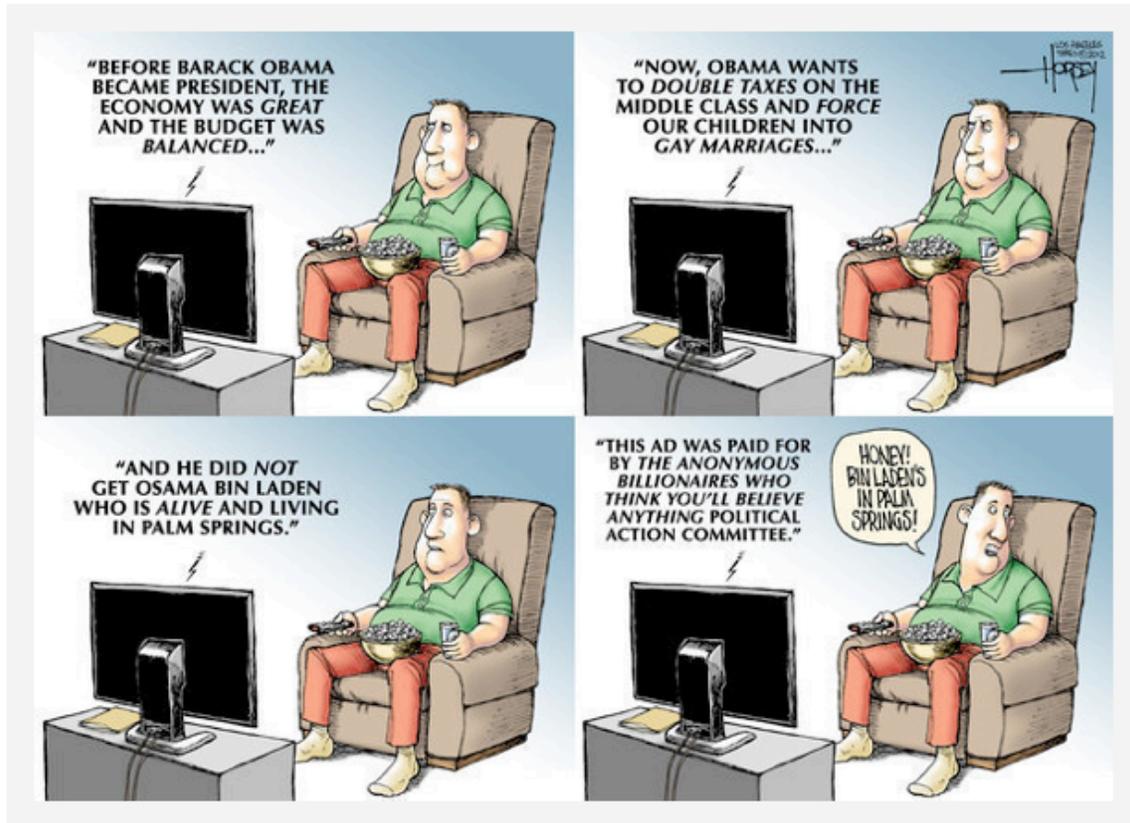# Democratic Peace Theory and the Importance of Social Scientific Analysis
(Or, How to Become An Expert BS Detector)

Days/Times
Room Number

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How many times have you read or listened to political analysis and thought, "this guy is full of sh★t!" But can you articulate clearly why you find their argument lacking? Can you make a better one? In this class we will explore the factors that make for compelling political analysis. And we will identify tools to create meaningful political research.

As a vehicle for understanding what makes for good versus sloppy political analysis we will focus throughout the semester on one of the most popular and influential international relations theories: Democratic Peace Theory. In a nutshell, Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) argues that democracies do not go to war with each other, or at the very least that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other than they are to go to war with non-democracies. DPT has been incorporated into a variety of foreign policies and greatly informs

policy-makers' thinking about international relations. This is in part why George W. Bush justified the invasion and reconstruction of Iraq in October 2003 by explaining, "See, free nations are peaceful nations. Free nations don't attack each other. Free nations don't develop weapons of mass destruction."

