

Understanding Conflict Trends

A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict

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Preface

The recent spike in violence in places like Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen notwithstanding, the number of conflicts worldwide has fallen since the end of the Cold War, and few of those that remain are clashes between states. Most contemporary conflicts are insurgencies and civil wars. A growing consensus holds that the traditional causes of state-on-state conflicts have become less relevant as seizing territory for ideological or power reasons has become less attractive, and shifts in international norms and rapid availability of information have made coercive control of populations less tenable. Whether these trends represent temporary phenomena or a permanent change remains an open question. Speculation that such forces as globalization, resource scarcity, or climate change will fuel new conflicts is largely unsupported by evidence.

This report marshals the results of an extensive review of the literature on the sources and patterns of conflict both during and after the Cold War. It should be of interest to those involved in strategic defense planning, force structure, and force employment. It is intended to stand alone as a review of the social science literature on violent conflict, but it is also intended to serve as an appendix to the RAND report titled *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*.¹

Both reports resulted from a project titled Emergence of New Conflict Trends. The project's objective is to use empirical evidence to identify post-Cold War operational trends in armed conflict and the global strategic trends that characterize and influence the environments in which conflict takes place. It seeks to identify any trends that might portend a change toward state-on-state conflicts.

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Summary

The nature of conflict has changed over the past several decades. While most conflicts in the past occurred between states, contemporary conflicts tend to be insurgencies or civil wars. There is little consensus on the causes of the change in conflict patterns, although the fact that the pattern has changed is clear. The critical question for policymakers is whether the current conflict patterns represent a permanent shift or a temporary aberration.

To explore this question, we carried out an extensive review of the literature about armed conflicts and global strategic trends to determine the possible reasons for the change in conflict patterns and to assess the potential for a change in these patterns that might portend increased propensity toward state-on-state conflicts. This document is both a stand-alone review of the social-scientific literature on the causes of conflict and an appendix to the RAND report *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*.¹ It should be of interest to readers who want to review in greater depth the social science literature underlying our ultimate findings.

This review was drawn from dozens of scholarly journals and academic presses. Since political science has been the academic discipline most engaged with the question of large-scale violent conflict, the literature review focuses primarily on political science, but other fields—including economics, sociology, political and social psychology, and anthropology—are also represented. Although the review draws on schools of thought that have evolved over decades, it emphasizes the most-recent empirical findings. Because the ultimate goal of this study was to develop tools for projecting future levels and types of conflict, the review emphasizes quantitative research findings.

This review is not intended to be read cover to cover. Rather, it is topically organized so that users can simply read the results of the literature review on topics that are of particular interest to them. More specifically, the review groups explanations of interstate and intrastate war into ten broad topics each. These topics and the specific themes discussed are summarized in Table S.1.

¹ Thomas S. Szayna, Angela O'Mahony, Jennifer Kavanagh, Stephen Watts, Bryan Frederick, Tova C. Norlen, and Phoenix Voorhies, *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1063-A, 2017.

Table S.1. Inter- and Intrastate Conflict Topics

Topic Area	Contains Information About These Subjects:
Interstate Conflict	
Democracy and conflict	Nonviolent conflict resolution in mature democracies Democratic transparency Democratic accountability Role of nationalist forces Inability to justify repressive measures Effect of initial stages of democratization
Economic interdependence and conflict	Disruption of trade during conflicts Effect of trade with respect to natural resources Relation of trade with domestic lobbies Potential of trade to increase disputes
Wealth and conflict	Effect of land acquisition Effect of increased dependence on international capital markets Effects of contract-intensive society Effect of increases in wealth from low levels
Demographic and social changes	“Youth bulges” Older populations Small populations Large populations Family size Economic empowerment of women
International organizations	Peacekeeping missions Spread of norms of pacific international behavior Forums for resolution of conflict
Territorial integrity and conflict	Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on cost of disputes Norm as a coordinating mechanism Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on secessionist movements Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on settlement of preexisting disputes Effect of illegitimacy of colonialism
Nuclear weapons	Effectiveness of retaliation threat Effect of proximity on deterrence Norms about first use of nuclear weapons De facto nuclear deterrence Fostering of proxy wars
Technology and conflict	Information technology Diffusion of weapons technology
U.S. hegemony, primacy, and conflict	Likelihood of great power conflict Effect of U.S. influence on lesser powers U.S. effect on security community in Western Europe Risk of decline in U.S. role in enforcing international order
Realist factors	Equal capabilities between states Differences in state capabilities History of rivalry Formation of alliances Effect of arms races

Topic Area	Contains Information About These Subjects:
Intrastate Conflict	
State capacity	Effect of low state capacity “Lootable” resources Propensity for conflict in newly independent states Democratization Effect of large, disciplined security forces Poor governance Terrorism
Demography	Population size, growth, and density “Youth bulges” Urbanization Aging populations
Repression	Effect of repression on conflict Scale of repression Repression by strong and weak states
Democracy, democratization, and political inclusion	Reduction of one-sided violence Vulnerabilities of democracy Negative effect of democratization and autocratization Intensity of conflicts in democracy Partial democracies Pacifying effects of democracy
Ethnic and sectarian factors	Effect of ethnicity on the onset of conflict Interaction of ethnicity with economic and political status Territorially based ethnic conflict Effect of ethnicity on the intensity of conflict Settling ethnic conflicts
Economic factors	Grievances, especially economic inequality Low or declining incomes Sharp income declines
Competition over natural resources	Increase of inequalities Exploitable natural resources Dependence on single commodity Scarcity of renewable resources Environmental degradation
Legacies of prior conflicts	Post-conflict animosities created during fighting Effect of organizations and materiel left after conflicts
Technology	Proliferation of small arms Effect of new information and communication capabilities Spread of disruptive technologies Profusion of precision and automation technologies
International norms	Effect of norms at the international level Effect of norms at the state level International peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts Effect of civilization and humanitarian norms

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Julie Ann Tajiri and Lisa Turner formatted the document.

Abbreviations

ATOP	Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions
CINC	Composite Index of National Capability
CIRI	Cingranelli-Richards
CNTS	Cross-National Time Series
COW	Correlates of War
CPIA	Country Policy and Institutional Assessment
ELF	Ethno-Linguistic fractionalization
GDP	gross domestic product
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
ICB	International Crisis Behavior
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICOW	Issue Correlates of War
ICRG	International Country Risk Guide
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSCR	Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research
IO	international organization
ITERATE	International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events
MAR	Minorities at Risk
MID	militarized interstate dispute
MTOPS	Multilateral Treaties of Pacific Settlement
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PITF	Political Instability Task Force
PRIO	International Peace Research Institute, Oslo
RDWTI	RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TKB	Terrorism Knowledge Base
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

UN	United Nations
WDI	World Development Indicators
WGI	Worldwide Governance Indicator
WTO	World Trade Organization

Part 1

1. Introduction

Background

Contemporary conflicts tend to be insurgencies or civil wars. In the past, a much greater share of conflicts occurred between states. Many explanations have been advanced to explain this phenomenon, including the evolution of the global economy, changing international norms of behavior, and the preeminence of the United States in the international state system. While there are several competing explanations for this change in conflict patterns, the fact that the pattern has changed is clear.

The critical question for policymakers is whether the current conflict patterns represent a permanent shift or a temporary aberration. To explore this question, we carried out an extensive review of the literature about armed conflicts both between and within states to determine the possible reasons for the change in conflict patterns and to assess the potential for a change in these patterns that might lead to an increase in state-on-state conflicts. We use the information gleaned from these reviews as a starting point for an elaboration of signposts of changing patterns of conflict. The information contained in this review also could be useful in developing leading indicators of conflicts or in constructing future scenarios for war games or defense planning.

Purpose and Structure

This review presents the results of an extensive literature review. It is not intended to be read cover to cover. Rather, it is topically organized so that those interested in a given topic can simply read the results of the literature review on topics that are of particular interest to them. The results are broken down into two major groupings: interstate conflicts (Part Two) and intrastate conflicts (Part Three). Several topics are dealt with in those larger groupings, and the table of contents lists these. Each topic is organized similarly within the following groupings:

- overview
- summary of the effects of this variable
- hypotheses and literature review
- empirical evidence and relevant data sets
- other relevant factors
- how this factor might explain current conflict trends
- why this might be different in the future
- references about the topic.

The overview section provides a brief summary of the key points of consideration. The second section provides an overview of how the variable might explain historical patterns of conflict. The hypotheses and literature review section lists the major hypotheses about the sources of conflict that have been gleaned from the review of the literature for a given area. If there are major differences in the literature, those are noted in a separate section labeled “counterarguments.” The fourth section describes the findings from searches of empirical and other data sets. The section on other relevant factors describes what other influences might affect the hypotheses deduced from the literature. The next section explains how the factor might explain current trends in conflicts. The seventh section discusses why the past might not be prologue for a particular topic. The last section lists the references consulted in the development of the hypotheses.

Not every topic we examined could fit neatly into the organizational structure outlined above. In some cases, we include additional remarks. For example, if there are important considerations or caveats about the data sets, those are discussed in an additional separate section.

The report’s chapters each deal with a number of topics. Table 1.1 provides a listing of subjects treated in each chapter to facilitate a search of a topic of particular interest.

Table 1.1. Inter- and Intrastate Conflict Topics

Topic Area	Contains Information About These Subjects:
Interstate Conflict	
Democracy and conflict	Nonviolent conflict resolution in mature democracies Democratic transparency Democratic accountability Role of nationalist forces Inability to justify repressive measures Effect of initial stages of democratization
Ethnic and sectarian factors	Effect of ethnicity on the onset of conflict Interaction of ethnicity with economic and political status Territorially-based ethnic conflict Effect of ethnicity on the intensity of conflict Settling ethnic conflicts
Economic interdependence and conflict	Disruption of trade during conflicts Effect of trade with respect to natural resources Relation of trade with domestic lobbies Potential of trade to increase disputes
Wealth and conflict	Effect of land acquisition Effect of increased dependence on international capital markets Effects of contract-intensive society Effect of increases in wealth from low levels
Demographic and social changes	“Youth bulges” Older populations Small populations Large populations Family size Economic empowerment of women
International organizations (IOs)	Peacekeeping missions Spread of norms of pacific international behavior Forums for resolution of conflict
Territorial integrity and conflict	Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on cost of disputes Norm as a coordinating mechanism Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on secessionist movements Effect of Territorial Integrity Norm on settlement of preexisting disputes Effect of illegitimacy of colonialism
Nuclear weapons	Effectiveness of retaliation threat Effect of proximity on deterrence Norms about first use of nuclear weapons De facto nuclear deterrence Fostering of proxy wars
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U.S. hegemony, primacy, and conflict	Likelihood of great power conflict Effect of U.S. influence on lesser powers U.S. effect on security community in Western Europe Risk of decline in U.S. role in enforcing international order
Realist factors	Equal capabilities between states Differences in state capabilities History of rivalry Formation of alliances Effect of arms races

Topic Area	Contains Information About These Subjects:
Intrastate Conflict	
State capacity	Effect of low state capacity "Lootable" resources Propensity for conflict in newly independent states Democratization Effect of large, disciplined security forces Poor governance Terrorism
Demography	Population size, growth, and density "Youth bulges" Urbanization Aging populations
Repression	Effect of repression on conflict Scale of repression Repression by strong and weak states
Democracy, democratization, and political inclusion	Reduction of one-sided violence Vulnerabilities of democracy Negative effect of democratization and autocratization Intensity of conflicts in democracy Partial democracies Pacifying effects of democracy
Ethnic and sectarian factors	Effect of ethnicity on the onset of conflict Interaction of ethnicity with economic and political status Territorially based ethnic conflict Effect of ethnicity on the intensity of conflict Settling ethnic conflicts
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Competition over natural resources	Increase of inequalities Exploitable natural resources Dependence on single commodity Scarcity of renewable resources Environmental degradation
Legacies of prior conflicts	Postconflict animosities created during fighting Effect of organizations and materiel left after conflicts
Technology	Proliferation of small arms Effect of new information and communication capabilities Spread of disruptive technologies Profusion of precision and automation technologies
International norms	Effect of norms at the international level Effect of norms at the state level International peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts Effect of civilization and humanitarian norms

Applying the Literature Review to the Study of Conflict Trends

The literature reviewed in this document suggests that a wide variety of factors might have important relationships with different types of conflict. These heterogeneous findings are reflective both of the depth of the literature and of the complexity of how and when armed

conflict occurs. However, some of the factors reviewed are more strongly supported in the literature than others. Our review identifies ten key factors as having the most clearly established relationship with armed conflict and the greatest potential to affect future conflict trends. They are listed below, with a short explanation for each:

- **The capacity of state institutions.** Institutional capacity affects a state's ability to provide such public goods as infrastructure or security to their populations and to maintain effective and disciplined security services. The capacity of state institutions is often conceptualized as three-dimensional—comprised of military capacity, administrative/bureaucratic capacity, and political-institutional coherence and quality.
- **The prevalence of consolidated democracies.** The distribution and nature of political regime types around the world have varied over time. Consolidated democracies are those that have successfully implemented a range of effective institutional rules and legal procedures constraining the executive, mandating popular election of political leaders, and ensuring civil, political, and minority rights.
- **The degree of ethnic and sectarian polarization.** Almost all of the world's states are composed of multiple ethnic and sectarian groups, but ethnic and religious identities do not always act as societal cleavages. Societies become polarized along ethnic or sectarian lines as ethnicity, religion, or both become important factors for group identification, forming the basis for political organization and the lens through which societal grievances are framed.
- **The rate of economic growth.** Economies grow at different rates. Expressing the rate of growth in percentage terms from one period to another allows for a calculation of the change in the state's economy in an overall sense and allows for a comparison of rate of growth with that of other states. High growth rates tend to ease distributional conflicts and provide increasing resources for the state to regulate conflict.
- **The extent of economic interdependence.** Economic interdependence refers to how states' economies are interrelated with each other in particular and with the global economy in general. There are two key characteristics of economic interdependence that influence countries' likelihood of conflict. First, countries' economic outcomes are affected by external conditions, such as demand in another country or a global economic shock. Second, economic interdependence tends to inhibit conflict insofar as disrupting a country's ties to the international economy would hurt its domestic economy.
- **The degree of U.S. preeminence.** The international state system is characterized by hierarchy in terms of power. The share of power of the most powerful state within the international state system and vis-à-vis the potential challenger to that state's power position expresses the degree of preeminence of that state. U.S. preeminence is built on the preponderance of the United States' military power, its large share of the international

economy, its central role in international governance, and its position as a supporter and enforcer of international norms.

- **The capabilities of international organizations.** International organizations can undertake key tasks in the international system, including developing solutions to cross-border problems, mediating disputes, shaping and enforcing international norms, disseminating information, and generating shared interests and potentially aligning states' preferences. The capabilities of international organizations to undertake these tasks depend on the amount of authority and resources states delegate to them.
- **The strength of international norms.** International norms represent collective expectations for the proper behavior of state actors. Strong international norms are ones that are relatively universally held and for which there is relatively universal consensus on the need for norm enforcement. Weaker norms might only be held by (or applied to) some states, or might be held more broadly but lack support for punishing states that violate the norm.
- **The diffusion of lethal technology.** Diffusion of lethal technology refers to greater access by states and nonstate actors to the technologies necessary to build and deploy lethal weapons, including nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons; precision munitions; or disruptive cyber technology.
- **The extent of resource stress due to population pressures.** Resource stress arises from the scarcity of renewable resources, such as water and arable land, to support the population living in the area. Resource scarcity increases environmental insecurity. The main sources of resource scarcity include: (1) supply-induced scarcity, in which resources are consumed at a faster rate than they can be regenerated; (2) demand-induced scarcity, in which previously stable resource consumption increases through a rise in population or consumption per capita; and (3) structural scarcity, in which the distribution of resources is uneven and some groups have limited access to resources.

Many additional factors were also considered, as evidenced by the lengthy literature review that follows. The reasons for the exclusion of other factors varied, but generally fell into three categories. First, for factors such as the effects of prior conflicts and state repression, there is scholarly debate about whether these factors are themselves causes of conflict (independent variables) or are expressions of deeper, underlying causes. Second, many realist factors (such as the presence of alliances or rivalries), while likely to affect conflict at the dyadic or state level, were judged to be relatively consistent features of the international system and therefore unlikely to greatly affect overall trends in conflict. Third, there were several factors (such as the empowerment of women or aging populations) that, while potentially promising in explaining conflict trends, had not yet been robustly assessed in the empirical literature.

The ten key factors we identified were used in our analysis to help assess the likely direction of future conflict trends. This process is described in detail in Chapters Three, Four, and Five of

the report *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*.

Caveats

While there has been much progress in the empirical study of the causes of conflict in recent years,¹ there are at least three major methodological problems that inhibit the formation of a consensus around any particular school of thought arising from the literature review:

- **Endogeneity:** The direction of causality in arguments about violent conflict is often highly uncertain, or there is a loop in causality between the independent and dependent variables. Does democracy make states less likely to go to war with one another, or are states that have settled their differences simply more likely to democratize? Does a low level of economic development cause violent conflict, or does the fact or threat of violent conflict depress opportunities for economic development?
- **Omitted Variable Bias:** The causes of violent conflict are complex. Consequently, no statistical analysis can possibly incorporate all of the possible determinants of conflict. Simplifying reality to make it analytically tractable is both desirable and necessary. But the way in which we simplify a problem can have profound implications for our understanding of the issue. In the case of statistical analyses, factors that can be more easily measured are more likely to be included than variables that are more difficult to quantify. If the unobserved variables are the more important ones, however, studies are more likely to come to erroneous conclusions.
- **Interaction Effects:** In a world of limited resources, policymakers must identify priorities. If we could determine which factor was the strongest predictor of the onset of violent conflict, then that factor could reasonably be targeted for a disproportionate share of scarce foreign aid dollars or other resources. It is quite difficult to isolate the effects of specific variables, however, because of the complex ways in which these factors interact. Income inequalities might have very different effects on violence, for instance, when they reinforce long-standing ethnic animosities rather than existing in an ethnically homogeneous society, or when mitigated by the redistributive policies of a welfare state

¹ For reviews of the intrastate conflict literature and statistical tests of the robustness of various findings, see especially Håvard Hegre and Nicholas Sambanis, “Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 508–535; and Michael D. Ward, Brian D. Greenhill, and Kristin M. Bakke, “The Perils of Policy by P-Value: Predicting Civil Conflicts,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2010, pp. 363–375. Similar overviews of the interstate conflict literature are provided most prominently by John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 27, 1993; and Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War*, Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

rather than being matters of life and death in a subsistence-level rural economy. Statistical models have difficulty capturing such complex interaction effects. Without a better understanding of these interaction effects, however, the consequences of a particular policy intervention in a particular setting will often be difficult to predict.

Scholars have sought to address these problems through a number of methodological improvements. The study of interstate conflict has been greatly aided in recent years by focusing on the dyadic level of analysis, by the explosion in the number and breadth of different data sets, and by the increasingly sophisticated use of statistical methods designed to cope with the problems of endogeneity and interaction effects noted above.² Intrastate conflict studies have in recent years turned away from using countries as the unit of analysis—that is, a trend toward understanding the local dynamics of conflict rather than using much blunter, less nuanced comparisons of countrywide trends.³ Scholars have also made increasing use of experimental designs (both natural experiments and randomized control trials) in studies of intrastate conflict methods that offer considerably more powerful strategies to identify the effects of a given cause.⁴

Despite these improvements, major disagreements remain about the causes of conflict, likely future trends, and what the United States can do to influence outcomes in its favor. The literature reviewed in this report provides an overview of these debates, highlighting the areas where consensus has been achieved, and offers the reader an informed, nuanced way of thinking about the causes of conflict and the ways in which these causes might change in the future.

² See, for example, John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009; James Lee Ray, “Explaining Interstate Conflict and War: What Should Be Controlled For?” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2003, pp. 1–31; and Omar M. G. Keshk, Brian M. Pollins, and Rafael Reuveny, “Trade Still Follows the Flag: The Primacy of Politics in a Simultaneous Model of Interdependence and Armed Conflict,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2004, pp. 1155–1179.

³ See, for instance, Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3, August 2011, pp. 478–495; and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War,” in Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud, eds., *Order, Violence, and Conflict*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁴ See, for instance, Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti, “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 112, No. 4, 2004, pp. 725–753.

Part 2

2. Introduction to Interstate Conflict

Introduction

What does the literature find to be the most promising explanations for the decline in interstate conflict? What factors might arrest and potentially reverse the decline in interstate conflict?

Overview of the Literature

The post-1945 decline in interstate conflict has been the subject of intense interest in the academic literature. Persuasive arguments have been made that factors such as democracy, economic development, economic interdependence, international organizations, the Territorial Integrity Norm, U.S. hegemony, and nuclear weapons have contributed significantly to the increasingly peaceful relations between states. Given the centrality of territorial issues to interstate conflict, significant attention in the literature has been paid to the development and spread of an international norm guaranteeing the territorial integrity of existing states. This Territorial Integrity Norm prohibits both territorial transfers between states and the recognition of unilateral secessions from existing states. The following areas of the literature and potential hypotheses are reviewed below.

Democracy

- Domestic norms of nonviolent conflict resolution found in mature democracies reduce conflict between states.
- Greater democratic transparency reduces conflict between states by enabling credible commitments to settle disputes.
- Greater democratic accountability to domestic audiences discourages the pursuit of violent conflict.
- The need to appeal to nationalist forces for electoral advantage increases conflict between states.
- Inability to justify repressive measures that would be needed to extract gains from conquered populations reduces the incentive for democratic states to pursue conquest.
- The initial stages of democratization increase the likelihood of interstate conflict.

Economic Interdependence

- Potential disruptions of trade during crises increase the costs of pursuing interstate conflicts.

- Trade allows states to access natural resources without controlling them, reducing the incentive for states to try to control them through conquest.
- Trade strengthens domestic lobbies with an interest in preserving peace with trading partners.
- Greater interaction through trade increases the number of trade disputes, some of which might escalate to violence.

Wealth

- The acquisition of land decreases in relative value as economies develop, reducing the incentive for states to pursue conquest.
- Increased dependence on international capital markets increases the costs of pursuing disruptive interstate conflicts.
- Contract-intensive economies promote openness and transparency, reducing internal and external conflict.
- Increases in wealth from very low levels give some states the capacity to pursue interstate conflicts they previously lacked.

