CDSn4001: Conflict Analysis

Domestic political/social causes of war

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Agenda

- Individual causes of war
- Domestic causes of war/peace
  - Democracy, democratization, and democratic peace theory
  - Identity politics

Unmotivated vs. motivated bias

- **Unmotivated bias**
  - Results from the simplification/categorization that decision makers use to make sense of the world
  - Decision making characterized by bounded rationality
  - **Bounded rationality**: decision makers try to be rational but face inherent limits on their ability to do so (too much information, inability to process it) → people take shortcuts, decision-making is not irrational but imperfectly rational

Prospect theory

- How individuals weigh options is heavily influenced by whether the outcome is seen as a loss or a gain.

    - Individuals are much more willing to take a risk to avoid loss than to achieve gain.

- Results in a strong status quo bias in IR – leaders will take great risks to protect what they have

Unmotivated vs motivated bias

- **Motivated bias**
  - Due to some psychological need;
  - The actor sees what they want to see
  - **Cognitive dissonance**: individuals tend to construct internally consistent views of the world. When a new piece of information doesn't fit with internal beliefs → psychological discomfort → affects interpretation of new information

(Mis)perceptions and conflict

- Do decision-makers' perceptions/ misperceptions/biases matter in global politics?

- How can we use our knowledge of cognitive biases to lessen the potential for/intensity of conflict?

Democratic peace theory

- Two versions:
    1) individual DP model, and
    2) the cost of war and public opposition

Individual model

- Looks at behavior of individual states.
- **Democracies in general are more peaceful** (than non-democratic states). ← largely discredited
  - People are generally disinclined to go to war and will stop it if allowed.
  - Authoritarian leaders sometimes start wars to distract the public from authoritarianism, a motivation that democratic leaders do not have.

"The cost of war" model

- Dyadic model (i.e., focus on pairs)
- **Toward autocracies democracies are just as warlike as autocracies, but democracies do not fight each other.**
  - Origins attributed to Kant – possibility of an international federation of republics that could usher the perpetual peace.
  - Ordinary citizens are inherently peaceful because they are the ones who have to fight wars.
  - In democracies, citizens can vote to control politicians.
  - Power-hungry governments go to war against citizens' wishes.

In support of the dyadic model

- **Structural argument**:
  - political disputes resolved by compromise, which carries over into foreign policy
  - democracies keep their promises
  - audience costs
- **Normative argument**:
  - mutual respect among democracies and disdain toward autocratic states
- **Institutional argument**:
  - rational choice theory – political institutions have two effects on leaders.
  - 1) democratic states are more likely to win wars (because citizens are more likely to support war efforts).
  - 2) leaders are more sensitive to political costs of losing a war.

Problems with DPT?

- Is the promotion of democracy a solution to war and conflict?

Identity and a constitutive outside

- Constitutive outside: what identity is defined against, setting up an "inside" and an "outside" to an identity group. Us vs Them, determining who does and does not belong.

- Those who are "inside" the group are privileged over those who are "outside" the group.

- The insiders can enforce "purity" on the insiders by threatening them with being outcast and becoming "outsiders."

Primordialism

- **Ethnic group** = a group of people who share blood allegiances, kinship, and cultural attributes.

- Primordial ties become more significant through recurrent reference to them in symbolic and cultural attributes – through **myths, traditions, and heritage**.

- A nation-state is a product of historical processes
  - Ethnic groups turn into political units
  - Nation-state emergence as a natural process

Modernism

- Nationalism is a political phenomenon (not natural) – driven by political elites (i.e., the state)
  - "Nationalism is not awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist."
  - Through communication and mass-education in a standardized language, elites transform diverse ethnic identities into a unified community.
- Emergence of nations is linked to the processes of industrialization and modernization.
  - Changes in mode of production and communication created a need for "a culturally homogenous community of centrally-educated people."

Imagined communities

- Benedict Anderson – political scientist, historian
- Nation is imaginary
  - A community that is large enough that its members cannot personally know each other is imagined.
  - People perceive themselves as part of the group.
- Print-capitalism and spread of vernacular languages enabled nationalism, because people could relate to each other in new ways.

Elements of nationalism: territory

- Common territory seen as a homeland, national cradle, historical home – a physical place where nations can 'act out their dreams and fulfil aspirations'
  - Promotes sense of group distinctiveness and separateness;
  - BUT raises questions about nationality and citizenship, exclusion and inclusion.