As this statement demonstrates, <u>theories of international relations have a significant impact on how leaders develop foreign policies</u>. It is therefore of the greatest importance that *those who practice social science* develop valid, reliable theories and that *citizens and policy-makers* know how to intelligently analyze and apply those theories. In this class, you will develop <u>skills to critique political analysis and to promote responsible use of scholarly research in real-life politics</u>.

Why You Should Take This Class: Course Mission and Learning Goals

1. You will become a more efficient, empowered, and skeptical *consumer* of political information. You will learn to *analyze* and *critique,* distinguish between observation and explanation, separate causes and effects, unpack the mechanisms behind causal relationships, bound or contextualize theory, and assess the practical applicability of different arguments.
2. You will become a more thoughtful, careful, and creative *communicator* of political argumentation. You will be given tools, and opportunities to practice, both oral and written communication.
3. You will learn how to become a *producer* of scrupulous political analysis. You will learn how to create a research design concerning a political issue of interest to you – to clearly define your concepts, develop coherent measurement schemes, address competing explanations, and interpret results.

After taking this course, you will be able to apply these skills to answer a range of important policy questions, for example: "Is democratic peace theory a valid justification for the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq?" Or, "Should the Obama administration continue to invest significant resources in promoting democracy in China as a means of improving American security?" You will be able to tackle these questions – and any others pertaining to political causality – because <u>you will have learned how to conduct reasoned, critical social scientific analysis!</u>

Who Should Take This Class: Everyone!

This course is designed for anyone who is motivated to take it. There are no prerequisites; <u>the only requirement is that you are interested in achieving at least some (if not all) of the learning goals listed above.</u> No knowledge, familiarity, or comfort with scientific methods, math, science, or international

politics is necessary. <u>My job is to make this information accessible and interesting to all – I will work with you as a class and individually to make sure we are all getting as much out of the class as possible</u>, regardless of differing academic backgrounds.

Of course, because the class is about consuming and producing social analysis it may be particularly appealing if you are considering a career in government, the non-for profit community, consulting, academia, law, business, or education. People in these professions are frequently charged with summarizing, analyzing, and conducting research. And this is certainly a useful course for anyone considering an advanced degree in social science or related disciplines. But again, this is a course designed for anyone interested in improving his or her powers of interpretation, analysis, and argumentation.

What You Will Do In This Class: Assessment & Learning Activities

The following assignments are designed to help you achieve the learning goals listed above and chart your progress during the semester. There may appear to be many assignments, but please don't let that intimidate you. With more assignments come more opportunities to practice new skills and improve your grade throughout the course. More information on each assignment will be given in class at the appropriate time during the semester.

Active Reading Rubrics (1 point each – 20 points total)
For each reading we do I would like you to fill out a Reading Rubric (which I will provide). The rubric asks to you briefly answer the following:
1) What is the central question or puzzle? What is the author trying to explain?
2) What is the causal statement or answer? Try diagramming the argument. (For example, if you throw a dog a bone he will catch it, but only if he is fast: A → B if C.)
3) What evidence does the author use to support this argument? Is it compelling evidence? How relevant is the evidence to the question/ issue at hand? Can you think of evidence that would prove him/her wrong?
4) How does this relate to other readings we have done?
5) What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument versus the competing ones?
6) Why does this matter? This class emphasizes the interaction of theory and practice – how does this pertain to theoretical debates and/or actual policy/decision-making?

This assignment is not designed to make sure you read every word of every article. On the contrary, it is designed to help you read effectively, read with purpose, and give you an incentive to do all your reading as efficiently as possible (as opposed to spending a lot of time with just one article and neglecting the others). By completing these rubrics before class we will also be

able to have more productive, detailed conversations about the reading during class. Each class I will collect five student's rubrics, collecting a total of 20 from each student over the course of the term. (This is a pass/ fail assignment.)