Demographic and Social Changes

- “Youth bulges” increase the likelihood that states will be involved in interstate conflict.
- Older populations force states to increase the share of resources spent on health care and pensions, reducing the funding available for military aims.
- Smaller populations reduce the pressure on available natural resources and reduce the incentive for states to compete for additional resources.
- Larger populations increase the pressure on available natural resources and increase the incentive for states to compete for additional resources.
- Smaller family sizes reduce the willingness of populations to support violent conflicts between states that endanger their offspring.
- Greater political and economic empowerment of women reduces conflict between states.

International Organizations

- International organizations spread norms of pacific international behavior, reducing conflict between states.
- International organizations undertake peacekeeping missions that reduce conflict between states.
- International organizations provide useful forums for the resolution of disputes (e.g., World Trade Organization [WTO], International Court of Justice [ICJ]) that would be more likely to escalate to violence if dealt with bilaterally.

Territorial Integrity

- The Territorial Integrity Norm increases the costs to states of initiating new territorial disputes by threatening an international sanction.
- The Territorial Integrity Norm acts as a coordinating mechanism among weak states to discourage territorial disputes that could destabilize their regimes.
- The Territorial Integrity Norm discourages states from recognizing secessionist movements, which might in turn lengthen or exacerbate civil wars.
- The Territorial Integrity Norm inhibits the settlement of preexisting territorial disputes by emphasizing the permanence of mutually agreed upon borders.
- The illegitimacy of colonialism discourages stronger states from acquiring territory from noncontiguous weaker states.

Nuclear Weapons

- The prospect of nuclear retaliation makes the pursuit of existential threats against a nuclear state irrational.
- The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence is lessened between states that are geographically proximate.
- Norms against the first use of nuclear weapons have been effective, thus far avoiding the prospect of “nuclear blackmail.”
- All large, wealthy states are in effect latent nuclear powers, giving such states a de facto nuclear deterrent against existential threats.
- The irrationality of direct conflict between nuclear states might divert such conflict into proxy wars.

Technology

- Information technology increases people-to-people contact between populations, reducing the likelihood of conflict between states.
- Diffusion of weapons technology increases the deadliness of interstate conflict.
- Diffusion of weapons technology tends to equalize capabilities between states, making interstate conflict more likely.

U.S. Hegemony

- Great power conflict is unlikely due to the overwhelming scope of U.S. military primacy.
- The United States uses its influence to actively discourage conflict between lesser powers.
- U.S. hegemony enabled the creation of a security community in Western Europe, previously the source of much interstate conflict.

- The U.S. role in enforcing the international order increases the number of conflicts that the United States itself becomes involved in.

Realist Factors

- More equal capabilities increase conflict between states.
- Large differences in capabilities decrease conflict between states.
- A previous history of rivalry increases conflict between states.
- Alliance formation increases conflict between states.
- Arms races increase conflict between states.

Definitions and Data

While conflict between states can be measured in many ways, the literature has tended to focus on a handful of definitions. Most definitions treat interstate conflict as being two-sided, although some treat conflicts as multistate phenomena or focus on the extent to which individual states are involved in such conflict. In addition, most definitions of interstate conflict used in the literature refer to violent conflict, often involving some level of fatalities on both sides, although some definitions, such as those centering on territorial disputes, might be nonviolent. While a discussion of the specific data employed in each branch of the literature is included in the following sections, we first provide a brief overview of the most–commonly used data sets.

The most commonly used measure of interstate conflict comes from the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set,¹ which records each case of the threat, display, or actual use of force between states. While this data set was originally organized around the disputes themselves, in which any number of states could be involved, a dyadic version has also been created, and it is widely used.

The Correlates of War (COW) data set identifies each instance of interstate war with at least 1,000 battle deaths in a given year.² This definition is relatively stringent and thereby excludes a significant number of violent conflicts between states. For this reason, it is less widely used in the quantitative literature on interstate conflict than the more flexible MID.

The Armed Conflict data set from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) includes every instance of a conflict with at least 25 battle deaths between a state and either another state or a subnational actor. This data set is therefore widely used for the study of intrastate conflict, as discussed in the previous chapter, although it does also record interstate conflicts. However, it is less widely used than the MID

¹ Glenn Palmer, Vito D’Orazio, Michael Kenwick, and Matthew Lane, “The MID4 Data Set: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, forthcoming.

² Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816–2007*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010.

data set because it is limited to armed conflicts since 1946. The MID data are collected back to 1816 and therefore incorporate a much larger number of observations.

Major Findings

Scholars interested in explaining interstate conflict initially focused on factors from the realist model of international relations, including the balance of power, alliances, rivalries, and arms races. In *The War Puzzle*,³ Vásquez provides a summary of this literature. Research into these relationships continues, particularly into the role that territorial issues play in explaining conflicts between states. Influenced heavily by the empirical reality that interstate conflict is becoming increasingly uncommon, the field of study has shifted over the past two decades toward explaining the absence of conflict between states. The debate over how to explain this development is robust and ongoing, and its contours will be outlined in some detail in the thematic sections that follow. However, a number of key findings are worth highlighting here.

- The “democratic peace,” the extreme disinclination of two stable democracies to go to war with one another, has been well established in the literature. While the correlation between dyadic democracy and a reduction in interstate conflict is unquestioned at this point, the causation of the relationship remains a subject of vigorous debate.
- The most vigorous challenge to the democratic peace in recent years has come from scholars who argue in favor of the “capitalist peace.” This theory argues that wealthy states are unlikely to go to war with one another, and that democratic peace is driven by the fact that wealthy states are also likely to become democracies. While the democratic peace remains more widely accepted in the literature, this debate should be considered to be unsettled.
- A similarly vigorous debate has played out over the role that growing international trade might have in reducing conflict between states. Many scholars have found that high levels of trade between states reduce the likelihood of engaging in conflict with one another, often suggesting that the growth of trade works in concert with the spread of democratization to promote an increasingly stable, peaceful international environment. As intuitively appealing as this relationship might be, the empirical basis of it remains somewhat unsettled, and the effects of economic interdependence on interstate conflict are still a subject of interest and debate.
- The development of nuclear weapons and the role of U.S. hegemony are widely suspected or assumed in the literature as being instrumental in explaining the lack of major power war since 1945. Thus, these factors would appear to have played a central role in allowing for the establishment of other regimes, such as the robust international

³ Vásquez, 1993.

trading system, that might have reduced the incidence of interstate conflict overall. However, empirical testing of the role of these two factors remains quite difficult, given the small number of nuclear weapon states and the persistence of U.S. hegemony throughout this period. While these factors are widely considered to have been important, it is difficult to assess how important, or to compare their relative effects with those of other factors, such as democracy or economic growth.

Implications for Global Trends and Future Conflict

Overall, these findings suggest that interstate conflict is likely to continue to decline in the near future, or at least remain at historically low levels. Many of the factors that have been identified as important to the decline in such conflict appear to be relatively stable, particularly the global increases in democracy, wealth, and trade. However, this review should not be interpreted as confirming that this decline in interstate conflict is irreversible, with interstate war on the verge of becoming, in John Mueller's phrasing, obsolete.⁴ The literature has noted a number of potential developments that could undermine or reverse the effects of heretofore peaceful trends, although such developments should not be considered the most likely future scenario. Nonetheless, the factors that could reverse this trend are of particular interest and importance to policymakers, and they are therefore highlighted in the following sections.

Breakdown in Consensus

The increasingly pacific interstate order rests on a broad consensus among the leading powers on how this order should operate in political, economic, and security affairs. This order has been and continues to be extremely beneficial for most of the powerful states in the system, and their support for the existing order is therefore robust. However, Chinese acceptance of this order has thus far been conditional, joining such institutions as the WTO while opposing such global norms as those regarding foreign intervention. As China's relative power within the system increases, it might feel freer to challenge other aspects of this order that do not align with its preferences. Such a challenge could, in the long term, threaten the post-1945 institutional and normative structure that undergirds many of the positive developments we note.

Direct support in the literature for the pacifying effects of U.S. hegemony has been limited. However, the U.S.-led order has resulted in a number of other developments, such as the growth in international trade and the Territorial Integrity Norm, the pacific effects of which are more clearly evident. If U.S. hegemony remains an important pillar in maintaining those features of the international system, then its future remains important for long-term trends in interstate conflict.

⁴ John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1988, pp. 55–79.

Several factors identified in the literature could undermine or limit U.S. primacy. Global economic and demographic trends will inexorably erode the United States' share of relative power within the international system. The diffusion of advanced military technologies will likely limit the United States' current virtually unchallenged ability to project power throughout the globe. However, other factors noted in the literature could prolong the period of U.S. dominance. The United States will be relatively less burdened by the need to care for its aging population than will other powerful states, including China. The continued spread of democracy is likely to reduce the number of states that are interested in militarily challenging the U.S.-led system. While the long-term durability of U.S. hegemony remains uncertain, its foundations should certainly not be considered brittle.

Increase in Weak State Capacity

Some states, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, might currently be inhibited from pursuing interstate conflicts because of their extremely low levels of institutional capacity. As such, economic and political development in those states might tend to increase interstate conflict, even while high levels of development in other states continue to restrain it.

The hypothesis that increases in wealth and state capacity from very low levels might serve to increase interstate conflict is supported by the literature, albeit by a relatively narrow range of studies. States with levels of development low enough to be affected by this trend are primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, and so it is in that region that this future effect would most likely be observed.

Messy Democratization

While mature democracies are highly pacific, the initial stages of democratization are often accompanied by conflict. Dozens of countries have not begun any sort of democratic transition, and if they were to do so, particularly in waves, this could result in an increase in instability and interstate conflict.

In the literature, support is mixed for the hypothesis that the process of democratization leads to increased conflict between states. Some studies have shown this result but a number of others (typically those incorporating a wider range of control variables) have not. Democratization, however, might be associated with increases in intrastate conflict, some of which might become externalized. The hypothesis that states will respond to the initial stages of democratization by attacking their neighbors, however, does not enjoy any consensus in the literature.

Demographic Pressures

As global population continues to increase, greater competition for finite resources could lead to an increase in interstate conflict. Although increases in international trade have thus far allowed for more efficient sharing of resources and have actually decreased conflict, this trend might not hold in the face of continuously increasing global population.

The overall link between population pressures and increases in interstate conflict is not currently well established in the literature. Demographic factors have been more widely studied (and with stronger findings) in the intrastate literature, but they do not appear to have often led to increases in conflict between states. It should be noted, however, that the levels of population density experienced by states up to now, with a few exceptions, are lower than those that will be experienced by states in the future. It remains possible that much higher levels of population density will be associated with increased interstate conflict, but there is not yet evidence in the literature to support this possibility.

Environmental Pressures

Similarly, significant climate change could substantially reduce arable land, food, and water resources, combining with demographic pressures to increase competition and conflict among states. Interstate conflict over resources appears to be rare, although the number of studies that have addressed this issue is relatively small. Other studies have emphasized that resources can also be a source of cooperation. Cross-border water resources in particular appear to be more frequently a source of cooperative behavior between states. Therefore, the hypothesis that future environmental pressures, driven by climate change, would lead to a significant increase in interstate conflict relies primarily on the proposition that the future will differ significantly from the past, perhaps due to absolute global scarcities of resources, such as food. Such a situation cannot be eliminated from consideration, but there is not yet evidence from the literature that suggests it is likely in the medium term.

In this report, the literature on interstate conflict is reviewed thematically, with each section assessing multiple potential hypotheses, identifying data sources related to each branch of the literature, and evaluating the major empirical studies on the subject. A bibliography of the works reviewed is also included in each section, which we hope will provide readers who are interested in particular topics with a starting point into this very rich and broad literature.

3. Democracy and Conflict

Overview

The empirical finding that democratic states are unlikely to come into conflict with one another is clearly established in the literature.¹ Indeed, the democratic peace is arguably one of the most important, and certainly one of the most widely known, findings in the international relations literature. Despite the importance of this finding, there remain three areas of considerable dispute among scholars regarding the influence of democracy on the incidence of interstate conflict:

- What is the mechanism by which democracy acts to restrain conflict between states?
- Do the early stages of democratization increase conflict between states?
- Is the strong correlation between democracy and a reduction in conflict spurious, with other common factors actually being responsible?

The first two of these areas of dispute are discussed in the hypotheses that follow, while the third is dealt with in the subsequent sections of this literature review, particularly those dealing with the effects of wealth, international organizations, and economic interdependence.

One additional important clarification is that the democratic peace has generally been found to be two-sided. While there is a strong tendency for democratic states not to go to war with one another, the presence of democracy itself in a state makes it no less likely to engage in war than other types of states.² A minority of scholars have found support for a one-sided version of the democratic peace,³ wherein democracies are in general less prone to conflict, but theirs is not the consensus view and rests on less well-established empirical ground.

¹ See Stuart A. Bremer, "Democracy and Militarized Interstate Conflict, 1816–1965," *International Interactions*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1993, pp. 231–249; John Oneal and Bruce Russett, "The Kantian Peace," *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 1999, pp. 1–37; and Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, "Domestic Political Accountability and the Escalation and Settlement of International Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 6, 2002b, pp. 754–790, among many others. Potential exceptions to the democratic peace, such as the U.S. Civil War, are generally discounted on technical grounds (e.g., both sides were not independent states with well-established democratic institutions). Regardless of whether a single historical exception to the democratic peace can be found, however, the overall pattern of a strongly reduced likelihood of violent conflict between established democratic states remains clear.

² See, for example, Huth and Allee, 2002b, p. 257.

³ See David L. Rousseau, *Democracy and War: Institutions, Norms, and the Evolution of International Conflict*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Overall, the democratic peace remains one of the most consistent and important findings of the empirical literature on interstate conflict, and the substantial literature that continually attempts to parse or differently interpret this finding testifies to its durability.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The number of democratic states has increased dramatically in recent decades, a trend that broadly corresponds with the observed reduction in interstate conflict. While the causal relationship between these trends remains contested, as discussed below, a continuing increase in the number of democracies in the future would be likely to correspond with continuing reductions in interstate conflict.

The possibility that the initial stages of democratization might be associated with an increased likelihood of interstate conflict, however, has the greatest potential to alter this pacific trend in the future. Autocratic states in sub-Saharan Africa, the Mideast, and Asia are likely to experience difficult democratic transitions when and if they occur. If the literature suggesting that democratic transitions tend to be linked to increased interstate conflict is correct, then such states could prove to be an important counter to the overall reductions in violence that democratization would be expected to produce in the decades to come.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following two sets of hypotheses: first, the mechanisms by which the democratic peace might operate; and second, potential increases in conflict in nascent democracies.

The hypotheses in the set that focused on mechanisms by which the democratic peace might operate include

- domestic norms of nonviolent conflict resolution found in mature democracies reduce conflict between states.
- greater democratic transparency reduces conflict between states by enabling credible commitments to settle disputes.
- inability to justify repressive measures that would be needed to extract gains from conquered populations reduces the incentive for democratic states to pursue conquest.
- greater democratic accountability to domestic audiences discourages the pursuit of violent conflict.

The hypotheses in the set that focused on potential increases in conflict in nascent democracies include:

- The need to appeal to nationalist forces for electoral advantage increases conflict between states.

- The initial stages of democratization increase the likelihood of interstate conflict.

Hypothesis

Domestic norms of nonviolent conflict resolution found in mature democracies reduce conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Democratic political institutions instill norms of restrained, nonviolent competition and cooperation among political elites.⁴
- The resort to violence to settle disputes is far less likely in democratic regimes.⁵
- Democratic political elites are normatively conditioned to find it easier to achieve compromise with other similar elites.⁶

Hypothesis

Greater democratic transparency reduces conflict between states by enabling credible commitments to settle disputes.

What the Literature Says

- Democratic states have contracting advantages that allow them to more credibly and transparently commit to peaceful dispute resolution, which can in turn be more easily reciprocated by similarly democratic states.⁷
- The influence of democratic legislatures on foreign policy decisionmaking increases reliability and transparency and allows for more credible international commitments.⁸

⁴ Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984; and Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World 1950–1990*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁵ Ted Robert Gurr, “Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1993, pp. 161–201; and Rudolph J. Rummel, “Power, Genocide and Mass Murder,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1994, pp. 1–10.

⁶ Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁷ Kurt T. Gaubatz, “Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Winter 1996, pp. 109–140; Brett Ashley Leeds, “Domestic Political Institutions, Credible Commitments, and International Cooperation,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 1999, pp. 979–1002; and Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

⁸ Lisa L. Martin, *Democratic Commitments: Legislatures and International Cooperation*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

- Democracies are more credibly able to demonstrate the audience costs of backing down in a crisis, making their positions clearer than autocracies and reducing misunderstandings that can lead to conflict.⁹

Hypothesis

Inability to justify repressive measures that would be needed to extract gains from conquered populations reduces the incentive for democratic states to pursue conquest.

What the Literature Says

- Since the advent of nationalism, draconian policies are required to extract economic advantage from conquered territories, policies that are not generally available to democratic states for domestic political reasons. Therefore, armed conflict might simply have fewer benefits for democratic states, reducing states' interest in pursuing it.¹⁰
- Alternatively, the globalization of production and supply chains has significantly reduced the benefits of armed conquest for advanced economies.¹¹

Hypothesis

Greater democratic accountability to domestic audiences discourages the pursuit of violent conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Poor performance in foreign policy matters will strengthen opposition parties, increasing the likelihood that the government will be removed from power, therefore reducing the incentive of democratic states to pursue interstate conflicts.¹²

⁹ James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3, September 1994, pp. 577–592.

¹⁰ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Peter Liberman, "The Spoils of Conquest," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1993, pp. 125–153; and Peter Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996.

¹¹ Clem Brooks and David Brady, "Income, Economic Voting, and Long-Term Political Change in the U.S., 1952–1996," *Social Forces*, Vol. 77, No. 4, 1999, pp. 1339–1374; and Shawn Rowan and Paul Hensel, "Declining Benefits of Conquest? Economic Development and Territorial Claims in the Americas and Europe," in *Peace Science Society North American Conference*, Houston, Texas: Vol. 12, 2004.

¹² Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson, "War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability," *American Political Science Review*, 1995, pp. 841–855; Miroslav Nincic and Barbara Hinckley "Foreign Policy and the Evaluation of Presidential Candidates," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1991, pp. 333–355; and John H. Aldrich, John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida, "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates 'Waltz Before a Blind Audience'?" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 1989, pp. 123–141.

- Positive performance in foreign policy increases the likelihood that a democratic government will remain in power, suggesting that democratic states are likely to pursue fewer conflicts and take greater care to win the conflicts they do pursue.¹³
- Increased accountability to their domestic political opponents encourages democratic regimes to pursue fewer interstate territorial disputes.¹⁴

Hypothesis

The need to appeal to nationalist forces for electoral advantage increases conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Traditional elites often attempt to retain power in democratic transitions by appealing to ethnic or nationalist sentiment that can increase interstate conflict.¹⁵
- Democratic leaders have an incentive to pursue interstate conflicts for electoral benefits.¹⁶
- Unpopular governments are more likely to initiate militarized territorial conflicts.¹⁷

Hypothesis

The initial stages of democratization increase the likelihood of interstate conflict.

What the Literature Says

- States with weak institutions that transition away from autocracy are more likely to become involved in interstate war than other states. Initial democratization increases the likelihood of states becoming involved in conflict. This is primarily theorized to be the

¹³ Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*, New York: Basic Books, 1992; and Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.

¹⁴ Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 82, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002a.

¹⁵ Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000; and Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.

¹⁶ Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1996, pp. 133–153; and Stephen E. Gent, "Scapegoating Strategically: Reselection, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Theory of War," *International Interactions*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, pp. 1–29.

¹⁷ Jaroslav Tir, "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2010, pp. 413–425.

result of nationalist forces that are stimulated by the democratic transition, but that are too strong for the new democratic institutions to contain.¹⁸

- However, other studies have not found widespread statistical support for the proposition that changes in regime type are associated with increased conflict.¹⁹

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Regarding mechanisms by which the democratic peace might operate:

- Scholars requiring quantitative measures of democracy have relied heavily on the Polity data set.²⁰ Polity IV (the current release) codes numerous regime characteristics for all states with a population greater than 500,000 from 1800 to 2010. The most widely used operationalization of democracy is constructed by subtracting a state's score on Polity's autocracy index from that state's score on the democracy index. The resulting index ranges from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy). Scores of 6 or higher are most commonly used to indicate full or established democracy.²¹
- Some scholars have also raised issues of measurement error with the Polity IV data set. Polity IV categorizes states based on their formal governing structures and does not do a good job of accounting for informal arrangements that might circumvent or subvert elected governments. Pakistan in the 1990s, for example, was coded as an established democracy despite the fact that the military maintained and exercised considerable power over the operation of the state.
- Other data sets incorporating measures of democracy do exist, the most comprehensive of which is the Polyarchy data set. Polyarchy covers the period from 1810 to 2000 and includes levels of competition, participation, and an overall index of democracy. The data set was originally compiled by Tatu Vanhanen and is hosted by PRIO. Polyarchy is not

¹⁸ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995, pp. 5–38; Mansfield and Snyder, 2005; and Snyder, 2000.

¹⁹ Patrick James, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Future Research," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1987, pp. 21–33; Michael D. Ward and Kristian S. Gleditsch, "Democratizing for Peace," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1, March 1998, pp. 51–61; and Bruce M. Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999.

²⁰ Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jaggers, Polity IV Data Set, Computer file; version p4v2012, College Park, Md.: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2002.

