

ABSTRACT

CONSENT AND COERCION: CONSENSUAL GOVERNMENT, EMPIRE AND NAVAL MILITARISM IN FIFTH CENTURY ATHENS AND LATE MEDIEVAL VENICE

The present study addresses the issue of whether or not democracies are prone to be more peaceful than other forms of government. It compares two case studies—fifth-century Athens and late medieval Venice—in terms of their naval deployments and the economic interests of individuals connected to the defense industry of those two city-states. In both cases, the prevailing notion of the democratic-peace theorists that consensual governments are unlikely to enact a belligerent foreign policy is completely overturned. In both city-states, when the governmental systems were most democratic, the navies of Athens and Venice were in a continual state of deployment, harassing and intimidating neighboring states. Individuals who stood to benefit from increased deployment of the navy voted constantly to send out naval expeditions to further their own economic interests. On the other hand, when the avenues of participation were more restricted, in both cases the states were more likely to follow a peaceful foreign policy. Thus, the idea that democracies are inherently peaceful seems a misguided notion, since high levels of popular participation in government actually resulted in more bellicose foreign policies in both Athens and Venice.

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