Comparison of Two Articles (20 points)
To develop your powers of analysis and criticism I will provide you with two articles on the same topic, asking you to describe and compare the quality of argument and evidence in a five page written response. This assignment will be given mid-way through the term, and asks you to make the same kinds of assessment as the reading rubrics but in a comparative, more in-depth format.

Mid-Term and End-of-Term Content Exams (mid-term is worth 20 points; end-of-term is worth 20 points – 40 points total)
To help you solidify and retain your understanding of course content and themes I will give you two short exams, one mid-way and one at the end of the term. These will test your knowledge of the reading, terms and concepts central to the course. Students will generate most of the exam questions themselves, each week submitting possible exam questions based on your readings and in-class discussions.

Create Your Own Research Design (40 points)
What are you planning to do after you graduate from college? Maybe you will get a job as an intelligence analyst at the CIA, as a reporter for your favorite magazine, or as a corporate consultant. Or maybe you will go to graduate school for your MA, PhD, JD, or MBA. Analyzing and executing research will be essential in all of those contexts. This term-long assignment will give you step-by-step training in how to conduct rigorous research and analysis. At the beginning of the term you will pick a political outcome or phenomena you are interested in and develop a plan for conducting the research in a systematic, reasoned, and responsible way. Different portions of the assignment will be due sequentially over the course of the semester to allow for feedback, revision, and to give you the time to execute each component. In class we will look at model research designs, identifying their strengths and weaknesses so that you can emulate the best practices in your own project.

In-Class Participation (30 points)
During the term there will be multiple and varied opportunities to develop your BS detection skills during class. We will discuss the content, merit, and weaknesses of assigned readings in both small groups and as an entire class, you will write short reaction papers to help you practice analyzing and critiquing social science literature, you will submit possible exam questions highlighting key concepts and course themes, and we will create causal diagrams of theories to get practice in breaking-down political arguments. All these forms of participation demonstrate your engagement with course themes and help you achieve the course's learning goals. Specific activities include:

Diagramming Causal Statements: This assignment gives students practice sniffing-out the causal claims embedded in popular political discourse. Twice during the term I will ask you to analyze a brief newspaper article or a transcript from a television or radio show. You will then identify any causal statements found in the document and create a causal diagram for two of the causal statements you identified, describing their underlying assumptions, causal mechanisms, and nature of causation. I will demonstrate and we will practice effective causal diagramming techniques during class as a rehearsal for this assignment.

Practicing Efficient Annotation: Being able to move efficiently through a high volume of text is an important life-skill, and a critical component in conducting good research. You have to know what has been written on a given topic before you can design a viable research program, and that often involves loads of reading. Therefore, students need to enhance their annotation skills. Twice during the term students will submit an annotated document to make sure their annotation skills improve during the course. I will also demonstrate and we will practice effective annotation and reading techniques during class.

Finding and Citing Appropriate Sources: Being able to distinguish between helpful and reliable sources, on the one hand, and irrelevant or unreliable sources, on the other hand, is critical to assessing and conducting research. And no one will take your research seriously if you don't know how to properly cite your sources. In this assignment you will be given a question and be asked to offer complete citations for 5 reliable sources on that topic, explaining why those sources are reliable and useful for answering the question. You should be able to complete this assignment without reading more than 200 words from each source. I will demonstrate and we will practice source collection during class before these assignments.

To make sure I assess your in-class participation fairly I will use a participation rubric. I will also ask that students submit a grading rubric assessing their own participation and an anonymous rubric for each of their peers. I will use your self-evaluations and peer reviews when determining the final participation grade.

Tips for Successful Performance in the Course:

Read Assignments – and This Syllabus – Carefully
Make sure you know what is expected of you and what the goals of a given assignment are well before it is due, and if you are at all confused seek

clarification from me, or from your peers, as soon as possible. Save yourself the frustration of spending hours completing an assignment that is different from the one you are supposed to be doing!