²¹ For example, by James L. Ray, "Global Trends, State-Specific Factors and Regime Transitions, 1825–1993," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1995, pp. 49–63; Russett and Oneal, 1999; Huth and Allee, 2002b; Douglas M. Gibler, "Bordering on Peace: Democracy, Territorial Issues, and Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2007, pp. 509–532; and Paul R. Hensel, Michael E. Allison, and Ahmed Khanani, "Territorial Integrity Treaties and Armed Conflict over Territory," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, pp. 120–143.

being regularly updated at this time. A fuller review of the pluses and minuses of the different data sets that measure democracy was conducted by Munck and Verkuilen.²²

- Freedom House also produces a widely used data set that incorporates measures of civil and political liberty. It constructs seven-point scales for both political rights and civil liberties that range from free (1) to not free (7). These scales evaluate the electoral process, political pluralism, the functioning of government, freedom of expression, rights of association, rule of law, and personal autonomy. Freedom House data were first published in 1972 and continue to be updated for all countries annually.
- A complete adjudication of the relative empirical strengths of all of the above hypotheses is outside the scope of this review, because significant evidence has been presented for each. However, using Polity IV data, Huth and Allee did attempt a comparative analysis of several different proposed causal mechanisms for the democratic peace.²³ They focused on territorial claims as a subset of interstate conflict and found the strongest support for the previously discussed hypothesis that domestic audience costs promote peace between democracies. However, the field as a whole has not settled on a single dominant hypothesis for the democratic peace. Instead, most of the recent literature has focused on the possibility of spurious correlation, which will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this literature review.

Regarding potential increases in conflict in nascent democracies:

- Overall, empirical support for the proposition that democratization can lead to increased interstate conflict is not well established. Mansfield and Snyder, who conducted the most sophisticated of the studies cited above, do find support for this hypothesis,²⁴ but their regressions include only a very small number of control variables. In addition, while they find many 19th-century cases, the only post-1945 instances they identify of democratizing initiators of wars were Argentina, 1940s Iraq, and Turkey, which highlights how rare the phenomenon they describe has actually been, given the large number of democratic transitions over this period.
- One possible way to reconcile Mansfield and Snyder's work with other studies that do not reproduce their findings is to note that *Electing to Fight* does not control for levels of economic development in its statistical analysis. As middle-income states are the most likely to undergo democratization, as well as the most likely to become involved in

²² Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, pp. 5–34.

²³ Huth and Allee, 2002b.

²⁴ Mansfield and Snyder, 2005.

interstate conflict (as detailed below), it is possible that the authors' omission of this variable explains their differing results.

- In addition, Mansfield and Snyder suggest that nationalism is responsible for the increase in interstate conflict following democratization, but nationalism has played a much smaller role in the politics of newly democratic states in recent decades, owing to the much weaker national identities of post-colonial states in particular. It is possible that democratization was once a combustible event, but that it is only rarely so today.
- Tir argues that elites might be more selective about the kinds of conflicts they pursue for diversionary purposes and suggests limiting the analysis to territorial conflicts, which desperate regimes might consider to be more incendiary.²⁵ Tir's empirical results, based on territorial MID and International Crisis Behavior data, support his initial hypothesis and do include a robust set of control variables. His avenue of research seems to warrant further study.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The increase in the number of stable democracies over the past several decades might have contributed to the observed overall reduction in interstate conflict.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- The pace of democratization might slow in the future; relatively few of the remaining autocratic states have yet achieved the levels of economic development typically associated with successful democratization.
- Alternatively, significant numbers of democratic transitions might still occur, but their initial stages might be accompanied by increased interstate conflict. As discussed above, the relationship between democratic transitions and interstate conflict remains contested, but such transitions still represent a plausible source of increased instability and conflict in the future.

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²⁵ Tir, 2010.

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4. Economic Interdependence and Conflict

Overview

The extensive literature on the effects of economic interdependence on interstate conflict is one of the most nuanced in the field. Together with democracy, wealth, and international organizations, economic interdependence has been suggested to be one of the primary explanations behind the recent decline in interstate conflict, and its effects have therefore been heavily scrutinized.

The theoretical roots of the literature stretch back centuries,¹ and numerous more recent theoretical works detailing the proposed mechanisms by which economic interdependence, usually operationalized as bilateral trade, might reduce or increase conflict have been undertaken. These proposed mechanisms are detailed in the hypotheses outlined in the next section.

In addition, a robust empirical literature has developed over the past 15 years to assess the effect of bilateral trade on interstate conflict. As discussed below, the two most prominent works on this topic have produced diametrically opposed findings.² While Russett and Oneal find that economic interdependence plays an important role in reducing interstate conflict, Barbieri finds the opposite, showing that greater bilateral trade actually increases the likelihood of conflict between states. These very different findings can be explained in large part by differences in the data they employ, as will be discussed in detail. Russett and Oneal's work has been more widely cited and accepted in the literature, but the debate between the two camps remains unsettled.

This debate has resulted in significant attention to the construction and availability of international trade data, and several high-quality data sets are now available that cover the entire period under examination by our project.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Economic interdependence has increased significantly over the past several decades, which might have led to the observed substantial reductions in conflict between states over this period. While the trend toward increasing interdependence appears relatively durable, protectionist

¹ For example, Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, Charleston, S.C.: BiblioBazaar, [1795] 2009.

² Bruce M. Russett and John R Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999; and Katherine Barbieri, *The Liberal Illusion: Does Trade Promote Peace?* Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

impulses in response to prolonged economic downturns, as occurred in the 1930s, could stall or reverse the progress made toward reduced interstate conflict in the future.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Potential disruptions of trade during crises increase the costs of pursuing interstate conflicts.
- Trade allows states to access natural resources without controlling them, reducing the incentive for states to try to control them through conquest.
- Trade strengthens domestic lobbies with an interest in preserving peace with trading partners.
- Greater interaction through trade increases the number of trade disputes, some of which might escalate to violence.

Hypothesis

Potential disruptions of trade during crises increase the costs of pursuing interstate conflicts.

What the Literature Says

- The economic losses that would occur due to disruptions in trade discourage states from pursuing conflicts with their trading partners.³
- Trade, democracy, and membership in international organizations all constrain states from pursuing conflict by increasing the incentives for maintaining peace.⁴
- Low levels of economic interdependence promote larger states that more often engage in conflict with one another. By contrast, higher levels of economic interdependence promote smaller states that engage in conflict with one another less often. The relative economic value of having access to a large internal market drives this process.⁵

³ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage*, London: The Foundations of International Polity, 1912, pp. 1–66; Solomon William Polachek, “Conflict and Trade,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1980, pp. 55–78; Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988; Solomon W. Polachek, and Judith McDonald, “Strategic Trade and the Incentive for Cooperation,” *Disarmament, Economic Conversion, and Management of Peace*, 1992, pp. 273–284; and Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997.

⁴ Russett and Oneal, 1999.

⁵ Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, *On the Number and Size of Nations*, Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, No. 5050, 1995; Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, “War, Peace, and the Size of Countries,” *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 89, No. 7, 2005, pp. 1333–1354; and Alberto Alesina, Enrico Spolaore, and Romain Wacziarg, “Trade, Growth and the Size of Countries,” *Handbook of Economic Growth*, Vol. 1, 2005, pp. 1499–1542.

Hypothesis

Trade allows states to access natural resources without controlling them, reducing the incentive for states to try to control them through conquest.

What the Literature Says

- Increases in international trade provide an avenue for states to resolve resource conflicts and instead share resources.⁶
- Trade reduces resource scarcity in states, decreasing their incentive to pursue interstate conflict.⁷
- However, the control of resources still brings significant benefits, and valuable resources remain an important focus of interstate conflict.⁸

Hypothesis

Trade strengthens domestic lobbies with an interest in preserving peace with trading partners.

What the Literature Says

- Domestic interest groups with a financial interest in trade will lobby the state to avoid conflict.⁹
- Democracies are more likely to respond to lobbies that promote peaceful trade, as their political systems are more open to diverse pressure groups.¹⁰

Hypothesis

Greater interaction through trade increases the number of trade disputes, some of which might escalate to violence.

⁶ Richard N. Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*, New York: Basic Books, Vol. 386, 1986.

⁷ John Anthony Allan and Tony Allan, *The Middle East Water Question: Hydropolitics and the Global Economy*, Vol. 2., London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2002; and Tony Allan, "Watersheds and Problemsheds: Explaining the Absence of Armed Conflict over Water in the Middle East," *Middle East*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1998, p. 50.

⁸ Michael T. Klare, "The New Geography of Conflict," *Foreign Affairs*, 2001, pp. 49–61.

⁹ Russett and Oneal, 1999.

¹⁰ Daniel Verdier, *Democracy and International Trade: Britain, France, and the United States, 1860–1990*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994; Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 42, 1995; and Russett and Oneal, 1999.

What the Literature Says

- Unequal gains from trade increase resentment and lead to conflict between the parties.¹¹
- Close links because of trade increase the opportunity for, and therefore the likelihood of, conflict.¹²
- Alternatively, greater interaction between states increases the affinity between them, making conflicts unlikely.¹³

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- The most common operationalization of economic interdependence used in the literature is the relative size of bilateral trade flows. This flow is calculated by summing the imports and exports between two countries, and dividing the state's gross domestic product (GDP) by that term. In two-sided analyses, this number is calculated for each state, and then the smaller of the values is used, reflecting the insight that the less economically interdependent state will likely be the less constrained one.
- The trade data used to construct this measure typically come from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the COW project's International Trade data set. The IMF provides trade data from 1948 to the present, while the COW trade data cover 1870 to 2009. Although all international system members are covered in both data sets, numerous bilateral trade relationships are also missing in any given year. Further, missing data tend to correlate with the presence of conflict between states because even the reporting of trade data is often seen as political. (Syria refuses to report its trade with Israel because it does not acknowledge that state's existence.)
- An additional attempt to cope with this issue has been made by Gleditsch,¹⁴ who produced an expanded trade data set covering 1948 to 2000 that imputes many missing

¹¹ Katherine Barbieri, *Economic Interdependence and Militarized Interstate Conflict, 1870–1985*, Binghamton, N.Y.: doctoral dissertation, Department of Political Science, Binghamton University, 1995; John J. Mearsheimer, "Disorder Restored," in Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton, eds., *Rethinking America's Security*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992; Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1988, pp. 485–507; Peter Wallensteen, "Scarce Goods as Political Weapons: The Case of Food," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1976, pp. 277–298; and Albert O. Hirschman, *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, Vol. 17, 1945.

¹² Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, Vol. 5, 1979.

¹³ Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957.

¹⁴ Kristian S. Gleditsch, *All International Politics Is Local: The Diffusion of Conflict, Integration, and Democratization*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

trade values. The best way to cope with the problem of missing trade data is the subject of a long-running debate in the literature that is discussed later.

- A number of other measures of economic interdependence have been used in the literature, albeit less frequently. Data sets covering openness to trade (compiled by Sachs and Warner¹⁵), commodity trade statistics (compiled by the United Nations [UN]), and the measures of financial openness discussed elsewhere in this review in the section on wealth are all worth bearing in mind.
- The primary thread running through the literature on the effect of economic interdependence on interstate conflict is a lengthy debate between Barbieri and Russett and Oneal. Russett and Oneal conclude that economic interdependence, alongside democracy and membership in international organizations, is a crucial pillar of the liberal international order, one having an important, independent effect in reducing conflict between states.¹⁶ Barbieri comes to the opposite conclusion, finding that states with stronger bilateral trade ties are more likely to be involved in conflict with one another.¹⁷
- As mentioned above, the empirical differences between these two influential works stem in large part from their differing treatment of missing trade values. Russett and Oneal assume that if both states were members of the IMF but reported no trade between them in a given year, then the value of trade between them was in fact zero. By contrast, Barbieri treats missing data as simply missing and does not feel that the benefits of attempting to compensate for missing data outweigh the costs of potentially introducing further inaccuracy into the results. This debate has continued for several years among scholars on both sides of the issue.¹⁸ Gleditsch provides a useful summary of the debate, siding with those who argue for adding imputed missing values to the data.¹⁹
- An alternative empirical challenge to the importance of economic interdependence in reducing conflict between states comes from those who argue that it is in fact conflict that

¹⁵ Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, "The Curse of Natural Resources," *European Economic Review*, Vol. 45, 2001, pp. 827–838.

¹⁶ Russett and Oneal, 1999.

¹⁷ Barbieri, 2002.

¹⁸ Erik Gartzke and Quan Li, "All's Well That Ends Well: A Reply to Oneal, Barbieri & Peters," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2003, pp. 727–732; John R. Oneal, Bruce Russett, and Michael L. Berbaum, "Causes of Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885–1992," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, pp. 371–393; John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett, "Rule of Three, Let It Be? When More Really Is Better," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2005, pp. 293–310; Katherine Barbieri, Omar M. G. Keshk, and Brian M. Pollins, "Trading Data: Evaluating Our Assumptions and Coding Rules," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 26, No. 5, 2009, pp. 471–491; and Katherine Barbieri and Omar M. G. Keshk, "Too Many Assumptions, Not Enough Data," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2011, pp. 168–174.

¹⁹ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "On Ignoring Missing Data and the Robustness of Trade and Conflict Results: A Reply to Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, pp. 153–157.

reduces trade flows, rather than vice versa. Although Russett and Oneal lag their measure of economic interdependence by one year to address this problem, several studies that employ a Simultaneous Equations Model do find the causality between trade and conflict to be reversed.²⁰ The methodological issues involved are somewhat complex, but it is worth noting that the results still largely depend on whether missing trade data are ignored or imputed, and what method is used to do so.²¹ The use of Simultaneous Equations Models in this case has also been challenged on methodological grounds.²²

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

States have become significantly more economically interdependent in the post-1945 era, and these linkages might be an important factor in discouraging states from pursuing interstate conflicts with their trading partners.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- Open economies might be more difficult to maintain in the absence of continued economic growth and relative political stability.
- Chronic economic or political stability, whether global or regional, could prompt states to pursue protectionist measures, thus reducing economic interdependence and potentially entering a negative spiral where interstate conflict becomes increasingly possible.
- Nonetheless, such developments should be considered to be relatively unlikely; economic interdependence is likely to continue to contribute to further reductions in interstate conflict.

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Alesina, Alberto, and Enrico Spolaore, *On the Number and Size of Nations*, Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, No. 5050, 1995.

²⁰ Russett and Oneal, 1999; Omar M. G. Keshk, Brian M. Pollins, and Rafael Reuveny, "Trade Still Follows the Flag: The Primacy of Politics in a Simultaneous Model of Interdependence and Armed Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2004, pp. 1155–1179; Hyung Min Kim and David L. Rousseau, "The Classical Liberals Were Half Right (or Half Wrong): New Tests of the 'Liberal Peace,' 1960–88," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 2005, pp. 523–543; and Omar M. G. Keshk, Rafael Reuveny, and Brian M. Pollins, "Trade and Conflict: Proximity, Country Size, and Measures," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2010, pp. 3–27.

²¹ See, for example, Keshk et al., 2010, p.18.

²² Cullen F. Goenner, "Simultaneity Between Trade and Conflict: Endogenous Instruments of Mass Destruction," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2011, pp. 459–477.

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5. Wealth and Conflict

Overview

In the post-1945 era, wealthy states have been less likely to become involved in conflict with one another than with poorer states. However, wealthy states have been similar in a number of other ways, including being disproportionately democratic and economically interdependent. Attempts to establish that the level of economic development has a strong, independent effect on the likelihood of conflict between states initially yielded mixed results, although in recent years that appears to have been changing, and the so-called “Capitalist Peace” now represents an important strand in the literature.

Most early studies did not find the level of economic development to have any statistically significant effect on conflict.¹ More recently, using increasingly nuanced data and methodologies, scholars have begun to establish evidence for the importance of economic development.² There remains significant variation among the studies in the literature in the data used and the control variables employed, so a final determination on the relative importance of economic development is difficult to make at this stage.

One additional explanation for these uneven findings, beyond the recent improvements in data and statistical methodology, might be that economic development has a curvilinear relationship with conflict. As Gartzke and Rohner put it, “Poor states cannot project power, while the rich do not desire to make war.”³ At very low levels of economic development, additional wealth tends to increase conflict (by enabling states to pursue latent conflicts), while very high levels of economic development and additional wealth tend to decrease conflict (by decreasing the incentive of the state to pursue the conflict). Since most analyses have operationalized economic development as a linear variable, its true effect might have been

¹ Lewis F. Richardson, *Arms and Insecurity: A Mathematical Study of the Causes and Origins of War*, Pittsburgh, Pa.: Boxwood Press, 1960; Maurice A. East and Phillip M. Gregg, “Factors Influencing Cooperation and Conflict in the International System,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1967, pp. 244–269; Rudolph J. Rummel, “Some Attributes and Behavioral Patterns of Nations,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1967, pp. 196–206; and Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, “Alliance, Contiguity, Wealth, and Political Stability: Is the Lack of Conflict Among Democracies a Statistical Artifact?” *International Interactions*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1992, pp. 245–267.

² Håvard Hegre, “Development and the Liberal Peace: What Does It Take to Be a Trading State?” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2000, pp. 5–30; Erik Gartzke, “The Capitalist Peace,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2007, pp. 166–191; and Michael Mousseau, “The Social Market Roots of Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2009, pp. 52–86.

³ Erik Gartzke and Dominic Rohner, *Prosperous Pacifists: The Effects of Development on Initiators and Targets of Territorial Conflict*, Zurich, Switzerland: Institute for Empirical Research in Economics University of Zurich, September 2010, p. 6.

partially obscured. Those studies that have adopted research designs that allow for the measurement of this curvilinear relationship have found evidence for it.⁴

In general, however, most analysts who have studied economic development have found it to be an important factor, although not the only such factor, in explaining the decreased likelihood of conflict between developed countries. Mousseau is an important exception to this overall view,⁵ because he argues that democracy actually plays no role in determining the likelihood of conflict between states and that it is the highly contract-intensive nature of wealthy economies that eliminates conflict between them. His work is treated in more detail in the empirical results section.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The increasing number of wealthy states in the international system might be an important factor in explaining the overall reduction in interstate conflict over the past several decades. If economic growth rates were to decline significantly in the future, this might have the effect of stalling or reversing the trend toward reduced interstate conflict.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- The acquisition of land decreases in relative value as economies develop, reducing the incentive for states to pursue conquest.
- Increased dependence on international capital markets increases the costs of pursuing disruptive interstate conflicts.
- Contract-intensive economies promote openness and transparency, reducing internal and external conflict.
- Increases in wealth from very low levels give some states the capacity to pursue interstate conflicts previously beyond their capability, thus increasing the risk for conflict.

⁴ Charles R. Boehmer and David Sobek, "Violent Adolescence: State Development and the Propensity for Militarized Interstate Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2005, pp. 5–26; Bryan A. Frederick, *The Sources of Territorial Stability*, dissertation, Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, OCLC: 814397500, 2012a; and Bryan Frederick and Paul R. Hensel, "Regional Variations in Territorial Claims, 1816–2008," paper presented at the *International Studies Association–Midwest, St. Louis, Missouri*, November 2012.

⁵ Mousseau, 2009; and Michael Mousseau, "A Market-Capitalist or a Democratic Peace?" in John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know About War?* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012, p. 189.

Hypothesis

The acquisition of land decreases in relative value as economies develop, reducing the incentive for states to pursue conquest.

What the Literature Says

- Economic development increases the relative value of capital and reduces the relative value of land, reducing the incentive of states to pursue armed conquest.⁶
- The geographic clustering of developed economies reinforces the pacifying effects of the decreasing value of land.⁷
- Wealthy states are less interested in initiating interstate conflicts, but they are not less likely to be the targets of such conflict.⁸

Hypothesis

Increased dependence on international capital markets increases the costs of pursuing disruptive interstate conflicts.

What the Literature Says

- States that are heavily integrated with global financial markets are less likely to experience conflict.⁹
- Capital market integration reduces conflict by reducing uncertainty about the potential costs of conflict between states. Capital markets tend to impose costs on states at the initial stages of a crisis, thereby clarifying in advance the potential costs of a conflict and incentivizing the parties to avoid it.¹⁰

Hypothesis

Contract-intensive economies promote openness and transparency, reducing internal and external conflict.

⁶ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981; and Richard N. Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*, New York: Basic Books, Vol. 386, 1986; and Gartzke, 2007.

⁷ Nils P. Gleditsch, Håvard Strand, and Mirjam E. Sørli, "Why Is There So Much Conflict in the Middle East?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2005.

⁸ Gartzke and Rohner, 2010.

⁹ Gartzke, 2007.

¹⁰ Erik Gartzke and Quan Li, "All's Well That Ends Well: A Reply to Oneal, Barbieri and Peters," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2003, pp. 727–732.

What the Literature Says

- While fatal conflicts do occur between democracies, they do not occur between states that have contract-intensive economies.¹¹
- Once measures of the contract-intensive nature of developed economies are controlled for, democracy has no value in explaining the reduction in MID's between states that are both wealthy and democratic.¹²

Hypothesis

Increases in wealth from very low levels give some states the capacity to pursue interstate conflicts they previously lacked.

What the Literature Says

- Economic growth expands the capabilities of states to project power and engage in conflict.¹³
- Consistent economic growth increases the likelihood of conflict by increasing states' perception of their capabilities and achievable foreign policy goals.¹⁴
- The growth of military expenditures is not linked to any increase in conflict.¹⁵
- Low levels of economic development inhibit states from pursuing conflicts by limiting their capacity. Intermediate levels of economic development are associated with the highest levels of involvement in conflict.¹⁶

¹¹ Mousseau, 2009.

¹² Mousseau, 2012.

¹³ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988; Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman, *Political Capacity and Economic Behavior*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997; and Charles R. Boehmer, "Economic Growth and Violent International Conflict: 1875–1999," *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2010, pp. 249–268.

¹⁴ Blainey, 1988; and Boehmer, 2010.

¹⁵ Boehmer, 2010.

¹⁶ Boehmer and Sobek, 2005; Frederick, 2012a; and Frederick and Hensel, 2012.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- The main variable used to operationalize high levels of economic development is GDP/capita, which is available for the post-1945 era from a variety of sources, including the World Bank and the Penn World Tables.¹⁷ For comparisons before the Second World War, Maddison calculates GDP estimates for most states back to 1800, and for selected polities back to the year 0.¹⁸
- Due to the difficulties involved with calculating GDP statistics into the nineteenth centuries, some studies have used energy consumption as a proxy variable for economic activity.¹⁹ Energy consumption values are available for all states in the international system from the years 1816 to 2007 as part of the COW project's National Material Capabilities data set.²⁰
- Measures of financial openness and relative capital flows have also been regularly used in the literature, drawn from data collected by the IMF. The figures used typically measure the relative restrictions placed on financial openness by governments, rather than the size of the financial flows relative to the economy.²¹ Raw data on capital flows are also available from the IMF.
- Mousseau operationalizes the contract-intensiveness of an economy by looking at the prevalence of life-insurance policies, drawing on data collected for the World Bank.²² These data cover 64 states in the post-1945 era, although Mousseau imputes data values for many others. These measurements of contract-intensive economies have not yet been widely adopted by other scholars.

