovereignty as well as the high costs of rule, African states often existed *because* of their boundaries. Thus, to project power, leaders in Africa had to control littoral regions or population centers directly and inland, or hinterland, regions indirectly—this was true for