Participate in Class Actively, Creatively, and Respectfully
Discussion is an essential part of the class. Showing up is important, but not nearly enough. You are expected to engage the readings thoughtfully (with the help of the Active Reading Rubrics) and to participate actively (see the Participation Grading Rubric). Discussion is your opportunity to clarify and critique readings and make sure you get the most out of the material. In addition to *participating* actively, I expect you to *listen* actively. I encourage heated debate, but let's keep it clean!

Help Me Help You
If something about the course doesn't work for you let me know as soon as possible so we can manage these issues together. I strive to reply to emails promptly (within one business day of receipt), turn back assignments quickly (within a week of the due date), and assess students fairly by applying standardized grading templates (which you will be given in advance of any assignment). I welcome feedback and really enjoy speaking with students outside of class during visiting hours or by appointment!

Weekly Reading and Discussion Schedule

Week One: Introducing the Difficulty and Importance of Social Scientific Analysis	
Themes/ Questions	• What is social science? • What is causality? • What is theory? • Why do we care so much about getting it right? • What makes it so hard to get it right?
In-Class Activities	• Introductory Ice-Breaker • Dissecting the article "What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy?" (Develop answer with combination of small-group and class-wide discussion.) • Syllabus review and quiz – introduction and explanation of course goals, assignments, and responsibilities. (Develop understanding using think-pair-shares, content quiz to make sure students understand and agree to basic goals of the course.) • Schedule one-on-one meetings before next class. • Non-graded audit of student's preexisting

	knowledge.
	• Defining causality, different types of causality, necessary versus sufficient causality, identifying causal statements, causes, effects, and mechanisms.
Reading	First Class: • Susan Dominus, "What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy " New York Times, March 7, 2012 • Syllabus Second Class: • Syllabus again. • Works on causality (Mackie, etc.) from Walder and Gingrich class.
Assignments	• Submit brief, ungraded student self-assessments before class.

Week Two: Introducing Democratic Peace Theory, and Its (mis)Applications	
Themes/ Questions	• What is democratic peace theory? • How has it been variously interpreted/ applied by academics? • How has it been variously interpreted/ applied in American foreign policy? • What does it matter? • Introduction to some elementary principles for conducting good social science in the context of democratic peace theory: concept clarity and measurement, internal validity, external reliability, bounding and contextualizing theory, endogeneity, reverse causality, Z-variables.
In-Class Activities	• Think-pair-share or jigsaw group work on democratic peace theory. • Group diagramming of newspaper article pertaining to democracy and war. • In small groups discuss student's research design topic. Students get to know their RD partners.
Reading	• Doyle
Assignments	• Research Design (RD): Step One • Practicing Annotation (PA) Assignment

Week Three: What Do We Mean by Democracy?	
Themes/ Questions	• The importance of measurement and conceptual

	clarity for theory-building and application.
In-Class Activities	• Circulate three examples of annotation (good, bad, medium) and have them discuss. I will create examples based on amalgamation of what they submitted and at the end turn back to them my comments on their PA assignments from the last week.
Reading	• Kant, Mansfield/Snyder
Assignments	• Causal Diagramming (CD) Assignment • RD Step Two

Week Four: What Causes the Democratic Peace?	
Themes/ Questions	• What are some different explanations for the empirical findings associated with democratic peace theory? • Do different kinds of explanation require different research designs/ testing strategies?
In-Class Activities	• Circulate three examples of causal diagramming (good, bad, medium) and have them discuss. I will create examples based on amalgamation of what they submitted and at the end turn back to them my comments on their CD assignments from the last week.
Reading	• Owen,
Assignments	• PA Assignment • Finding Sources (FS) Assignment