¹⁷ Alan Heston, Robert Summers, and Bettina Aten, "Penn World Table," Version 7.1, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania, November 2012.

¹⁸ Angus Maddison, "Growth Accounts, Technological Change, and the Role of Energy in Western Growth," *Economia ed Energia. Secoli XIII-XVIII—Atti Delle Settimane di Studi*, No. 34, April 2003.

¹⁹ R. E. Burkhardt and M. S. Lewis-Beck, "Comparative Democracy—The Economic Development Thesis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, 1994, pp. 903–910; and Shawn Rowan and Paul Hensel, "Declining Benefits of Conquest? Economic Development and Territorial Claims in the Americas and Europe," in *Peace Science Society North American Conference*, Houston, Texas: Vol. 12, 2004.

²⁰ J. David Singer, "Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985," *International Interactions*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1988, pp. 115–132.

²¹ See, for example, Erik Gartzke, Quan Li, and Charles Boehmer, "Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2001, pp. 391–438; Gartzke and Li, 2003; and Gartzke, 2007.

²² Mousseau, 2009; Mousseau, 2012; and Thorsten Beck and Ian Webb, "Economic, Demographic, and Institutional Determinants of Life Insurance Consumption Across Countries," *World Bank Economic Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2003, pp. 51–88.

- Mousseau’s work warrants special notice because of his recent insistence that measures of contract-intensive economies entirely account for the observed reduction in conflict between wealthy democracies, and that democracy has no independent effect at all.²³ This is a significantly stronger conclusion than other analysts have come to, and it is interesting because Mousseau’s operationalization of economic development differs greatly from that of other analysts. While his metric is innovative, the lack of data on life insurance policies from a number of states, as well as various methodological issues, opens his conclusion to skepticism on empirical grounds.²⁴
- The most influential work on the importance of economic development in explaining the likelihood of conflict between states has been conducted by Gartzke,²⁵ who finds that increasing economic development (as measured by the natural log of GDP per capita) reduces conflict between contiguous states while increasing it between noncontiguous states. The pacific effects of development are therefore mitigated by the increase in power projection capabilities that make interaction and conflict with a much wider range of states possible. Gartzke and Rohner clarify that economic development, as measured both by GDP per capita and by energy consumption, might affect the issues over which states conflict, with wealthier states pursuing fewer territorial disputes (which tend to be with contiguous states) and more disputes over policies or adherence to global norms (which tend to be with noncontiguous states).²⁶ Both studies use interstate wars and various categories of MIDs as dependent variables and incorporate fairly robust sets of control variables.
- Gartzke’s conclusions have been widely cited and are highly influential in the field, although they are not without challenge. Dafoe, for example, details several methodological differences between Gartzke’s work and the seminal research done by Russett and Oneal (including Gartzke’s listwise deletion of missing data and his relatively uncritical inclusion of regional dummy variables) and finds Gartzke’s work to be biased (perhaps inadvertently) against democratic peace arguments.²⁷

²³ Mousseau, 2012.

²⁴ Bruce Russett, “Capitalism or Democracy? Not So Fast,” *International Interactions*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2010, pp. 198–205; and Allan Dafoe, “Statistical Critiques of the Democratic Peace: Caveat Emptor,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2011, pp. 247–262.

²⁵ Gartzke, 2007.

²⁶ Erik Gartzke and Dominic Rohner, *To Conquer or Compel: Economic Development and Interstate Conflict*, University of California, San Diego, and the University of York, UK: Typescript, 2009.

²⁷ Dafoe, 2011; Bruce M. Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999; and Gartzke, 2007.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Wealthier states might be less likely to fight one another. The significant increases in GDP per capita levels in the post-1945 era might therefore help to explain why the frequency of interstate conflict has reduced so dramatically over the same period.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- While economic growth has been a relatively persistent feature of the post-1945 era, it relies ultimately on continued increases in productivity driven by technological innovations, which are not guaranteed to continue.
- In addition, poor economic management or self-imposed austerity could produce prolonged periods of low or no economic growth in certain regions that could stall or reverse the observed trends toward fewer interstate conflicts.
- For states at very low levels of economic development, continued growth might have the effect of increasing their capacity and power projection capabilities, leading to increased levels of interstate conflict. This trend might be particularly salient in the decades to come in sub-Saharan Africa.

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6. Demographic and Social Changes

Overview

Demographic and social factors have not been a primary focus of research on interstate conflict, in sharp contrast to their much more central role in the study of intrastate conflict. While demographic factors have been theoretically linked to conflict for some time, empirical support for their effects at the interstate level has been quite limited.¹

The primary mechanism by which demographic factors have been theorized to affect interstate conflict is through the pressure that population growth places on resources, with the resulting resource scarcity increasing the likelihood of conflict between states. Goldstone offers a good summary of the overall view of the literature toward this hypothesis, noting that while population growth does increase pressure on natural resources, the evidence linking this pressure to increased interstate conflict is quite weak.² However, population growth has been linked to increased intrastate conflict under certain circumstances, and those internal conflicts are then sometimes internationalized. The smaller number of quantitative studies that directly link demographic factors to interstate conflict will be reviewed in the “Empirical Evidence” section of this chapter.³

While population growth and population density have been only weakly linked to increases in interstate conflict, new theories (such as what some refer to as “geriatric peace”) have posited other potential links between demographic characteristics and interstate conflict. An older age structure is among the characteristics of states that have experienced sharp declines in interstate conflict, and interesting theoretical work has been done on this topic, although robust empirical work has, to date, not.

¹ Thomas R Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population and its Effects on Future Improvement of Society*, 2nd ed., London: Cambridge University Press, 1803; A. F. K. Organski, “The Balance of Power,” *World Politics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968, pp. 272–299; and Paul R. Erlich, *The Population Bomb*, New York: Ballentine, 1968. The effects of demographic factors have more frequently been assessed indirectly, as factors such as population size are important components of state capabilities and power. See Chapter Twelve for a detailed discussion of the effect that state power may have on the likelihood of conflict.

² Jack Goldstone, “Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2002, pp. 3–23.

³ Jaroslav Tir and Paul F. Diehl, “Demographic Pressure and Interstate Conflict: Linking Population Growth and Density to Militarized Disputes and Wars, 1930–89,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1998, pp. 319–339; Skyler J. Cranmer and Randolph M. Siverson, “Demography, Democracy and Disputes: The Search for the Elusive Relationship Between Population Growth and International Conflict,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 3, 2008, pp. 794–806; and Katharine M. Floros, *Of, By, and For the People? How Demographic Pressure Affects Participation in Inter- and Intra-State Conflicts*, dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2008.

Research linking gender equality and a decline in interstate conflict is better established empirically. Caprioli has conducted a series of studies establishing that gender equality (operationalized by female labor force participation and fertility rates) reduces the likelihood that states will initiate and participate in militarized interstate disputes.⁴ Good questions can be raised about whether this operationalization accurately reflects gender equality or captures the effects of other phenomena. Nonetheless, these results are under-addressed in the literature, because gender equality variables have not been widely incorporated as control variables in other studies of interstate conflict.

Overall, however, the relationship between demographic factors and interstate conflict has been found to be relatively weak (although still sometimes statistically significant) in comparison with economic or strategic factors. Several factors, such as youth bulges, which have been found to be important correlates of intrastate conflict, have not found similar empirical support at the interstate level. These findings call into question, among other things, whether the proposed future increase in interstate conflict due to the increasing pressure on resources generated by climate change is likely to occur.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The extent to which demographic factors might have contributed to the strong decline in interstate conflict in the post-1945 era is contested in the literature. Declining birth rates, aging populations, and greater empowerment of women might have played a role in reducing conflict among wealthy states, but the scale of the independent contribution of these factors is unclear. In the future, middle- and high-income states are likely to experience declining population growth rates loosely associated with declining levels of interstate conflict, while low-income states might be more likely to experience the higher population growth rates and youth bulges that are potentially associated with increases in interstate conflict. Climate change, however, is a potential wildcard for the future. Significant changes in climate could greatly increase the resource pressures felt by states, and the demographic data suggest that the burden of these increased pressures would be borne most heavily in lower-income states. These pressures have the potential to lead to additional interstate conflict involving such states, although this possibility should be considered uncertain and the resource pressures would likely need to be quite severe.

⁴ Mary Caprioli, “Gendered Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2000, pp. 51–68; M. Caprioli, “Gender Equality and State Aggression: The Impact of Domestic Gender Equality on State First Use of Force,” *International Interactions*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2003, pp. 195–214; and Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer, “Gender, Violence, and International Crisis,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 2001, pp. 503–518.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- “Youth bulges” increase the likelihood that states will be involved in interstate conflict.
- Older populations force states to increase the share of resources spent on health care and pensions, reducing the funding available for military aims.
- Larger populations increase the pressure on available natural resources and increase the incentive for states to compete for additional resources; smaller populations reduce the pressure on available natural resources and reduce the incentive for states to compete for additional resources.
- Smaller family sizes reduce the willingness of populations to support violent conflicts between states that endanger their offspring.
- Greater political and economic empowerment of women reduces conflict between states.

Hypothesis

“Youth bulges” increase the likelihood that states will be involved in interstate conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Large youth populations are a necessary condition of powerful militaries, which in turn can lead to increased conflict.⁵
- Additional population only increases state capacity to a point, and beyond that becomes a burden that restricts state capacity.
- Youth bulges increase the likelihood that states will initiate violent MIDs.⁶

Hypothesis

Older populations force states to increase the share of resources spent on health care and pensions, reducing the funding available for military aims.

What the Literature Says

- Aging populations reduce the resources available to militaries and will reduce the ability of most leading states in the international system to mount an effective challenge to U.S. hegemony.⁷

⁵ Organski, 1958.

⁶ Floros, 2008.

⁷ Mark L. Haas, “A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2007, pp. 112–147; R. Jackson and N. Howe, *The Graying of the Great Powers: Demography and Geopolitics in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies,

- Aging populations will restrain arms races in Asia over the next several decades by redirecting spending from militaries to social programs, reducing the likelihood of conflict in that region.⁸

Hypothesis

Larger populations increase the pressure on available natural resources and increase the incentive for states to compete for additional resources; smaller populations reduce the pressure on available natural resources and reduce the incentive for states to compete for additional resources.

What the Literature Says

- Larger populations increase the pressure on states to acquire external resources. Whether these pressures lead to conflict depend on the state's ability to acquire these resources through trade or reduce the need for them through the improved security provided by alliances.⁹
- Population growth increases the likelihood of a state being involved in interstate conflict, but not initiating or escalating the conflict. Population density did not have statistically significant effects.¹⁰
- Population growth increases the likelihood of states with minor power becoming involved in interstate conflict.¹¹
- Demographic pressure increases the likelihood of violent interstate dispute initiation. This finding is conditioned by the level of economic interdependence (negatively) and wealth (positively).¹²
- Population pressures lead to interstate conflict contingent on the level of military capability of the state. Low capabilities might often prevent states from acting on their resulting desire for additional resources.¹³

2008; and Christian Leuprecht, "International Security Strategy and Global Population Aging," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2010, pp. 27–48.

⁸ Seong-Ho Sheen, "Out of America, Into the Dragon's Arms: South Korea, a 'Northeast Asian Balancer?'" in Kelvin J. Cooney and Yoichiro Sato, eds., *The Rise of China and International Security*, Oxford, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2009, pp. 140–158.

⁹ Nazli Choucri and Robert C. North, "Lateral Pressure in International Relations: Concept and Theory," in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1989, pp. 289–326.

¹⁰ Tir and Diehl, 1998.

¹¹ Bradley A. Thayer, "Considering Population and War: A Critical and Neglected Aspect of Conflict Studies," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 364, No. 1532, 2009, pp. 3081–3092.

¹² Floros, 2008.

- Population growth increases water scarcity, which increases lower-level interstate armed conflict.¹⁴
- However, transboundary water resources have historically tended to induce interstate cooperation, rather than conflict.¹⁵
- States suffering from greater environmental scarcity, partly operationalized by population density, are more likely to be involved in MIDs.¹⁶
- The link between resource scarcity and conflict is poorly specified and weakly established,¹⁷ although it remains possible that the effects of this phenomenon will be felt more clearly in the future.¹⁸
- Climate change might induce mass migrations of people that will in turn lead to increased conflict.¹⁹
- However, climate change is caused by economic development, whose pacific effects tend to reduce interstate conflict. Although resource shortages relating to climate change could increase conflict, in principle, simultaneous increases in wealth mitigate this effect. If attempts to reduce climate change decreased economic growth, particularly for middle-income states, this could increase interstate conflict.²⁰

¹³ Warren S. Thompson and David T. Lewis, *Population Problems*, New Delhi: MacGraw-Hill Books Company, 1965.

¹⁴ Wenche I. Hauge and Tanja Ellingsen, "Causal Pathways to Conflict," in Paul F. Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch, eds., *Environmental Conflict*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001, pp. 36–57; Peter H. Gleick, *Water in Crisis: A Guide to the World's Fresh Water Resources*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1993; Paul R. Hensel, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Thomas E. Sowers II, "Conflict Management of Riparian Disputes," *Political Geography*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2006, pp. 383–411; and Ariel Dinar, Rahman Shaikh Mahfuzur, Donald F. Larson, and Philippe Ambrosi, "Local Actions, Global Impacts: International Cooperation and the CDM," *Global Environmental Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2011, pp. 108–133.

¹⁵ Aaron T. Wolf, "A Long-Term View of Water and Security: International Waters, National Issues and Regional Tensions," in Clive Lipchin, Deborah Sandler, and Emily Cushman, eds., *The Jordan River and Dead Sea Basin*: Springer Netherlands, 2009, pp. 3–19; and Aaron T. Wolf, Shira B. Yoffe, and Mark Giordano, "International Waters: Identifying Basins at Risk," *Water Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2003, pp. 29–60.

¹⁶ Phillip Stalley, "Environmental Scarcity and International Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2003, pp. 33–58.

¹⁷ Ragnhild Nordås and Nils P. Gleditsch, "Climate Conflict: Common Sense or Nonsense?" in *Human Security and Climate Change, an International Workshop*, 2005.

¹⁸ Jon Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Policy in the New Security Era*, London: Zed Books, 2001.

¹⁹ Thomas F. Homer-Dixon and Jessica Blitt, *Ecoviolence: Links Among Environment, Population and Security*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998; and Günther Bächler, "Environmental Degradation in the South as a Cause of Armed Conflict," in Alexander Carius and Kurt Lietzmann, eds., *Environmental Change and Security: A European Perspective*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1999, pp. 107–130.

²⁰ Erik Gartzke, "Could Climate Change Precipitate Peace?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 177–192.

- Alternatively, population growth (i.e., a larger number of smart people) stimulates technological advancement, which in turn creates new mechanisms for avoiding resource constraints, reducing interstate conflict.²¹

Hypothesis

Smaller family sizes reduce the willingness of populations to support violent conflicts between states that endanger their offspring.

What the Literature Says

- Declining birth rates increase the reluctance of societies to commit their soldiers to military conflict.²²
- Lower birth rates decrease the likelihood that states will become involved in interstate conflict.²³

Hypothesis

Greater political and economic empowerment of women reduces conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Domestic gender equality reduces the likelihood that states will become involved in or initiate interstate conflict.²⁴
- The higher status of women in democracies partially explains the reductions in interstate conflict typically associated with the democratic peace.²⁵
- Gender imbalances (more men, fewer women) resulting from offspring sex selection increase both interstate and intrastate conflict.²⁶

²¹ Julian L. Simon, "Lebensraum Paradoxically, Population Growth May Eventually End Wars," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 33, No. 1, March 1989, pp. 164–180.

²² Edward N. Luttwak, "Where Are the Great Powers? At Home with the Kids," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4, 1994, pp. 23–28; and Edward N. Luttwak, "A Post-Heroic Military Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4, 1996, pp. 33–44.

²³ Patrick M. Regan and Aida Paskeviciute, "Women's Access to Politics and Peaceful States," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2003, pp. 287–302.

²⁴ Caprioli, 2000; Caprioli, 2003; and Caprioli and Boyer, 2001.

²⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "Women and the Evolution of World Politics," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 5, 1998, pp. 24–40.

²⁶ Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, "A Surplus of Men, a Deficit of Peace: Security and Sex Ratios in Asia's Largest States," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2002, pp. 5–38.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- The two major demographic variables evaluated by the quantitative literature on interstate conflict have been population growth and population density. Population growth figures can be found in a number of sources, but can perhaps be calculated most easily from the COW project's National Material Capabilities data set, which provides annual total population figures for every state in the international system from the years 1816 to 2007. For the measure of state size needed to calculate population density figures, the best available resource comes from Lake and O'Mahony,²⁷ who calculated the size of each state in the international system for every year from 1815 to 1998.
- The UN Population Division also offers a number of important demographic variables for every state from the years 1950 to 2100 (projected) in five-year increments. These variables include total population, population density, population age structure data, gender ratios, population growth rates, birth rates, and life expectancy.
- Three major studies that have evaluated the effects of population growth and population density on interstate conflict in a rigorous, quantitative manner deserve closer examination. Their findings and methodologies are reviewed later in some additional detail.
- Tir and Diehl examined the effects of population growth and population density on the likelihood that all states from the years 1930 to 1989 would become involved in a militarized interstate dispute.²⁸ The authors lagged these demographic variables by ten years under the assumption that demographic changes would likely take some time to influence state behavior. As noted above, they found that population growth did make states more likely to be involved in MIDs, although not as the initiator, and they were not more likely to escalate such MIDs to higher levels of violence. Population density was not found to have any statistically significant effect. Overall, these findings represent fairly weak support for the relationship between demographic variables and interstate conflict.
- Cranmer and Siverson refined the methodology used by Tir and Diehl in several ways,²⁹ expanding the time frame to cover the years 1816 to 1994, using up to 20-year lags of the demographic variables, and they treated the state-year observations as panel data. In addition, they limited the dependent variable to be the initiation of MIDs that involved a

²⁷ David A. Lake and Angela O'Mahony, "The Incredible Shrinking State: Explaining Change in the Territorial Size of Countries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 5, 2004, pp. 699–722.

²⁸ Tir and Diehl, 1998.

²⁹ Randolph M. Siverson and Joel King, "Alliances and the Expansion of War," in J. David Singer and M. D. Wallace, eds., *To Augur Well: Early Warning Indicators in World Politics*, Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979, pp. 37–49.

display of force. These methodological refinements did not significantly improve the robustness of the results, although they did clarify them. The authors found that population growth increases dispute participation and initiation, primarily for democratic minor powers. (That is, democracy and major or minor power status conditioned the overall previous finding of increased conflict related to population growth.) Democratic states were theorized to be more responsive to popular concerns regarding resource scarcity.

- Floros pursued a slightly different approach,³⁰ utilizing numerous measures of overall demographic pressure including population growth, youth bulges, population density, urbanization, and refugees, all relative to the state's GDP. As already mentioned, Floros found that this measure of demographic pressure generally increased the likelihood of violent interstate dispute initiation (MIDs where violence was actually used, rather than only being threatened). She also found that the effects of demographic pressure were conditioned by the level of economic interdependence (which reduced the likelihood of dispute initiation) and wealth (which increased the likelihood of dispute initiation). It is worth noting two things about Floros' findings. First, when all of the different demographic pressure variables were included in the same statistical model, only youth bulges and population density remained statistically significant—while population growth, the apparently strongest variable from previous studies, did not. Second, the inclusion of these numerous demographic variables did not eliminate the statistical significance of many important control variables discussed elsewhere, including joint democracy and economic growth.
- Overall, quantitative investigations into the effects of demographic variables on interstate conflict have not been exhaustive. While the research that has been done has not established particularly striking findings on par with other research paradigms in interstate conflict, numerous relationships remain to be investigated more fully, and several interesting theoretical works point to fruitful approaches for scholars to do so.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Declines in birth rates, older populations, and greater empowerment of women might have contributed to the decline in interstate conflict in the post-1945 era by reducing the interest, incentive, and capability of states to pursue such conflicts.

³⁰ Floros, 2008.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- High population growth rates and youth bulges will be experienced by a decreasing number of states in the future, but for such states it is possible that these factors could contribute to an increased risk of interstate conflict. These states are likely to concentrate in sub-Saharan Africa and south and southwest Asia.
- Severe climate change could significantly increase the resource pressures felt by states, which in extreme cases could lead to increasing conflict between them. These pressures should be felt most strongly by states with high population growth rates, and they are likely to be triggered only as a result of severe shortages of vital resources, such as food and water.

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7. International Organizations

Overview

Work on IOs suggests that these organizations serve six key functions: (1) problem solving, (2) mediation, (3) norm shaping and socialization, (4) coercion of norm breakers, (5) information flow, and (6) generating shared interests. Several of these functions might enable IOs to reduce the likelihood of interstate conflict.

Theories about IOs and conflict suggest that the existence of IOs alters the anarchic nature of the international system and provides a number of checks on conflict between state actors. First, IOs might help to spread anticonflict norms and values that reduce the ability and willingness of states to get involved in conflict. A variant of this argument considers IOs as the third leg of the “Kantian tripod” used to explain democratic peace (with the other two being democracy and trade interdependence). Second, IOs might provide a forum where states can settle disputes without violence, create channels of communication and rules for negotiation, and insert a neutral, third party into the resolution process that can facilitate a nonviolent solution. IOs might also create “rules of the road” that reduce the frequency of conflict by setting up agreed-upon standards and operating procedures. Finally, IOs could actively engage in peacemaking activities, either by intervening with a peacekeeping force or by mediating disputes. In many cases, the IO will have a level of neutrality and legitimacy that can make the intervention successful.

Although arguments about IOs are intuitively appealing, empirical support for their pacific effects is more mixed. The ability of IOs to spread norms and reduce conflicts appears contingent on membership (particularly whether there are major power members), the level of interaction and common interests between members, and the size of the IO. The efficacy of IO-driven interventions in achieving peace appears to be better than that of individual states, but even here, empirical support is limited. Forceful and far-reaching intervention measures appear to increase the chances for peace, but more limited interventions often fail. Finally, primarily IOs with strong dispute settlement provisions, formal structures, and security/diplomacy focus do seem to be associated with more pacific interstate relations.

