

Title: “Public Opinion, Rivalry, and the Democratic Peace”

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- Abstract: Public opinion is considered one of the important channels that underpins the democratic peace. As democratic leaders are beholden to the electorate, it disincentivizes them from fighting other democracies. In this regard, recent studies (e.g., Tomz and Weeks 2013), based on survey experiments, have demonstrated that citizens in democracies are averse to attacking other democracies. None of these studies, however, take the potential role of rivalry into account. In this manuscript, we argue that democratic publics’ perception of (ongoing) rivalry weakens—if not trumps—the rather well-established effect of regime type. Specifically, democratic publics are less reluctant to fight other democracies that they consider rivals. Using original survey experiments, we show that the South Korean public, similar to those of western democracies, is reluctant to use force against nonrival democracies, but less so against rival democracies. Our experiments suggest that in the presence of rivalry, public opinion may not operate as the mechanism that underpins the democratic peace. Indeed, these findings force us to rethink about the claim that democratic publics are largely averse to war against other democracies.