Week Five: What Are The Critiques and Alternatives to Democratic Peace Theory?	
Themes/ Questions	• Are there other ways to explain the empirical findings associated with democratic peace theory? • How devastating are these critiques? • If we believe the critiques/ alternatives, what does that imply for foreign policy? What are some different explanations for the empirical findings associated with democratic peace theory? • Do different kinds of explanation require different research designs/ testing strategies?
In-Class Activities	• Group-based discussion and class-wide debate.
Reading	•
Assignments	• CD Assignment • Finding Sources Assignment

Week Six: Applying Lessons to Individual Research Designs	
Themes/ Questions	•
In-Class Activities	• Peer review of research designs, discussion of achievements and stumbling blocks students are experiencing. • Mid-Term Content Exam
Reading	
Assignments	• RD Part Three and RD Step Four • Prepare for Mid-Term Content Exam

Week Seven: Testing Theory I: Experimental Methods	
Themes/ Questions	• How do we know if we are right about the democratic peace? • How successful are experimental methods in testing the democratic peace hypothesis? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
In-Class Activities	• Circulate three examples of source list (good, bad, medium) and have them discuss. I will create examples based on amalgamation of what they submitted and at the end turn back to them my comments on their FS assignments from the last week. • Will use clickers to break down/ show how to properly diagram causal statements embedded in CD assignment from last week. • Peer discussion and evaluation of experimental designs.
Reading	• Works on DPT using experiments.
Assignments	• Develop a research design for your own project using experimental methods. What are the strengths and limitations of using an experimental approach as applied to your specific topic?

Week Eight: Testing Theory II: Statistical Methods	
Themes/ Questions	• How successful are statistical methods in testing the democratic peace hypothesis? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
In-Class Activities	• Peer discussion and evaluation of statistical designs.
Reading	• Works on DPT using statistics.

Assignments	• Develop a research design for your own project using statistical methods. What are the strengths and limitations of using a statistical approach as applied to your specific topic?

Week Nine: Testing Theory IV: Qualitative Methods	
Themes/ Questions	• How successful are qualitative methods in testing the democratic peace hypothesis? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
In-Class Activities	• Peer discussion and evaluation of qualitative designs.
Reading	• Works on DPT using qualitative analysis.
Assignments	• Develop a research design for your own project using qualitative methods. What are the strengths and limitations of using a qualitative approach as applied to your specific topic?

Week Ten: Testing Wrap Up: Comparing the Different Methods	
Themes/ Questions	• What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of these different research designs? • What kinds of research are most amenable to each kind of testing strategy?
In-Class Activities	• Peer review and feedback.
Reading	• Minimal – one or two summary articles but give students time to synthesize knowledge and apply to their project.
Assignments	• RD Step Five: Develop your own testing strategy – either based on one of the three you have already developed or some combination. Justify your choices with reference to the nature of your project and the strengths and weaknesses of different modes of testing.

Week Twelve: End-of-Term Exam and Review	
Themes/ Questions	• What have we learned so far? • How can we apply it to our individual projects?
In-Class Activities	• First day this week have Content Exam. Second day this week review exam and do in-class comparison of two articles practice activity. • Kate presents her work so far as model.
Reading	

Assignments	• Prepare for Content Exam

Week Thirteen: Drawing Implications from Theory	
Themes/ Questions	• Why does it matter for policy how we interpret and apply democratic peace theory? • How should we interpret theory when crafting policy?
In-Class Activities	• Take break from individual projects – focus on interpretation and comparison of two articles assignment. • Collective Q&A, work session on Research Designs.
Reading	• Readings on how DPT has been incorporated into US foreign policy • Two articles on same topic that disagree, generate different implications for policy. Maybe on whether to encourage democracy in China.
Assignments	• Comparison of two articles assignment.

Week Fourteen: In-Class Peer Review	
Themes/ Questions	
In-Class Activities	
Reading	
Assignments	• RD Step Six.

Week Fifteen: In Conclusion	
Themes/ Questions	
In-Class Activities	• Students present, and vote on, Research Designs (First Day) • In-Class Reflection Essay and Discussion (Second Day)
Reading	
Assignments	• RD Step Seven and Step Eight