Those who are skeptical of the significance of IOs in promoting peace suggest that IOs are not independent actors, but instead reflect the values and preferences of their members and of the system’s most powerful states. Others suggest that the relationship between IOs and reduced conflict is simply another manifestation of the role that democracy plays in promoting peace, noting that democracies are more likely to join IOs than nondemocracies, or the role of trade interdependence.

The most common data sets used in this work are the COW and MID data. Most work uses two-sided forms of these databases and considers regime type using Polity and relevant economic data from the IMF or Penn World Tables (most often trade).¹ Contiguity is another factor that some work considers. Alliances are taken most often from the COW data. International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data are also used, both to identify conflicts and to capture IO interventions and outcomes.²

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

IOs might have reduced conflict between states by providing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, providing peacekeeping forces, and promoting norms of peaceful dispute settlement. However, the success of IOs in the post-1945 era has waxed and waned with the degree of consensus among states that provides their legitimacy. If this consensus were to degrade significantly in the future, perhaps in response to a decline in the preeminence of the United States, the effectiveness of IOs in reducing interstate conflict could also be drastically reduced.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- IOs undertake peacekeeping missions that reduce conflict between states.
- IOs spread norms of pacific international behavior reducing conflict between states.
- IOs provide useful forums for the resolution of disputes (WTO, ICJ, etc.) that would be more likely to escalate to violence if dealt with bilaterally.

Hypothesis

IOs undertake peacekeeping missions that reduce conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- IOs can conduct peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions with more neutrality and legitimacy than other actors.³

¹ Alan Heston, Robert Summers, and Bettina Aten, "Penn World Table," Version 7.1, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income, and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania, November 2012.

² *International Crisis Behavior Dataset*, Version 10, University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, July 2010.

³ Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Why States Act Through Formal International Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1998, pp. 3–32.

- Intervention by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) appears more effective than intervention by individual states or by coalitions. All forms of mediation help, but military interventions appear most significant, although this might be an artifact of the way the data are coded.⁴
- Empirical evidence suggests that strong IO decisions and significant measures by the IO to enforce peace or separate parties do contribute to the end of a conflict but that smaller-scale mediation tends to fail.⁵
- Considering the efficacy of nonmilitary intervention, the imposition of binding dispute settlement techniques by the IO might be most effective in promoting a peaceful settlement.⁶
- Focusing on the UN, work by Haas suggests that the organization can be effective in decreasing hostilities, limiting intervention, and scaling down rival claims, but it is less effective in achieving more ambitious goals and when intervening in major disputes.⁷

Counterarguments

- Empirical evidence suggests that interventions by collective security organizations do not increase the likelihood of peace.⁸
- Diehl, Reifschneider, and Hensel use ICB intervention rankings to measure when a UN intervention has occurred as well as the nature of that intervention and the severity of the crisis and the crisis outcome.⁹ They find that UN involvement has little effect on intensity of violence or recurrence of conflict.

Hypothesis

IOs spread norms of pacific international behavior reducing conflict between states.

⁴ Derrick V. Frazier and William J. Dixon, "Third-Party Intermediaries and Negotiated Settlements, 1946–2000," *International Interactions*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2006, pp. 385–408.

⁵ Mark L. Haas, "A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2007, pp. 112–147.

⁶ Holley E. Hansen, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Stephen C. Nemeth, "IO Mediation of Interstate Conflicts: Moving Beyond the Global Versus Regional Dichotomy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2008, pp. 295–325.

⁷ Haas, 2007.

⁸ Charles Boehmer, Erik Gartzke, and Timothy Nordstrom, "Do Intergovernmental Organizations Promote Peace?" *World Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2004, p. 1.

⁹ Paul F. Diehl, Jennifer Reifschneider, and Paul R. Hensel, "United Nations Intervention and Recurring Conflict," *International Organization*, Vol. 50, 1996, pp. 683–700.

What the Literature Says

- Abbott and Snidal argue that the centralization and independence of IOs allow them to spread norms, settle disputes, and prevent conflict.¹⁰
- Some argue that IOs function as the third leg of the Kantian Tripod (along with democracy and international trade) and are a fundamental pillar of state order because they encourage norms of reciprocity and cooperation.¹¹
- Empirical evidence is mixed: Some studies show that joint membership in IOs tends to reduce the likelihood of conflict between states.¹² Others find no effect.¹³ Still others find that IGOs increase conflict among members.¹⁴
- The type of IO, its key members, and status as a major power affect whether the IO has a pacific effect or not.¹⁵
- IOs also might be a mechanism for solidifying the spread of democracy that is associated with reduced conflict.¹⁶ Empirical evidence supports the argument that democracies are more likely to join IOs (i.e., leaders join to formalize their commitment).
- Other work suggests that it is not IO membership but other types of similarities in interests, commitments, and priorities that are most effective in reducing interstate conflict. IOs contribute to peace among states that are “structurally equivalent”—i.e., they have similar networks of ties, affiliations, commitments, and prestige, so they share sets of ideational commitments.¹⁷ Dyads that include two states that are not structurally equivalent or that have very different levels of prestige are more likely to enter into conflict, despite being members of IGOs.

¹⁰ Abbott and Snidal, 1998.

¹¹ Bruce Russett, John R. Oneal, and David R. Davis, “The Third Leg of the Kantian Tripod for Peace: International Organizations and Militarized Disputes, 1950–85,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1998, pp. 441–467.

¹² John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett, “Clear and Clean: The Fixed Effects of the Liberal Peace,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2001, pp. 469–485; and John R. Oneal, Bruce Russett, and M. Berbaum, “Causes of Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885–1992,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, pp. 371–393.

¹³ Harold K. Jacobson, William M. Reisinger, and Todd Mathers, “National Entanglements in International Governmental Organizations,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 1986, pp. 141–159; and William Kinkade Domke, *War and the Changing Global System*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988.

¹⁴ Erik Gartzke, Quan Li, and Charles Boehmer, “Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2001, pp. 391–438.

¹⁵ Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom, 2004.

¹⁶ Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2006, pp. 137–167.

¹⁷ Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery, “Power Positions: International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2006, pp. 3–27.

- States in small IOs are more likely to experience conflict reduction than states in large ones (because they are more likely to have close and positive ties rather than negative or distant ones).¹⁸
- Russett and Oneal show some reverse causality—IO membership decreases conflict, but conflict also decreases IO membership.¹⁹

Counterarguments

- IOs reflect interstate relationships, rather than affecting them or causing peace.²⁰ Powerful states use IOs to control rules of the game and the behavior of other actors.²¹
- States that are members of IOs might have more *need* for IOs (more interests abroad). These states might interact and compete more heavily with other states, leading to increased conflict compared with other state pairs (even if the rate of conflict without the IO would be even higher).
- Relatedly, allies appear more likely to enter into conflicts.²²

Hypothesis

IOs provide useful forums for the resolution of disputes (WTO, ICJ, etc.) that would be more likely to escalate to violence if dealt with bilaterally.

What the Literature Says

- States use international organizations to manage interactions and conflict episodes. IOs provide stable arenas for negotiation that enhance the legitimacy of each interaction.²³
- IOs serve as fact-finding, early warning, mediation, and adjudication bodies that limit conflict escalation (and are perceived as neutral).²⁴
- IOs facilitate information exchange (revealing private information about states that without an institutional connection might form the grounds for conflict. This alters both the perceived and real costs and benefits of entering into a conflict.²⁵

¹⁸ See Hafner-Burton and Montgomery, 2006.

¹⁹ Oneal and Russett, 2001.

²⁰ Gartzke, Li, and Boehmer, 2001.

²¹ See John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1994, pp. 5–49; and John J. Mearsheimer, “A Realist Reply,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995, pp. 82–93.

²² Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum, 2003.

²³ Abbott and Snidal, 1998.

²⁴ Russett, Oneal, and Davis, 1998.

- IOs might increase multilateral dispute resolution, but do not appear to affect the likelihood of bilateral negotiations (potentially because the third party provides external influence and potentially lends credibility).²⁶
- IOs might alter the bargaining mechanisms between states. Shannon, Morey, and Boehmke show that membership in IOs can reduce the *duration* of interstate dispute even where they do not affect the actual *onset* of interstate disputes.²⁷
- Even indirect links created by IOs create channels of communication that can substitute for or displace conflict. Using network analysis, Dorussen and Ward show that these interstate linkages are associated with reduced conflict and do seem to substitute for diplomatic ties (even when they are indirect)—primarily because they serve as channels of information.²⁸
 - Position within a network might matter. States at similar positions in the networks are less likely to have conflict.²⁹
 - The best links are short, direct ones.
- IOs provide nonviolent mechanisms, such as sanctions and embargoes, that can be used instead of war.³⁰
- Empirical evidence suggests that the most-structured IOs reduce conflict between members, even if IOs writ large do not.³¹
- Empirical evidence shows that IOs with a *security diplomacy* mandate are more effective in reducing conflict (although this does not include intervention).³²
- Empirical evidence suggests, however, that allies are more likely to have violent conflict, possibly due to disagreement about some of these rules and mechanisms.³³

²⁵ Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom, 2004; Han Dorussen and Hugh Ward, “Intergovernmental Organizations and the Kantian Peace: A Network Perspective,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2008, pp. 189–212; and Russett and Oneal, 2001.

²⁶ Megan Shannon, Daniel Morey, and Frederick J. Boehmke, “The Influence of International Organizations on Militarized Dispute Initiation and Duration,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2010, pp. 1123–1141.

²⁷ Shannon, Morey, and Boehmke, 2010.

²⁸ Dorussen and Ward, 2008.

²⁹ Zeev Maoz, Ranan D. Kuperman, Lesley Terris, and Ilan Talmud, “Structural Equivalence and International Conflict: A Social Networks Analysis,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 5, 2006, pp. 664–689.

³⁰ Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom, 2004.

³¹ Boehmer, Gartzke, Nordstrom, 2004.

³² Boehmer, Gartzke, Nordstrom, 2004.

³³ Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum, 2003.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

IOs as Peacekeepers

- ICB intervention rankings identify when UN intervention has occurred as well as the nature of that intervention and the severity of the crisis and the crisis outcome.
- Haas develops his own database of disputes and looks at where they were referred (to the UN or a regional organization) and what the outcome was (resolution, containment).³⁴
- Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth use the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) data for territorial, maritime conflicts with UN engagement.³⁵
- COW and MID data are used to identify conflicts.
- There is some empirical support for the effectiveness of interventions, although there are also clearly limits on when IO intervention activities work and when they are more likely to fail. For example, some studies suggest that IO intervention only works when it is relatively forceful, includes a military component or binding settlement technique, and when it directly addresses the underlying cause of the conflict. IO intervention also might be best at achieving limited goals in small conflicts and could be more effective at reducing the intensity of violence than actually stopping violence altogether.

IOs as Spreaders of Norms

- Russett and Oneal use COW and MID data to capture disputes and interstate war.³⁶ They specifically rely on the dyadic data.
- Note that Russett and Oneal only use dyads that include a major power, while the other analyses appear to include a more complete set of dyads.³⁷
- Russett and Oneal use IMF trade data and data on GDP from the Penn World Tables.³⁸
- Russett and Oneal use Polity for measures of democracy and alliance data from the COW project.³⁹
- There is some empirical support for the argument of IOs as spreaders of norms, although there are limits to IOs' pacific effects and questions about whether joint IO membership explains this result or if it is some other omitted variable, such as democracy, trade, or

³⁴ Haas, 2007.

³⁵ Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth, 2008.

³⁶ Russett and Oneal, 2001. They are like most others in using these data, including Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom, 2004; and Hafner-Burton and Montgomery, 2006.

³⁷ Russett and Oneal, 2001.

³⁸ Russett and Oneal, 2001.

³⁹ Russett and Oneal, 2001.

shared interest. For example, the membership and involvement of major powers affect the pacific effect of the IO. IOs do seem to be one mechanism used to solidify democracy, especially for new democracies. Even among states that are members of the same IO, however, the distribution of power between states in the international system continues to matter.

- Critics of this norm-based argument suggest that it is not the IO, but the major powers in the international system that are responsible for spreading norms and values, a process that would happen even without the IO's involvement. They also suggest that joint IO membership might simply proxy for trade interdependence and shared interests.

IOs as Forums for Dispute Resolution:

- Empirical testing of this argument relies largely on the MID and COW data sets.
- Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom use a data set of IO membership that codes IOs based on their level of institutionalization.⁴⁰
- Polity is typically used for levels of democracy.
- COW data are used to measure relative power and alliances.
- Dorussen and Ward use network analysis to assess the effects of IO ties on conflict.⁴¹
- Empirical evidence suggests that certain types of IOs are able to reduce the likelihood of conflict between members with specific dispute resolution procedures. For example, IOs that have a security/diplomacy focus and that have institutionalized dispute resolution mechanisms might be associated with lower rates of conflict.
- Other work suggests that the dispute resolution channels in an IO might reduce the *length* of conflict even if they have no real effect on *onset*.
- Work using network analysis offers additional insight, showing that the closeness of interstate relationship and the position of states within a network will shape the pacific effect of joint IO membership. States that have close ties and are at similar points in the network, where communication is easiest, are least likely to fight. Critics of the argument suggest that joint membership in IOs and increased interaction between states might contribute to increased conflict, including disagreements about the rules and mechanisms governing interactions within the IO itself.
- Of all hypotheses about why IOs might contribute to peace, those focused on their provision of dispute resolution receive the most empirical support.

⁴⁰ Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom, 2004.

⁴¹ Dorussen and Ward, 2008.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

IOs have become prevalent in the post-1945 era. In the post–Cold War era, particularly, they appear to have become increasingly active and effective in allowing states to settle or manage their conflicts in a nonviolent or less violent manner.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- It could become increasingly difficult to get consensus behind the most-significant types of intervention (those involving force), especially as IOs grow in size and diversity of membership.
- Recent experience with failed military interventions and failure by IOs to negotiate lasting settlements reduces confidence in the efficacy of their interventions.
- Territorial integrity norms make third-party and IO intervention more difficult.
- As IOs grow to include more dissimilar states, it is not clear that the diffusion of norms will continue to the same extent as it has in the past, when states joining and leading the major IOs were all Western democracies.
- If interests of major states diverge or if economic downturns and resource scarcity lead to competition, it is not clear that joint IO membership will be able to counter that.
- Wider IO membership might increase the spread of norms and possibly further reduce interstate conflict.
- One interesting trend is the decline in the scope of the UN and increase in scope of regional organizations as a settler of disputes.
- Increasing number and membership in IOs might support the reduction of conflict.
- Overlapping and possibly conflicting IOs and their dispute resolution mechanisms might lead to disagreements and competition that result in new conflict.
- Competition for control of IO mechanisms and disagreements about dispute resolution procedures among increasingly diverse memberships might lead to new conflicts.

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Russett, Bruce, John R. Oneal, and David R. Davis, "The Third Leg of the Kantian Tripod for Peace: International Organizations and Militarized Disputes, 1950–85," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1998, pp. 441–467.

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8. Territorial Integrity and Conflict

Overview

Territory has historically been the most important issue over which violent interstate conflict has occurred.¹ This finding has been confirmed even once contiguity is controlled for and when issues of potential sampling bias are investigated.² Territorial conflicts have also been found to recur more frequently than other kinds of interstate conflict and to be more violent than conflicts fought over other issues.³

Given the centrality of territorial issues to interstate conflict, significant attention in the literature has been paid to the development and spread of an international norm guaranteeing the territorial integrity of existing states.⁴ This norm prohibits both territorial transfers between states and the recognition of unilateral secessions from existing states, a concept known as the Territorial Integrity Norm.⁵ The possibility that this norm might have significantly reduced the frequency of interstate territorial conflict has been suggested qualitatively and tested quantitatively,⁶ and significant evidence has been uncovered that suggests this possibility.

However, most of the research dealing with the Territorial Integrity Norm has focused on its potential unintended consequences and how the goal of preventing territorial conflict between

¹ Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; John A. Vásquez, *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations Series, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993; and John A. Vásquez and Marie T. Henahan, *Territory, War, and Peace*, Routledge, 2011.

² Paul D. Senese and John A. Vásquez, “A Unified Explanation of Territorial Conflict: Testing the Impact of Sampling Bias, 1919–1992,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2003, pp. 275–298.

³ Paul R. Hensel, “One Thing Leads to Another: Recurrent Militarized Disputes in Latin America, 1816–1986,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1994, pp. 281–297; and Paul R. Hensel, “Charting a Course to Conflict: Territorial Issues and Interstate Conflict, 1816–1992,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1996, pp. 43–73.

⁴ Mark W. Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2001, pp. 215–250.

⁵ Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 1999, pp. 699–732.

⁶ Robert Jackson, and Mark W. Zacher, *The Territorial Covenant: International Society and the Stabilisation of Boundaries*, Vancouver: UBC Institute of Internal Relations, Working Paper No. 15, 1997; Zacher, 2001; Paul R. Hensel, Michael E. Allison, and Ahmed Khanani, “Territorial Integrity Treaties and Armed Conflict over Territory,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, pp. 120–143; and Bryan Frederick, “The Effects of the Territorial Integrity Norm on the Prevalence of Territorial Claims,” San Diego, Calif.: *Annual Meeting of International Studies Association in San Diego, California*, April 2012b.

states might have either backfired or led to increased intrastate conflict.⁷ While persuasive arguments have been made that these negative effects of the norm are important, no empirical attempts to evaluate its relative merits, considering both its positive and negative effects, have been undertaken, so the true role in promoting the overall decline in conflict remains unclear.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Since its establishment in the 1960s and 1970s, the Territorial Integrity Norm might have reduced conflict between states by strongly discouraging them from pursuing new territorial disputes against their neighbors. However, it provides little guidance for how to settle preexisting territorial disputes. In the future, such disputes are likely to linger despite the norm. In addition, the strength of the norm rests on the strong international consensus in favor of it. If that consensus were to be explicitly challenged by a powerful state or group of states, the norm's deterrent effect could be greatly reduced and new territorial disputes might begin to become more prevalent.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- The Territorial Integrity Norm increases the costs to states of initiating new territorial disputes by threatening international sanction.
- The norm acts as a coordinating mechanism among weak states to discourage territorial disputes that could destabilize their regimes.
- The norm discourages states from recognizing secessionist movements, which could in turn lengthen or exacerbate civil wars.
- The norm inhibits the settlement of preexisting territorial disputes by emphasizing the permanence of mutually agreed upon borders.
- The illegitimacy of colonialism discourages stronger states from acquiring territory from noncontiguous weaker states.

Hypothesis

The Territorial Integrity Norm increases the costs to states of initiating new territorial disputes by threatening international sanction.

⁷ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Robert H. Jackson, "Juridical Statehood in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1992, pp. 1–16; Boaz Atzili, *Border Fixity: When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors*, Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006; and Boaz Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2007, pp. 139–173.

What the Literature Says

- Major Western powers have promoted and enforced the norm out of a desire to avoid a repetition of the territorially fueled World Wars.⁸
- While the prohibition against violent transfers of territory between states has historically been ineffective, the general prohibition of all types of territorial transfer has been effectively enforced.⁹

Hypothesis

The norm acts as a coordinating mechanism among weak states to discourage territorial disputes that could destabilize their regimes.

What the Literature Says

- Postindependence African leaders deliberately avoided territorial claims against their neighbors to avoid destabilizing the continent, and then enshrined the norm in the Organization of African Unity Charter.¹⁰
- The international application of the Territorial Integrity Norm to new states effectively guaranteed the internal power of postcolonial elites, providing powerful incentives to preserve the status quo territorial arrangements.¹¹

Hypothesis

The norm discourages states from recognizing secessionist movements, which might in turn lengthen or exacerbate civil wars.

What the Literature Says

- Postcolonial states often become “quasi-states,” guaranteed of their territorial integrity but without any institutions or capacity that would allow them to govern the territory they have.¹²
- By protecting developing states from territorial threat, the norm stunts their institutional development, making them more prone to involvement in both intra- and interstate conflict.¹³

⁸ Jackson and Zacher, 1997; Jackson, 1990; and Zacher, 2001.

⁹ Hensel et al., 2009.

¹⁰ Peter Malanczuk, *Akehurst's Modern Introduction to International Law*, Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1997; and Zacher, 2001.

¹¹ Jackson, 1990.

¹² Jackson, 1990.

Hypothesis

The norm inhibits the settlement of preexisting territorial disputes by emphasizing the permanence of mutually agreed upon borders.

What the Literature Says

- The early commitment to the territorial integrity of the post-Yugoslav states significantly exacerbated the wars between them.¹⁴
- The establishment of the norm has been associated with a reduction in new territorial claims, but might have made certain preexisting territorial claims more difficult to settle.¹⁵

Hypothesis

The illegitimacy of colonialism discourages stronger states from acquiring territory from noncontiguous weaker states.

What the Literature Says

- Normative prohibitions against colonialism effectively shield new, weaker states from territorial predation by stronger, noncontiguous states, eliminating conflicts due to colonization attempts.¹⁶
- Economic and technological changes have reduced the incentives for rich states to pursue colonies, while international norms enforced by wealthy states prevent poorer states from doing so.¹⁷

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- The most commonly employed definition of territorial conflict comes from the MID database, which includes a subjective description for each dispute as to whether the parties sought a revision of the territorial status quo. These territorial MIDs have been the most widely used measure of territorial conflict in the literature.

¹³ Atzili, 2006; and Atzili, 2007.

¹⁴ Mikulas Fabry, "International Norms of Territorial Integrity and the Balkan Wars of the 1990s," *Global Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2002, pp. 145–174.

¹⁵ Frederick, 2012b.

¹⁶ Jackson, 1990; Ethan A. Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society," *International Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1990, pp. 479–526; and Jackson and Zacher, 1997.

¹⁷ Erik Gartzke and Dominic Rohner, "The Political Economy of Imperialism, Decolonization, and Development," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2011, pp. 525–556.

- However, they are not without their problems. Foremost, the subjective judgment of whether territory was important to the parties was initially coded for the conflict as a whole and not necessarily for any of the specific parties to the conflict. Most quantitative analysis using territorial MIDs, however, is conducted at the two-sided level. When the two-sided MID data set was produced,¹⁸ the judgment of the importance of territorial issues was simply applied to every party involved in the conflict. This leads, for example, to coding Colombia and North Korea as engaged in a territorial MID during the Korean War.
- An alternative approach to the study of territorial issues was initiated by Paul Hensel in the ICOW project. The ICOW territorial claims data set records every instance of a two-sided territorial claim in the interstate system since 1816.¹⁹ For many years, only data on the Americas and Western Europe have been available through the ICOW project, but the forthcoming release this year of the Provisional ICOW data set including all regions of the world (based on data collected by Frederick)²⁰ promises to expand ICOW's use and utility significantly.
- The Territorial Integrity Norm itself has been operationalized in quantitative studies by the use of the Multilateral Treaties of Pacific Settlement (MTOPS) data set.²¹ The MTOPS data set identifies all instances of multilateral treaties that embody different versions of the norm, as well as the dates that each state acceded to them. Hensel et al. identified the growth and spread of the norm by measuring the percentage of states that had adopted treaties that contain language embodying the norm, at both the global and regional levels.²²
- The empirical analysis of the effects of the Territorial Integrity Norm remains at an early stage. While Zacher correctly identified the stark decline in armed conquest,²³ his attribution of that change to the norm was unsupported empirically. Hensel et al. evaluate the norm and do find support for its effects, albeit in a qualified fashion.²⁴ They find that the general prohibition of territorial transfers has been effective in reducing the likelihood of territorial MIDs between states when that prohibition is measured at the global level. This suggests that it is broad-based international pressure that is most effective in

¹⁸ Zeev Maoz, *Dyadic MID Dataset* (version 2.0), 2005.

¹⁹ Paul R. Hensel and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, "Issue Indivisibility and Territorial Claims," *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 2005, pp. 275–285.

²⁰ Frederick, 2012b.

²¹ Paul R. Hensel, *Multilateral Treaties of Pacific Settlement (MTOPS) Data Set*, Version 1.4, 2005.

²² Hensel et al., 2009.

²³ Zacher, 2001.

²⁴ Hensel et al., 2009.

reducing territorial conflict, rather than the local views of neighboring states. Frederick confirms these findings and provides evidence that the norm has achieved this reduction in territorial conflict by limiting the incidence of new territorial claims, while having little effect on the settlement or escalation to violence of preexisting territorial claims.²⁵

- The proposed negative effects of the Territorial Integrity Norm on intrastate conflict discussed above have been widely examined through case studies,²⁶ but have not been systematically analyzed using quantitative methodologies. Nonetheless, the evidence that has been presented for these unintended consequences is persuasive. Therefore, effects of the Territorial Integrity Norm seem to mirror the overall trends in conflict over the period of its establishment: a clear decline in interstate conflict and a lesser decline or possible increase in intrastate conflict.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The Territorial Integrity Norm might have reduced conflict between states by increasing the costs and decreasing the benefits of territorial expansion. The international community has shown that it will intervene to reverse and refuse to recognize armed conquest, which might have discouraged states from pursuing territorial conflicts against other states.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- The primary effect of the Territorial Integrity Norm is likely to reduce the number of new territorial disputes that occur between states. If the norm continues to be successful in this regard, we would expect the reduction in interstate conflict to accelerate over time as more states settle the borders between them.
- However, the strength of the norm rests on a consensus among the major powers that the norm both is beneficial and should be enforced. A rising power or group of powers could decide to challenge this consensus, which would likely weaken the norm at least in certain regions.
- In addition, the norm could be challenged by weaker states or secessionist movements as being incompatible with their nationalist projects. While such groups have been dissatisfied with the norm for some time, they have been unable to convince major states of the relative merits of loosening or eliminating it. In the future, if states begin to place a higher value on ethnic or religious self-determination, this balance could shift and the norm itself could be gradually weakened or discarded.

²⁵ Frederick, 2012b.

²⁶ Fabry, 2002; Atzili, 2006; and Atzili, 2007.

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9. Nuclear Weapons

Overview

Scholars have long noted that the age of nuclear weapons has also been the age of dramatically reduced interstate conflict. Numerous scholars have argued that war between states possessing nuclear weapons is extremely unlikely given the unthinkable costs of the escalation of conflicts between such states.¹ As a result, academic work on nuclear weapons has tended to focus on how to ensure that nuclear deterrence operates properly, with much of this work pioneered by scholars at the RAND Corporation.² This strong interest in nuclear strategy has been consistent throughout the past several decades.³

However, less attention has been paid in the literature to empirically establishing the effects that nuclear weapons have had on interstate conflict. In part this is because the greatest presumed effect of nuclear weapons, preventing war between major powers, is difficult to evaluate statistically (not having occurred in the nuclear age). Empirical investigations into the effects of nuclear weapons on lower-level forms of conflict, meanwhile, have been hampered until recently by the very small number of nuclear states, reducing the number of relevant observation years.

Nonetheless, several authors discussed here have attempted to overcome these hurdles, with generally persuasive results. The primary empirical finding of the literature is what is referred to as the “stability-instability paradox.”⁴ While nuclear weapons generally have been effective in reducing or eliminating large-scale conflict or war between nuclear states, lower-level conflicts involving nuclear states might, in fact, have become more prevalent. While the evidence supporting this finding is compelling, it rests on a relatively small number of studies in

¹ See, for example, Bernard Brodie, “War in the Atomic Age,” *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946; John Lewis Gaddis, “The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Post-War International System,” *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1986, pp. 99–142; and Kenneth N. Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,” *The American Political Science Review*, 1990, pp. 731–745.

² See, for example, Bernard Brodie and RAND Corporation, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, Vol. 959, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.

³ See, for example, Thomas C. Schelling, “Reciprocal Measures for Arms Stabilization,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 89, No. 4, 1960, pp. 892–914; Thomas Crombie Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, Vol. 190, 1966; Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, Vol. 14, 1961; Lawrence Freedman, “The Dilemma of Theatre Nuclear Arms Control,” *Survival*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1981, pp. 2–10; Lawrence Freedman, *The South Atlantic Crisis of 1982: Implications for Nuclear Crisis Management*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, N-2926-CC, 1989; Lawrence Freedman and Saki Dockrill, “Nuclear Weapons Have Only Been Used in Anger Twice,” *The World War Two Reader*, 2004, p. 65; Thomas L. Friedman, “The Long Bomb,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2003; and Beatrice Heuser, “Victory in a Nuclear War? A Comparison of NATO and WTO War Aims and Strategies,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 7, 1998, pp. 311–328.

⁴ Glenn H. Snyder, *The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror*, San Francisco, Calif.: Chandler, 1965.

comparison with other areas of the literature, such as those analyzing the democratic or capitalist peace. As the number of nuclear weapon states presumably will continue to increase in the future, more data will become available to conduct more robust hypothesis testing.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The possession of nuclear weapons might have been a crucial factor in preventing direct conflict between major powers in the post-1945 era by dramatically increasing the consequences of such a conflict. If nuclear proliferation expands in the years to come, this stabilizing effect might begin to be felt by smaller states as well. However, research suggests that while large-scale interstate conflicts could become less prevalent, smaller conflicts might increase alongside the number of states possessing nuclear weapons. In addition, increased nuclear proliferation raises the risk of acquisition or use of nuclear weapons by substate or nonstate actors, which could be incredibly destabilizing.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- The prospect of nuclear retaliation makes the pursuit of existential threats against a nuclear state irrational.
- The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence is lessened between states that are geographically proximate.
- Norms against the first use of nuclear weapons have been effective, thus far avoiding the prospect of “nuclear blackmail.”
- All large, wealthy states are, in effect, latent nuclear powers, giving such states a de facto nuclear deterrent against existential threats.
- The irrationality of direct conflict between nuclear states might divert such conflict into proxy wars.

Hypothesis

The prospect of nuclear retaliation makes the pursuit of existential threats against a nuclear state irrational.

What the Literature Says

- Nuclear states will avoid direct confrontations with one another due to the fear of escalation to nuclear war.⁵

⁵ Brodie, 1946; Gaddis, 1986; and Waltz, 1990.

- Nuclear states are likely to experience fewer high-level conflicts with one another, but might experience more low-level conflicts.⁶
- Crises involving states with nuclear weapons are less likely to escalate to violence. However, nuclear states are no less likely to become involved in crises than other states.⁷
- Alternatively, nuclear weapons have been largely irrelevant to international security, as major war among developed states has become obsolete for other reasons.⁸
- Nuclear weapons might have had some minor deterrent effect, but only at the margins, and they cannot be responsible for the lack of wars between major powers in the nuclear era.⁹

Hypothesis

The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence is lessened between states that are geographically proximate.

What the Literature Says

- The geographic proximity of India and Pakistan reduces the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence between them by substantially compressing the time frame in which escalation decisions need to be made.¹⁰
- The possession of nuclear weapons makes only a marginal contribution to a state's ability to deter an attack, in comparison with other factors such as the conventional balance of capabilities.¹¹

Hypothesis

Norms against the first use of nuclear weapons have been effective, thus far avoiding the prospect of "nuclear blackmail."

⁶ Snyder, 1965; and Robert Rauchhaus, "Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2009, pp. 258–277.

⁷ Kyle Beardsley and Victor Asal, "Winning with the Bomb," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2009, pp. 278–301.

⁸ John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1988, pp. 55–79.

⁹ John A. Vasquez, "The Deterrence Myth: Nuclear Weapons and the Prevention of Nuclear War," in Charles W. Kegley, ed., *The Long Postwar Peace: Contending Explanations and Projections*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991, pp. 205–223.

¹⁰ Mario E. Carranza, "An Impossible Game: Stable Nuclear Deterrence After the Indian and Pakistani Tests," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1999, pp. 11–24.

¹¹ Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 1990, pp. 466–501.

What the Literature Says

- Nuclear blackmail, or bluffing, has been used by the United States in various crisis situations, albeit somewhat halfheartedly and with difficult-to-discern effectiveness.¹²
- States that possess nuclear weapons are more likely to prevail in crises with non-nuclear states than would otherwise be predicted, suggesting that fear of nuclear retaliation does play a role in crisis bargaining.¹³

Hypothesis

All large, wealthy states are, in effect, latent nuclear powers, giving such states a de facto nuclear deterrent against existential threats.

What the Literature Says

- Many states (including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) pursue strategies of “nuclear hedging” to give themselves the capacity to produce nuclear weapons relatively quickly while retaining the benefits of complying with the non-proliferation regime.¹⁴
- The United States provides its allies with a de facto nuclear deterrent, relieving them of the responsibility of developing an independent nuclear deterrent.¹⁵
- Embracing the nonproliferation regime comes with significant economic benefits, while pursuing a nuclear program often comes with significant economic costs.¹⁶
- Many states are capable of producing nuclear weapons but choose not to do so, indicating that nuclear weapons are acquired in response to perceived threats.¹⁷

Hypothesis

The irrationality of direct conflict between nuclear states might divert such conflict into proxy wars.

¹² Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1987.

¹³ Beardsley and Asal, 2009.

¹⁴ Ariel E. Levite, “Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2003, pp. 59–88; Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambition: Why Countries Constrain Their Nuclear Capabilities*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1995; and Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell Reiss, *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

¹⁵ Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling the Bomb: Nuclear Proliferation in the 1980s*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982.

¹⁶ Etel Solingen, “The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1994, pp. 126–169.

¹⁷ Jacques E. C. Hymans, “Theories of Nuclear Proliferation: The State of the Field,” *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2006, pp. 455–465.

What the Literature Says

- The possession of nuclear weapons might increase the likelihood of lower-level conflicts, including proxy wars, between states.¹⁸
- The United States and Soviet Union conducted a series of proxy wars throughout the developing world during the Cold War in lieu of open conflict.¹⁹

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- Data sets of the years during which states possessed nuclear weapons have been collected by several authors.²⁰ All such data sets rely on publicly available information regarding often-covert nuclear programs, such as Israel's and North Korea's, and might therefore contain inaccuracies and disagreements about the dates of nuclear capability. In addition, there is debate whether states that briefly inherited nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union (such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan) should be coded as nuclear powers.
- The majority of work on the influence of nuclear weapons has largely been either theoretical or based on case studies. Systematic quantitative investigations of the effects of nuclear weapons have been less common. However, three important studies that have quantitatively assessed these effects—by Huth and Russett, Beardsley and Asal, and Rauchhaus—are surveyed below in some detail. While not unanimous in their conclusions, these studies generally suggest that nuclear weapons might have helped to make the post-1945 era more peaceful than it would have been otherwise.
- Huth and Russett evaluate the effect that several factors, including the possession of nuclear weapons, have on the likelihood that states will be able to deter an attack on their territory.²¹ They analyze all historical cases from 1900 to 1980 in which a state attempted to deter an attack and include a number of control variables—including, most prominently, the balance of conventional capabilities. They find that, historically, nuclear weapons have not had a significant effect in helping states to deter attacks. It should be noted, however, that the cases they identify were those in which threats took place, so it

¹⁸ Snyder, 1965; Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989; and Robert Jervis, "The Nuclear Revolution and the Common Defense," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 5, 1986, pp. 689–703.

¹⁹ Odd Arne Westad, "Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World," *Journal of Peace Research*, 1992, pp. 455–464; and Gaddis, 1986.

²⁰ These works include Victor Asal and Kyle Beardsley, "Proliferation and International Crisis Behavior," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2007, pp. 139–155; Erik Gartzke and Matthew Kroenig, "A Strategic Approach to Nuclear Proliferation," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2009, pp. 151–160; and Bryan Frederick, *The Sources of Territorial Stability*, dissertation, Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, 2012.

²¹ Huth and Russett, 1990.

is still possible that states that possessed nuclear weapons were significantly less likely to be the target of threats in the first place.

- Asal and Beardsley, however, find that nuclear weapons do have a significant effect in reducing the level of violence in crises.²² The authors use data from the ICB data set to test whether crises involving nuclear states are more likely to escalate to higher levels of violence. The authors control for a relatively small number of additional variables (the balance of conventional capabilities, the salience of the crisis, and the presence of democratic regimes). Nonetheless, they determine that crises involving nuclear powers are more likely to be resolved nonviolently and are less likely to escalate to war.
- Rauchhaus analyzes the likelihood that states with nuclear weapons will become involved in violent interstate conflict, operationalized in multiple ways (MIDs, MIDs where force was used, fatal MIDs, and interstate war) using the COW and MID data sets covering the years 1885 to 2000.²³ The author uses a robust set of control variables, including the balance of conventional capabilities, alliances, democracy, and economic interdependence. Rauchhaus finds that in dyads with nuclear asymmetry (one state has nuclear weapons while the other does not) conflict is more likely to occur, while in cases of nuclear symmetry (both states have nuclear weapons), interstate war is significantly less likely, although lower-level disputes are not. Overall, he suggests that the possession of nuclear weapons improves the security of states by reducing the overall intensity of conflicts in which the state becomes involved.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The possession of nuclear weapons might have contributed to the lack of war between major powers in the post-1945 era by drastically increasing the negative consequences of such conflict.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- Additional states are likely to acquire nuclear weapons over the next few decades. While research indicates that this might restrain direct conflict between such states, it might also redirect such conflict into proxy wars or the support of nonstate actors.
- The potential pacifying effects of nuclear weapons are contingent on absolutely secure command and control operations. As nuclear weapons expand to an increasing number of states, some with lower levels of administrative capacity than the initial nuclear powers, this contingency might be tested, with potentially dire consequences should it fail.

²² Asal and Beardsley, 2007.

²³ Rachhuas, 2009.

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10. Technology and Conflict

Overview

The literature analyzing the effects of technology on interstate conflict has grown significantly over the past decade, with greater academic interest doubtless spurred by the information technology revolution. The result has been a series of thoughtful works that comment persuasively on both the historical relationship between technological change and interstate conflict and the future effect of further technological development.

This review highlights two main areas of the literature on technology and interstate conflict: the effect of the information technology revolution and the effect of innovations in military technology.

While a robust debate has emerged regarding the effects of such new communication technologies as social media on intrastate conflict and regime stability,¹ much less effort has been made to link these technologies to interstate conflict. Popular works have asserted the importance of communication technologies for bringing the world closer together and reducing conflict, but the academic evidence for such hypotheses has been scant. This chapter, therefore, reviews the theoretical components of the argument that greater cross-cultural contacts will reduce conflict between states, as well as the limited work that has been done on the impact of new communication technologies specifically.

Significant academic research has been reviewed in the previous chapter asserting that one innovation in military technology, nuclear weapons, has already had a transformative effect on the likelihood of interstate conflict. However, in time, a number of additional technological developments—from precision-guided munitions to drone attacks to cyber warfare—might also have far-reaching influences on interstate conflict. The literature discussing the effects of these technologies is very new, and the effect of such technologies on the likelihood of interstate conflict has only been assessed speculatively thus far. Nonetheless, the theoretical implications of these technologies have been persuasively outlined by numerous scholars, the consensus views of which are reviewed in this chapter.

¹ See, for example, Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media—Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, 2011, p. 28; Daniel W. Drezner, “Weighing the Scales: The Internet’s Effect on State-Society Relations,” *Brown Journal World Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2010; MacKinnon, Rebecca, “Flatter World and Thicker Walls? Blogs, Censorship, and Civic Discourse in China,” *Public Choice*, Vol. 134, No. 1–2, 2008, pp. 31–46; Evgeny Morozov, “Iran: Downside to the Twitter Revolution,” *Dissent*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2009, pp. 10–14; and Malcolm Gladwell, “From Innovation to Revolution—Do Social Media Make Protests Possible: An Absence of Evidence,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1, 2011, p. 153.

Overall, the literature suggests that new technologies are likely to have a destabilizing effect on the interstate system. Research suggests that this is most likely to occur by limiting U.S. primacy in asymmetrical ways, although the overall dominance of U.S. military capability is likely to continue.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Technological advancements might have helped to reduce interstate conflict over the past several decades by reinforcing U.S. hegemony. Military technologies, in particular, have tended to be developed and deployed first by the United States, which has reinforced the overall U.S. lead in power projection capabilities. If technological diffusion, either by nuclear proliferation or by the spread of precision-guided munitions, were to reduce the scale of the U.S. advantage, it would also make interstate conflict more likely, as will be discussed in Chapter Twelve's review of realist factors.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Information technology increases people-to-people contact between populations, reducing the likelihood of conflict between states.
- Diffusion of weapons technology increases the deadliness of interstate conflict.
- Diffusion of weapons technology tends to equalize capabilities between states, making interstate conflict more likely.

Hypothesis

Information technology increases people-to-people contact between populations, reducing the likelihood of conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Increasing interaction between groups, particularly interactions that are broadly based, encourages the development of shared communities that, in turn, reduces the likelihood of conflict between groups and states.²
- Cultural similarities, particularly a common religious background, reduce the likelihood of violent conflict between states.³

² Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957; and Kristian S. Gleditsch, *All International Politics Is Local: The Diffusion of Conflict, Integration, and Democratization*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

- Cultural diffusion will tend to increase the size of culturally similar groups over time. However, cultural diffusion as a process is limited, and persistent differences between groups can remain despite repeated interaction. Increasing similarity among certain groups might actually lead to increasing polarization at the global level.⁴
- The world is moving toward a common culture and community, assisted by technologies such as the Internet, that will tend to greatly reduce international conflict over time.⁵
- The Internet could expand and deepen the sense of community within groups, without necessarily leading to significantly increased dialog between disparate groups.⁶
- The ability of information and communication technologies to widely disseminate evidence of humanitarian disasters or political repression increases the pressure for international humanitarian interventions, thereby increasing the likelihood of certain kinds of interstate conflict.⁷

Hypothesis

Diffusion of weapons technology increases the deadliness of interstate conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Military technologies oscillate between favoring offensive and defensive strategies, which, in turn, affects the likelihood that states will find conflicts worth pursuing.⁸
- The proliferation of robotic or unmanned weapons will make the initiation of interstate conflicts more likely, as policymakers who possess these weapons will no longer be inhibited by a concern for casualties on their side.⁹
- The proliferation of low-cost, unmanned weapons, such as drones, might increase the risk of low-intensity conflicts between rivals, which, in turn, runs the risk of escalation.¹⁰

³ Errol Anthony Henderson, "The Democratic Peace Through the Lens of Culture, 1820–1989," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1998, pp. 461–484.

⁴ Robert Axelrod, "The Dissemination of Culture: A Model with Local Convergence and Global Polarization," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997, pp. 203–226.

⁵ Amitai Etzioni, "Are New Technologies the Enemy of Privacy?" *Knowledge, Technology and Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2007, pp. 115–119.

⁶ Kurt Mills, "Cybernations: Identity, Self-Determination, Democracy and the "Internet Effect," in the Emerging Information Order," *Global Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2002, pp. 69–87.

⁷ Eytan Gilboa, "The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations," *Political Communication*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2005, pp. 27–44.

⁸ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁹ Peter Warren Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*, Penguin Press, 2009.

¹⁰ Michael J. Boyle, "The Costs and Consequences of Drone Warfare," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1–29.

- Cyberwarfare has become an ongoing, low-level form of interstate conflict. While the damage that cyberattacks can do remains limited, the odds that persistent cyberwarfare could escalate into more traditional realms of conflict are increasing with time.¹¹
- The diffusion of advanced military technology will serve primarily to increase the lethality of strikes by nonstate actors. However, the spread of organizational innovations—such as the combination of state and nonstate actors (resulting in so-called Hybrid Wars, i.e., conflict with both Hezbollah and Iran)—means that this diffusion has important implications for interstate conflict as well.¹²

Hypothesis

Diffusion of weapons technology tends to equalize capabilities between states, making interstate conflict more likely.

What the Literature Says

- Diffusion of military technologies will tend to equalize power among states in the long term.¹³
- Realists tend to assume that new military technologies will diffuse quickly and evenly among states, but this has not historically been the case. Instead, institutional and cultural factors often limit the ability of states to adopt new technologies. Therefore, technological diffusion will not necessarily lead to equalized military capabilities, although the recent convergence of organizational models among major militaries might encourage greater homogenization than in previous eras.¹⁴
- The effect of the diffusion of military technologies depends on the cost and difficulty that states face in adopting them. States that are both financially and organizationally capable of adopting new technologies will be the ones that benefit from them. As a result, diffusion will not necessarily tend to equalize military capabilities among states. That will depend on the characteristics of the technologies undergoing diffusion. Information

¹¹ Jeffrey Carr, *Inside Cyber Warfare: Mapping the Cyber Underworld*, Sebastopol, Calif.: O'Reilly Media, Incorporated, 2011; James Andrew Lewis, *Assessing the Risks of Cyber Terrorism, Cyber War and Other Cyber Threats*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2002; Martin C. Libicki, "Cyberspace Is Not a War-Fighting Domain," *A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012, pp. 325–439; and William F. Lynn III, "Defending a New Domain—The Pentagon's Cyber-Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, 2010, p. 97.

¹² Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Arlington, Va.: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007.

¹³ Gilpin, 1981.

¹⁴ Emily O. Goldman and Leslie C. Eliason, eds., *The Diffusion of Military Technology and Ideas*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.

technology advances are likely to be relatively cheap, but require significant organizational capacity to adopt, and therefore favor states with those characteristics.¹⁵

- The spread of military technologies, such as precision munitions, to greater numbers of adversaries could limit U.S. ability to project power, creating challenges for the exercise of U.S. military hegemony. This challenge might be blunted by even newer technologies developed by the United States, depending on how well the U.S. military is able to incorporate and adapt to such technologies.¹⁶

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- Unlike the other sections of this literature review, the hypotheses related to the effect of technological advances on interstate conflict have yet to be tested quantitatively. In large part, this is because these hypotheses tend to be about the future, rather than the past. As an inherently forward-looking body of literature, less empirical work has been performed looking back and assessing the effect of previous generations of revolutionary technologies (such as aircraft carriers, television, and nuclear submarines) on the prevalence of interstate conflict. As a result, data sets relevant to such hypotheses are also not widely available or used.
- Nonetheless, a few data sets that might be of interest for research in this area do exist. Data on Internet penetration levels are collected by the World Bank and available for a wide range of countries since 2000. Data sets also exist compiling data for most states on arms transfers (since 1950) and military expenditures (since 1988), both collected by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), although these data sets might be more applicable to the literature review of realist factors in Chapter Twelve.
- Empirical testing of the impact of technological factors on interstate conflict remains at a very early stage, however.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The fact that significant advances in military technologies have been primarily developed and deployed by the system's hegemon, the United States, has tended to reinforce that state's primacy and might have reduced the likelihood of interstate conflict, particularly among major powers.

¹⁵ Michael C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010.

¹⁶ Michael G. Vickers and Robert C. Martinage, *The Revolution in War*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2004; Max Boot, "The Paradox of Military Technology," *The New Atlantis*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2006, pp. 13–31; and Thomas G. Mahnken, "Weapons: The Growth and Spread of the Precision-Strike Regime," *Dædalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 140, No. 3, Summer 2011, pp. 45–57.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- Nuclear proliferation and the diffusion of precision-guided munitions will tend to reduce the gap in power projection capabilities between the United States and its allies and other states. In turn, realist theories suggest that these developments should make interstate conflict relatively more likely.
- New communication technologies could reduce conflict between states by increasing the degree of first-hand contact between their populations. However, the evidence for this relationship is quite weak to this point.
- Cyber warfare might increasingly constitute a low-level form of interstate conflict, where normative understandings of what constitutes unacceptable, aggressive behavior are much weaker. This raises the possibility of cyberattacks escalating into forms of conventional interstate conflict if they are not managed properly.
- Technological developments are likely to affect interstate conflict trends through economic variables, by increasing economic growth and providing additional opportunities for economic interdependence, both developments that would be expected to further reduce interstate conflict overall.

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11. U.S. Hegemony, Primacy, and Conflict

Overview

The literature suggests several ways in which U.S. primacy could contribute to international stability and peace, some focused on military primacy and others on the U.S. position as hegemon more generally. Arguments about military primacy suggest that the overwhelming dominance of U.S. power (1) deters challenges from potential rivals and deters aggressive states from attacking U.S. allies or interests or violating U.S.-based norms or (2) allows the United States to protect the “commons” and underwrite the stability of international trade (which contributes to reduced conflict), thus providing stability and reducing insecurity which might otherwise lead to arms races and conflict escalation.¹

Other arguments focus more generally on the role as a hegemon, suggesting that the guarantees provided by the United States are both military and economic in nature and that the U.S. position as hegemon or “balancer” is what has allowed peace in Europe and in Asia, both areas where large-scale interstate conflicts have emerged in the past. Clear anecdotal evidence supports these arguments, but little good empirical evidence exists to prove the association between U.S. primacy and more pacific relations.²

A final set of arguments suggests that the United States uses its position as hegemon to actively discourage conflict between smaller states, through either alliances, mediation, economic mechanisms, or direct military intervention.³ There is evidence both supporting and refuting this argument. While the United States has used its influence to discourage conflict at points, there is no systematic evidence that U.S. intervention or coercion has led directly to a decline in conflict. Little evidence supports the contention that the U.S. role as hegemon has significantly increased the number of conflicts involving U.S. military personnel as “global

¹ Stephen Van Evera, “Primed for Peace: Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1990, pp. 7–57; G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5, 2002, pp. 44–60; Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2003, pp. 5–46; Richard K. Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1994, pp. 34–77; Ian Clark, “Bringing Hegemony Back in: The United States and International Order,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2009, pp. 23–36; Robert J. Art, “Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 1, 1996, pp. 1–39; Elke Krahnmann, “American Hegemony or Global Governance? Competing Visions of International Security,” *International Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2005, pp. 531–545; and Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1997, pp. 49–88.

² Van Evera, 1990; Posen 2003; Betts, 1994; and Art, 1996.

³ John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1990, pp. 5–56; Art, 1996; and Krahnmann, 2005.

policemen.” U.S. military deployments are closely linked with U.S. interests and domestic political concerns, rather than overseas interventionist exploits. On the other hand, some evidence suggests that smaller states do behave differently and are more likely to engage in conflict when U.S. power appears to be declining than at other points, which would support the pacifying effect of a U.S. hegemon.⁴

Critics of arguments about U.S. primacy note that there are limits to primacy, both in geographic scope and in terms of the types of conflicts that primacy is most likely to deter. For example, U.S. primacy might be less relevant in nontraditional conflicts—such as that in Iraq—and in places such as Africa, where China or Russia is gaining additional influence. Furthermore, U.S. primacy might not be permanent—a fact underscored by the relative economic rise of China, which could present a challenge to U.S. economic dominance.⁵

The majority of arguments about U.S. hegemony are difficult to test empirically. Most work relies on case studies that compare pre- and post-Cold War dynamics or pre- and post-World War II dynamics. Some empirical work compares conflict under the U.S. hegemony and conflict in previous hegemonic eras, such as when Great Britain was the dominant power. However, such comparisons are often difficult to make because of the large number of variable factors between the two periods.⁶

Empirical work relies on the COW and MID data sets, as well as measures of relative power from COW, data on military spending, and relative economic growth rates. Empirical work focused on the use of U.S. military force overseas uses the International Military Interventions data set, data compiled by Regan,⁷ or data compiled from war resolutions reports by the Congressional Research Service. Additional data from Polity on regime type and from the Penn World Tables or IMF for economic variables might also be relevant.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

U.S. hegemony has deterred military conflict among great powers and promoted the development of an international system, including trade and other regimes, that has reduced conflict among all states. Over time, the degree of U.S. dominance is likely to erode, which could call into question the stability of the pacific international system the United States has

⁴ Patrick M. Regan, “Choosing to Intervene: Outside Interventions in Internal Conflicts,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 1998, pp. 754–779; Mi Yung Yoon, “Explaining U.S. Intervention in Third World Internal Wars, 1945–1989,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1997, pp. 580–602; and James Meernik, Eric L. Krueger, and Steven C. Poe, “Testing Models of U.S. Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid During and After the Cold War,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 1998, pp. 63–85.

⁵ Posen, 2003; Clark, 2009; and Ikenberry, 2002.

⁶ Meernik, Krueger, and Poe, 1998; Regan, 1998; and Yoon, 1997.

⁷ Regan, 1998.

helped to build. The level of difficulty this development might pose will depend on the degree to which rising powers, such as China and India, agree to support the existing international system.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Conflict between major powers is unlikely because of the overwhelming scope of U.S. military primacy.
- U.S. hegemony enabled the creation of a security community in Western Europe, previously the source of much interstate conflict.
- The United States uses its influence to actively discourage conflict between lesser powers.
- The U.S. role in enforcing the international order increases the number of conflicts that involve the United States.

Hypothesis

Conflict between major powers is unlikely because of the overwhelming scope of U.S. military primacy.

What the Literature Says

- One important variant of arguments about the role of U.S. hegemony and military primacy is the Hegemonic Stability Theory,⁸ which suggests that military primacy and the hegemon's commitment to the status quo of the hegemon (in this case, the United States) can deter conflict and reduce security fears and insecurity that could lead to arming and conflict in other states.
- Military primacy increases U.S. ability to defeat any threat to itself or its allies and, therefore, increases the power of extended deterrence.⁹ This reduces conflict.
- Military primacy allows the United States to function as an offshore balancer, supporting key allies and the status quo in regions such as Asia and the Middle East.
- Military primacy allows the United States to control the "commons," which provides stability and prevents conflict—military primacy facilitates control of the commons, including sea and space.¹⁰

⁸ A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

⁹ Paul K. Huth, "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2, 1988, pp. 423–443.

¹⁰ Posen, 2003.

- The United States underwrites trade and security through its military primacy for all nations, which means that they also begrudgingly accept U.S. hegemony and the status quo supported by the United States.¹¹
- Volgy and Imwalle find that hegemonic distribution of military and political power is associated with less conflict, less crises, and less foreign policy activity.¹²

Counterarguments and Caveats

- The U.S. Army might be dominant in ground campaigns, but there are limits in other areas; for example, there are limits on U.S. military nation-building, peacemaking, and peace-enforcing. There are also limits on the reach of U.S. power, power in space, etc.¹³
- Primacy might *not* matter in cases such as events in Iraq, where the enemy can launch a campaign of attrition. Primacy does not matter when the costs are too high and public support is lacking.¹⁴
- Military primacy might not always be able to deter conflicts between smaller powers.¹⁵
- U.S. influence is far from global.¹⁶
- The emergence of new major powers could still be destabilizing (i.e., the emergence of China and other revisionist powers might have an effect.)¹⁷
- Other types of primacy (i.e., economic primacy) could play a role.¹⁸

Hypothesis

U.S. hegemony enabled the creation of a security community in Western Europe, previously the source of much interstate conflict.

What the Literature Says

- The United States acts as a balancer of last resort and, for continually competing states, a type of insurance against renewed warfare.¹⁹

¹¹ Art, 1996; and Clark, 2009.

¹² Thomas J. Volgy and Lawrence E. Imwalle, "Hegemonic and Bipolar Perspectives on the New World Order," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1995, pp. 819–834.

¹³ Posen, 2003.

¹⁴ Clark, 2009.

¹⁵ Clark, 2009; and Posen, 2003.

¹⁶ Krahnemann, 2005.

¹⁷ Posen, 2003; and Betts, 1994.

¹⁸ Posen, 2003; and Ikenberry, 2002.

¹⁹ Art, 1996.

- The U.S. hegemonic role reduces anarchy and might contribute to stability and reduce war, even if the United States does not actively discourage conflict.²⁰
- NATO, which is anchored by the United States, facilitates and supports long-term peaceful relationships in Europe after the Cold War, even in the face of new, emerging threats.²¹
 - The U.S. hegemonic role limits security buildups within Europe and helps mediate disputes.²²
 - The U.S. hegemonic role provides stability in Asia as well, by providing allies, such as Japan and South Korea, assurances against China and North Korea.²³
- The U.S. role in maintaining an open economy in Europe is another way that the United States has contributed to stability and less-frequent war in Europe—by limiting the likelihood of trade disputes escalating to conflict and ensuring a level of prosperity that also provides a buffer against conflict.²⁴
- The U.S. role as underwriter of stability in the world system leads to economic prosperity and reduced conflict.²⁵

Hypothesis

The United States uses its influence to actively discourage conflict between lesser powers.

What the Literature Says

- This hypothesis again relies on Hegemonic Stability Theory and the argument that because the United States benefits from the current international system in which it is a hegemon, it actively seeks (either out of benevolence or through coercion) to maintain stability and discourages conflict.²⁶
- The United States could influence the behavior of other nations in any number of ways, given its role as balancer, ally, or deterrent.²⁷

²⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.

²¹ Mark Duffield, “Complex Emergencies and the Crisis of Developmentalism,” *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1994, pp. 37–45.

²² Mearsheimer, 1990.

²³ Van Evera, 1990.

²⁴ Van Evera, 1990.

²⁵ Posen, 2003.

²⁶ Charles P. Kindleberger, “Hierarchy Versus Inertial Cooperation,” *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1986, pp. 841–847; and Organski and Kugler, 1981.

²⁷ For example, Betts discusses this influence in Asia. Betts, 1994.

- As hegemonic control weakens, smaller states seeking to carve out more independent foreign policies engage in more foreign policy activity.²⁸ This suggests that the United States does play a role in reducing conflict.
- The United States discourages risky behavior, buildup of arms, or anything that might challenge its position through political, economic, and other channels.²⁹
- The United States might use economic influence and benefits, along with its alliances with smaller states, to limit aggressive actions that might lead to conflict. There is some empirical evidence that these types of asymmetric alliances do reduce the likelihood of conflict.³⁰

Counterargument

- According to Ikenberry, the United States has shown little interest in meddling in the affairs of other states.³¹
- It is now largely international institutions, rather than the United States, that play this intermediary role.³²

Hypothesis

The U.S. role in enforcing the international order increases the number of conflicts involving the United States.

What the Literature Says

- The United States might use force to retain its hegemonic position, leading to conflict between the United States and rising states.³³ There is some evidence that increased military activity by the United States is associated with a decline in hegemonic strength.
- The United States might be able to protect international order simply with threats of force.³⁴

²⁸ Volgy and Imwalle, 1995.

²⁹ Posen, 2003.

³⁰ See Duncan Morrow, "Regional Policy as Foreign Policy: The Austrian Experience," *Regional Politics and Policy*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1992, pp. 27–44.

³¹ Ikenberry, 2002.

³² James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992; and Lawrence S. Finkelstein, "What Is Global Governance?" *Global Governance*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1995, pp. 367–372.

³³ Mastanduno, 1997; and Clark, 2009.

³⁴ Julian Go, "Waves of Empire: U.S. Hegemony and Imperialistic Activity from the Shores of Tripoli to Iraq, 1787–2003," *International Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2007, pp. 5–40.

- There is evidence that interventions, both military and nonmilitary, might not always be beneficial for any of the involved parties. Intervention appears to increase the duration of wars and sometimes contributes to unrest in surrounding areas, thus demanding additional U.S. forces.³⁵
- As hegemon and with an interest in maintaining the status quo, the United States might be forced to intervene in more conflicts or take military actions that it would not take otherwise. From the U.S. perspective, this could constitute an increase in conflict.³⁶
- After the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001, U.S. security policy appears, in some instances, to be interventionist and unilateral.³⁷

Counterarguments

- The United States might not always be “compelled to intervene.” Most wars that involve the United States were initiated by the United States or involved the United States protecting its own direct interests, rather than instances when the United States was pulled in through entanglements.³⁸
- Yoon shows that U.S. military interventions since 1945 were driven by geopolitical factors—not economic or domestic and not the United States policing on its own.³⁹
- U.S. military deployments and interventions tend to be the exception rather than the norm.⁴⁰
- Explicit tests of the “global policeman” argument find no evidence for it.⁴¹

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Overwhelming Scope of U.S. Military Primacy

- There are few examples of hegemony and thus few cases to draw on in an empirical analysis.

³⁵ Karl R. DeRouen, Jr., and David Sobek, “The Dynamics of Civil War Duration and Outcome,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2004, pp. 303–320; and Virginia Page Fortna, “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2004, pp. 269–292.

³⁶ Mastanduno, 1997; and Clark, 2009.

³⁷ Krahnemann, 2005.

³⁸ See Regan, 1998; and Meernik, Krueger, and Poe, 1998.

³⁹ Yoon, 1997.

⁴⁰ Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1997, pp. 86–124.

⁴¹ Go, 2007.

- Empirical tests use MID and COW to measure war and conflict.
- Power is usually assessed using the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score, which is calculated to assess national materiel capabilities relative to other nations or using measures of military spending.
- The scope and extent of deterrence is difficult to estimate because what is effectively being measured is what didn't happen.

U.S. Hegemony Enabled the Creation of a Security Community in Western Europe

- Most empirical tests of this argument are based on (1) an assessment of conflict trends before and after World War II or before and after the end of the Cold War, or (2) qualitative discussions about how the U.S. position could affect the likelihood of conflict in other states.

United States Uses Influence to Discourage Conflicts Among Lesser Powers

- Where the literature does include empirical tests, it tends to use COW or MID data.
- Relative power might be measured by the CINC score (or one of its dimensions), military spending, or in economic terms, such as growth rates.
- Hegemonic Stability Theory is inherently difficult to test because it is difficult to measure stability. Further, there are few cases of true hegemony, and it is difficult even to define what a hegemony is.
- These arguments rely heavily on theory and anecdotes.

United States as Global Policemen

- Data on U.S. military interventions used in research in this area draw on International Military Interventions, the Regan database of interventions, Military Interventions by Powerful States, or ICB.⁴²
- Data on U.S. interventions are also contained in war resolutions reports by the presidents and compiled by the Congressional Research Service.
- Go assembles his own database of “imperialistic” activity by the United States, but he does not conduct any imperialistic econometric tests.⁴³

⁴² Regan, 1998; Patricia L. Sullivan and Michael T. Koch, “Military Intervention by Powerful States, 1945–2003,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 5, 2009, pp. 707–718; *International Crisis Behavior Dataset*, Version 10, University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, July 2010; and Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, “The International Military Intervention Dataset: An Updated Resource for Conflict Scholars,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2009, pp. 589–599.

⁴³ Go, 2007.

- While it is the case that U.S. interventions have increased in recent years, there is little evidence that a U.S. role as a “global policeman” is driving this trend. First, U.S. military intervention is really the exception rather than the norm. Second, those interventions that do occur are self-initiated, limited in scope (for the most part), and often motivated by U.S. self-interest rather than a purely benevolent rationale. On the other hand, there is some evidence that U.S. intervention in foreign conflicts contributes to additional demands on U.S. forces in other areas. As a result, there is the risk that even small “policing” activities might lead to many military commitments.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

U.S. military primacy has likely reduced conflict between major powers by all but eliminating the ability of other states to pose an armed challenge to the global and regional status quo. In addition, U.S. hegemony has likely reduced conflict among all states by encouraging the growth of a series of international regimes, particularly the trading regime, that restrain conflict between states.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- The United States could lose military primacy or, more realistically, face military challengers with specific capabilities that challenge U.S. dominance.
- U.S. military primacy might not deter low-intensity conflict or unconventional forms of political violence.
- Political and economic conditions within the United States could limit its ability to deploy forces and might require a more-limited overseas presence that is less effective as a deterrent.
- The United States could lose its international influence and ability to control the actions of smaller states as its military and economic primacy decline (in relative terms). The United States might be involved in fewer conflicts as its influence wanes, but conflict overall might rise as smaller powers rise to challenge the status quo.
- The United States might be forced to intervene more often to protect the status quo and its position of primacy. In this case, both overall conflict and U.S. involvement could increase in the future.
- As actual military primacy declines, the United States might be forced to intervene in more conflicts to maintain credibility and position of influence.
- Rise of a more multipolar world could allow other countries to assume some of the United States’ current “balancer” role, reducing the number of conflicts in which the United States gets involved (for better or worse).

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12. Realist Factors

Overview

Realist theories of war focus on how the distribution of power among states in the international system, as well as changes in this distribution, contribute to and constrain conflict. Realist theories assume that states are unitary actors, operating in a mostly anarchic system, seeking to maximize their self-interest, security, and power. A key tenet of realist theory is the idea of a security dilemma, which posits that as each state seeks to become stronger by amassing resources and capabilities, its actions make other states feel weaker and more insecure. Those states respond by arming themselves, which can lead to arms races and sometimes conflict.

Realist theories suggest that states use war to increase their own security and power when they think that conflict is more likely than peace and cooperation to get them a desirable outcome. War provides information about the balance of capabilities and is most likely when there is some kind of uncertainty about the distribution of power, sometimes based on false optimism or misperceptions.

Finally, in addition to the arguments below, realist theory suggests a number of other important hypotheses about war. For example, realist theories suggest that war is more likely when conquest is easy and the offensive has an advantage. In these cases, windows of opportunity for first strikes are larger, insecurity is greater, advantages in being the first to move are more significant, arms races and misperceptions are more common, and power gains by other states are more threatening. These arguments, combined with the increasing difficulty of conquest in the present period, might help explain the recent decline in interstate conflict.

Empirical support for most realist arguments is mixed: There is evidence both for and against most hypotheses. This mixed support suggests that realist factors do affect to the outbreak of conflict, but context, the international system, and domestic political factors also matter. For example, the balance of power between two states might affect the likelihood of conflict, but the presence of allies, common interests, and domestic pressures could ultimately determine the strength of this relationship.

The most common data sets used in this literature are the COW and MID data, although some work also uses the ICB data set. Relative power is measured using the CINC score from the COW project, although military spending is also used to assess military strength. Alliance data come from either the COW alliance data set or the Alliance Treaty Obligations and

Provisions dataset (ATOP), and the enduring rivalry work relies most heavily on the data set Diehl and Goertz developed from the COW data.¹

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Realist theories, such as those related to the balance of capabilities, alliances, and rivalries, are important factors in determining which states tend to become involved in interstate conflicts. However, their role in reducing interstate conflict over the past several decades is more difficult to determine. The inequality of capabilities between the United States and other major powers has likely contributed to the lack of conflict between them. U.S. hegemony has also likely reduced the number of arms races and rivalries that have developed, which the literature suggests to be strongly linked with interstate conflict. In general, however, realist theories (as shown in these examples) illustrate the mechanisms by which other factors (discussed elsewhere in this review, such as U.S. primacy) tend to operate, rather than representing important causes of the decline in interstate conflict themselves.

In the future, realist theories would similarly predict that a rise in interstate conflict could accompany a decline in U.S. preeminence, and the theories on the balance of capabilities would help to predict where such resurgence in conflict would be more likely to occur; i.e., between which states.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Equal capabilities increase conflict between states.
- Large differences in capabilities decrease conflict between states.
- Arms races increase conflict between states.
- Alliance formation increases conflict between states.
- A previous history of rivalry increases conflict between states.

Hypothesis

Equal capabilities increase conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Blainey argues that war is caused by uncertainty in the distribution of power, as do Organski and Kugler.² They suggest that when a power distribution is roughly equal,

¹ Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

uncertainty is high and states are more likely to fight, both to gain new information about relative strength and to potentially achieve a better outcome for themselves.³

- Garnham and Weede also both find that war is more likely between states of equal power.⁴
- Morrow and Kim suggest that alliances matter to the outbreak of conflict and that it is less equality in power between states than equality between rival blocks of states that matters for predicting when conflict will occur. They also find that rough equality between these alliance blocs increases chance for conflict.⁵
- Diehl finds that time period might matter to the outbreak of conflict.⁶ Specifically, parity of power between states appears to contribute to war before 1900, whereas after 1900, a preponderance of power held by one state over another contributes to war.
- Ferris finds that nonconflict events might be more likely between states with relatively equal power, but that war is more likely when there is a preponderance of power on one side.⁷
- Power Transition Theory suggests that it is less equality than *convergence of power* between rival states that increases the likelihood of conflict.⁸ Differential growth rates might increase the likelihood of conflict.⁹
 - However, balance in the absence of transition is not found to be linked with heightened chance for change.¹⁰

² Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, London: Macmillan, 1973; A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, "The Costs of Major Wars: The Phoenix Factor," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 71, No. 4, 1977, pp. 1347–1366.

³ Adam Meirowitz and Anne E. Sartori, "Strategic Uncertainty as a Cause of War," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2008, pp. 327–352; and James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations For War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 1995, pp. 379–414.

⁴ David Garnham, "Power Parity and Lethal International Violence, 1969–1973," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1976, pp. 379–394; and Erich Weede, "Arms Races and Escalation: Some Persisting Doubts (Response to Wallace's Article, JCR, March 1979)," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, pp. 285–287.

⁵ James D. Morrow and Woosang Kim, "When Do Power Shifts Lead to War?" *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1992, pp. 896–922.

⁶ Paul F. Diehl, "Contiguity and Military Escalation in Major Power Rivalries, 1816–1980," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 1985, pp. 1203–1211.

⁷ Wayne H. Ferris, *The Power Capabilities of Nation-States: International Conflict and War*, Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1973.

⁸ Organski and Kugler, 1977.

⁹ Henk Houweling and Jan G. Siccamo, "Power Transitions as a Cause of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1988, pp. 87–102.

¹⁰ Organski and Kugler, 1977.

- War is most likely when there is a dissatisfied rising state that is strong enough to start a war and believes in the benefits of such a war.¹¹ Werner and Lemke find support for this model when smaller, nonmajor powers are included in the analysis. They also find strong evidence that parity leads to war.¹²

Counterarguments and Caveats

- Small and Singer and Bueno de Mesquita argue that balance of power between states reduces the likelihood of conflict.¹³ They argue that equal capabilities might reduce or deter conflict because states that are uncertain about conflict outcomes prefer not to fight. However, these theories are most often tested by using major-power dyads, which limits the generalizability of their findings.
- An equally rich literature argues that it is not transitions, but simply preponderances of power that are more likely to lead to war (although there is less empirical evidence on this side of the argument).¹⁴
- In all cases, likelihood of war must consider costs, possible benefits, risk aversion, and domestic politics. No single balance-of-power distribution is likely to explain everything.

Hypothesis

Large differences in capabilities decrease conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- A preponderance of power held by one state over another makes it clear who will win a conflict and prevents the need for war.¹⁵
- In addition to reducing uncertainty, preponderance of power allows the strongest power to commit resources to maintaining the status quo.¹⁶
 - States with more military power have more power to negotiate and get their preferred outcome without war.

¹¹ Suzanne Werner and Douglas Lemke, “Opposites Do Not Attract: The Impact of Domestic Institutions, Power, and Prior Commitments on Alignment Choices,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1997, pp. 529–546.

¹² Werner and Lemke, 1997.

¹³ Melvin Small and J. David Singer, “The Diplomatic Importance of States, 1816–1970: An Extension and Refinement of the Indicator,” *World Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1973, pp. 577–599; and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Risk, Power Distributions, and the Likelihood of War,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1981, pp. 541–568.

¹⁴ Organski and Kugler, 1977; and Bueno de Mesquita, 1981.

¹⁵ Bueno de Mesquita, 1981; and Fearon, 1995.

¹⁶ Organski and Kugler, 1977.

- Powerful states could serve as a deterrent.
- Geller finds that one state holding a preponderance of power decreases the likelihood of conflict between rivals.¹⁷
- Diehl finds that time period might matter. While parity between two states appears necessary for war prior to 1900, one state holding a preponderance of power seems necessary after 1900.¹⁸
- Organski and Kugler use their Power Transition Theory as an explanation that a preponderance of power between two countries decreases the likelihood of conflict because weak states will not challenge the strong state and the strong state is satisfied with the status quo.¹⁹
 - As already noted, conflicts are more likely when power transitions are occurring or have occurred. Two mechanisms might contribute to the increase in the likelihood of conflict as power converges at a two-sided level. First, as a weaker power catches up to a stronger one, the weaker power might challenge the stronger one for primacy. Second, the stronger power might choose to fight a preemptive war against the weaker one to prevent the transition.
- Sweeney similarly places conditions on the pacific effect of a balance of power noting that a preponderance of power is only more peaceful than a balance when state interests are aligned. When states don't share interests, balance of power is less likely than preponderance to lead to conflict.²⁰

Counterarguments

- Mearsheimer suggests instead that imbalances in power promote uncertainty, and uncertainty in the balance of power leads to war. Relatedly, this means war could be more likely in a multipolar system where it is harder for states to acquire information about a balance of power.²¹
- Ferris suggests that serious conflict is more likely with states of equal power but that nonviolent disputes are less likely when one side has a greater preponderance of power.²²

¹⁷ Daniel S. Geller, "Power Differentials and War in Rival Dyads," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1993, pp. 173–193.

¹⁸ Diehl, 1985.

¹⁹ Organski and Kugler, 1977.

²⁰ Kevin J. Sweeney, "The Severity of Interstate Disputes: Are Dyadic Capability Preponderances Really More Pacific?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 2003, pp. 728–750.

²¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "A Realist Reply," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995, pp. 82–93.

²² Ferris, 1973.

- One potential limitation is that many power preponderance studies focus only on contiguous dyads.²³

Hypothesis

Arms races increase conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

Two Arms Races Models: Spiral and Deterrent

- In the spiral model, an arms buildup on one side leads the other side to feel insecure and perceive that war is inevitable. This belief contributes to additional buildup and insecurity, escalating the likelihood of war. This spiral is both self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling and leads to war.²⁴ Arguments that promote a positive relationship between arms races and conflict suggest that the buildup of arms is part of dispute escalation that ultimately makes the outbreak of direct hostilities more likely. A common form of this argument suggests that arms races cause spirals of escalation, in which each state continues to acquire and develop weapons based on fear of its rivals—but doing so increases the insecurity and subsequent arms acquisition of those rivals. As rivals acquire more weapons, this only further feeds the arms race.
- In the deterrent model, an arms buildup on one side triggers a buildup on the other, but rather than spiraling to conflict, both sides are deterred by the increased strength of their competitor. Disarmament in this case could decrease stability and increase the risk of conflict.²⁵

Empirical Evidence Supports Both Sides of the Debate

- As in the case of the relationship between conflict and the balance of power, it is likely that there is an intervening variable (or several variables). For example, arms buildups might contribute to heightened risk of conflict when the offensive weapons or strategies have a military advantage or when states have especially high defense spending burdens, because these factors increase the urgency and reduce the quality of decisionmaking. In

²³ Randolph M. Siverson and Michael P. Sullivan, “The Distribution of Power and the Onset of War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1983, pp. 473–494.

²⁴ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976; Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1978, pp. 167–214; Charles L. Glaser, “Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models,” *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1992, pp. 497–538; and Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1997, pp. 171–201.

²⁵ Michael D. Intriligator and Dagobert L. Brito, “Can Arms Races Lead to the Outbreak of War?” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1984, pp. 63–84.

contrast, arms buildups might deter conflict when defensive strategies are more powerful or when the perceived costs of war are high (as with nuclear weapons).

- Assessing the empirical evidence, it seems that arms races often do contribute to war, but they are rarely sufficient in and of themselves to cause a new conflict. Moreover, even if arms races are associated with conflict, there is no way to know if the level of conflict would have been higher in the absence of an arms race (deterrence might be unobserved).
- There is also evidence that arms races are associated with particular types of disputes (e.g., enduring rivalries or territorial conflicts that are more likely to result in militarized conflict). In this case, any relationship between arms races and war might be an artifact of enduring rivalries and territorial disputes, which are simply much more likely to lead to war.
- The bottom line is that while arms races are often associated with war outbreak, they do not always occur and might be characteristic of conflicts that escalate to war, rather than an independent cause of escalation.

Arms Races Appear to be Associated with Conflict in Some Cases, but Not Others

- Singer and Smith find that arms races are associated with increased conflict likelihood.²⁶
- Wallace argues that conflicts that escalate to war are more likely to be preceded by an arms race than those that are not. He suggests that arms races appear to function as an important part of the escalation process.²⁷

Subsequent Work Has Challenged and Qualified Wallace's Finding

- Wallace's finding is challenged in a later piece by Diehl,²⁸ who argues that correcting coding errors and correction to the arms race "index" that Wallace uses eliminates this result and suggests that conflicts preceded by arms races are not more likely than others to end in violence.
- Horn finds that short arms races might not lead to conflict but longer ones do.²⁹
- Smith suggests that it is the stability of arms races that determines whether they lead to war. Stability is a measure of the speed of the growth, and arms races become *unstable* if they pass the equilibrium point and continue growing at an increasing rate.³⁰

²⁶ J. David Singer, "The Outcome of Arms Races: A Policy Problem and a Research Approach," in J. David Singer, ed., *The Correlates of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1979, pp. 145–154; and Theresa Clair Smith, "Arms Race Instability and War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, pp. 253–284.

²⁷ Michael D. Wallace, "Arms Races and Escalation: Some New Evidence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1979, pp. 3–16.

²⁸ Diehl, 1985.

²⁹ Michael D. Horn, *Arms Races and the International System*, dissertation, New York: Rochester University, 1987.

³⁰ Smith, 1980.

- Diehl finds that war follows unilateral military buildup or an asymmetrical arms race that leads to a shift in the balance of power that favors conflict.³¹ Arms races that increase the defense burden of the target also increase the likelihood of conflict because the increased defense burden is unsustainable and forces the target to take action.
- Arms races might be part of a power transition. Military buildup could occur within a dissatisfied rising state and contribute to the threat this dissatisfied state poses to the stability in the system.

Arms Races May Be Most Likely in Particular Types of Conflicts

- Rider argues that arms races are most likely when stakes are related to territory.³² Arms races are costly and risky, and states are only willing to enter them when the stakes of the conflict are high.
- Rider, Findley, and Diehl suggest that arms races occur most frequently in the context of enduring rivalries.³³ In addition, arms races are more likely in the middle and latter stages of rivalry and appear associated with conflict in rivalries when the arms race occurs in the latter phases of the rivalry.

Counterarguments

- Confounding effects of the Cold War, World War I, and World War II might affect observed relationships between arms and war.
- Nuclear weapons might have their own relationship with conflict.

Hypothesis

Alliance formation increases conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- As is true of other realist arguments, evidence on the effects of alliances is mixed. Some work suggests that alliances “entangle” matters, increasing the likelihood of war and conflict. Others argue that alliances restrain and deter aggressive states and so decrease the likelihood of war. In either case, alliances contribute to war (or peace) through their effect on the power distribution and the information available to states. By altering the balance of capabilities, alliances influence the calculations of states considering war.

³¹ Diehl, 1985.

³² Toby J. Rider, “Understanding Arms Race Onset: Rivalry, Threat, and Territorial Competition,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 2009, pp. 693–703.

³³ Toby J. Rider, Michael G. Findley, and Paul F. Diehl, “Just Part of the Game? Arms Races, Rivalry, and War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2011, pp. 85–100.

Alliances also provide clear information to potential aggressors about who might be involved in the event of a conflict.³⁴

- More-nuanced empirical work suggests that both arguments might be true. While certain types of alliances (offensive, unconditional) appear to increase the likelihood that states will become embroiled in conflict, other types of alliances—especially asymmetric ones between major powers and smaller states, and flexible ones with conditional or generally weaker commitments—appear to decrease the likelihood of conflict.³⁵
- Other work looks at how alliances might affect the size of a conflict and argues that alliances contribute to bigger wars, as alliance partners are pulled into conflicts.³⁶
- Finally, there is evidence that the nature of the geopolitical regime and characteristics of the system might influence the effect of alliances on conflict. For example, there is work that shows that alliances do contribute to higher rates of conflict in the 20th century, but this is not true of the 19th century. This suggests that the association between alliances and war might be an artifact of the higher frequency of war in the 20th century or the nature of 20th century alliances.³⁷
- The nature of the alliance appears to affect its influence on the likelihood of conflict.
 - Oneal and Russett find that allies are more likely to enter into conflict than non-allies, suggesting that alliances create entanglements.³⁸
 - Oren finds that countries in large alliances are more likely than those involved in smaller alliances to get involved in conflicts.³⁹ He argues that alliances affect the spread of conflict, rather than the outbreak of conflict. Siverson and King make a similar argument.⁴⁰

³⁴ Siverson and Sullivan, 1983; Randolph M. Siverson and Michael R. Tennefoss, “Power, Alliance, and the Escalation of International Conflict, 1815–1965,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 4, 1984, pp. 1057–1069; and John Oneal and Bruce Russett, “The Kantian Peace,” *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 1999, pp. 1–37.

³⁵ Brett Ashley Leeds, “Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties,” *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 4, 2003, pp. 801–827.

³⁶ Ido Oren, “The War Proneness of Alliances,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1990, pp. 208–233.

³⁷ Oren, 1990.

³⁸ Oneal and Russett, 1999.

³⁹ Oren, 1990.

⁴⁰ Randolph M. Siverson and Joel King, “Alliances and the Expansion of War,” in J. David Singer and M. D. Wallace, eds., *To Augur Well: Early Warning Indicators in World Politics*, Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979, pp. 37–49.

- Flexible alliances might reduce conflict, but rigid alliances prevent fluid redistribution of power and might increase conflict.⁴¹
- Maoz says alliances between democracies appear to contribute to conflict, while those between nondemocracies constrain it.⁴²
- Maoz also finds that regional alliances do constrain conflict in the 20th century, but not the 19th.⁴³ In contrast, global alliances do not reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- Leeds suggests that alliance commitments affect the probability of conflict because they provide information about who might be involved if a war begins.⁴⁴
- Leeds also finds that different kinds of alliances have different effects on conflict:
 - “Alliance commitments that would require allies to intervene on behalf of potential target states reduce the probability that a militarized dispute will emerge.”⁴⁵
 - “Alliance commitments promising offensive support to potential challenger and alliances that promise nonintervention by outside powers increase the likelihood that a challenger will initiate a crisis.”⁴⁶
 - Leeds and Smith show that offensive alliances have a compelling effect on conflict behavior, emboldening alliance members to get involved.⁴⁷
- Benson similarly shows that unconditional compelling alliances significantly increase conflict, but also that these alliances are not all that common.⁴⁸ Deterrent alliances appear to have little or no effect on conflict likelihood. Only conditional deterrent allowances between minor and major powers significantly reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- Alliances between major powers are more likely to lead to more war than those between major/minor power dyads.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Charles Adams Gulick, *History and Theories of Working-Class Movements: A Select Bibliography*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1955.

⁴² Zeev Maoz, “Alliances: The Street Gangs of World Politics-Their Origins, Management, and Consequences, 1816–1986,” in John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know About War?* New York: Roman & Littlefield, 2000, pp. 102–44.

⁴³ Zeev Maoz, “Democratic Networks: Connecting National, Dyadic, and Systemic Levels of Analysis in the Study of Democracy and War,” in Zeev Maoz and Azar Gat, eds., *War in a Changing World*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2001, pp. 143–182.

⁴⁴ Leeds, 2003, pp. 801–827.

⁴⁵ Leeds, 2003, p. 427.

⁴⁶ Leeds, 2003, p. 427.

⁴⁷ Leeds, 2003; and Smith, 1980.

⁴⁸ Brett V. Benson, “Unpacking Alliances: Deterrent and Compellent Alliances and Their Relationship with Conflict, 1816–2000,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 4, 2011, pp. 1111–1127.

⁴⁹ Morrow and Kim, 1991.

- Gibler outlines factors that might affect the relationship between alliance and war, including democracy, status of the country, size of the country, and satisfaction of the country with the status quo.⁵⁰
- Alliances with a security focus might also be more likely to contribute to conflict than alliances focused on other issues.⁵¹
- Levy finds evidence that in the 20th century, alliances do seem to precede war (but this isn't true of the 19th century)—but this could be an artifact of the higher frequency of war in the 20th century.⁵²
- Morrow and Kim argue that alliances affect likelihood of war because they affect the distribution of power.⁵³ Their net effect will depend on whether they contribute to a balance of power that favors or discourages conflict.

Counterarguments

Counterarguments focus on the deterrent effects of alliances, including their ability to provide information about the likely distribution of power between alliance blocs and their ability to restrain aggressive powers.

- Alliances deter conflict.⁵⁴
- Alliances reduce conflict because alliance partners are able to control an aggressive nation. This is especially likely in alliances that tie a major power with an aggressive minor power.⁵⁵
- Alliances clarify who will defend whom and who will be involved in a conflict. This information reduces the likelihood of conflict by reducing uncertainty in the international system.⁵⁶
- Alliances maintain stability of collapsing powers that might otherwise destabilize the system.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Doug M. Gibler, "Alliances: Why Some Cause War and Why Others Cause Peace," in John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know About War?* New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 145–164.

⁵¹ Morrow and Kim, 1991.

⁵² Jack S. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495–1975," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1981, pp. 581–613.

⁵³ Morrow and Kim, 1991.

⁵⁴ J. David Singer and Melvin Small, "Foreign Policy Indicators: Predictors of War in History and in the State of the World Message," *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1974, pp. 271–296.

⁵⁵ Singer and Small, 1974; and Siverson and Tennefoss, 1984.

⁵⁶ Robert Endicott Osgood and Robert W. Tucker, *Force, Order, and Justice*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.

⁵⁷ George Liska, "The Politics of 'Cultural Diplomacy,'" *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1962, pp. 532–541.

Hypothesis

A previous history of rivalry increases conflict between states.

What the Literature Says

- Enduring rivals are states with a long history of interstate conflict.⁵⁸ Diehl and Goertz say that even within a rivalry, political shocks or something that alters the status quo might be required to trigger an outbreak of conflict.⁵⁹ Rivalries over territory are most likely to lead to conflict.⁶⁰
- Most empirical work on rivalries and recurring conflicts confirms that once two states have one conflict, they are more likely to suffer from additional conflicts in the future. There are many reasons why this might be the case. First, rivalries could lead to recurring conflict if the underlying causes of conflict are not resolved. Second, rivalries could occur if two states become used to solving their conflicts through violence and so increasingly resort to violence quickly when disputes arise. Third, a history of conflict could breed distrust between states that results in additional conflict in the future. A final argument presents a sort of selection effect, proposing that rivalries over territory are those most likely to lead to conflict, and these conflicts are least likely to be resolved.
 - Leng argues that states adopt more coercive bargaining strategies in successive confrontations with the same opponent, which means that enduring rivalries are likely to escalate to war over time.⁶¹
 - Hensel makes a similar argument that rivalries are evolutionary and build a pattern of expectations, behavior, and conflict.⁶²
 - Hensel suggests that relations between two adversaries will become more prone to conflict as they accumulate a longer history of militarized conflict.⁶³ There are two mechanisms for this relationship. First, the learning model suggests that if coercion

⁵⁸ Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "The Empirical Importance of Enduring Rivalries," *International Interactions*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1992a, pp. 151–163.

⁵⁹ Diehl and Goertz, 2001.

⁶⁰ Diehl, 1985.

⁶¹ Russell J. Leng, "When Will They Ever Learn? Coercive Bargaining in Recurrent Crises," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1983, pp. 379–419.

⁶² Paul R. Hensel, "One Thing Leads to Another: Recurrent Militarized Disputes in Latin America, 1816–1986," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1994, pp. 281–297.

⁶³ Paul R. Hensel, "Charting a Course to Conflict: Territorial Issues and Interstate Conflict, 1816–1992," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1996, pp. 43–73.

was successful in the past, there is an incentive to try it again, perhaps escalating the level of violence.⁶⁴ Second, states are likely to harden their positions over time.

- There is fairly consistent empirical support for argument that rivalries tend to lead to recurring conflict but less consensus on the precise mechanism that explains this phenomenon. Empirical studies find that enduring rivals do experience more and recurring conflict and that they are more likely to fight over territory. However, this literature also suggests that rivalries might not be the whole story. For example, some empirical work shows that political shocks or changes in relative power might be needed to trigger conflicts even between rivals.
 - Territorial issues are more likely to lead to enduring or recurring conflicts than policy disputes or disputes over the nature of a state's regime (because they are harder to solve).⁶⁵ Rivalries are most likely to be created by territorial issues or issues of power politics. While contiguous rivals might fight over territory, noncontiguous rivals are most likely to be involved in positional conflict (i.e., conflict over relative power). These conflicts also have a tendency to grow as states enter to try to improve their relative power (especially if both are major powers).
 - Geller finds the likelihood of conflict between rivals increases as power becomes more equal.⁶⁶
 - Arms races are a necessary condition of war between rivals.⁶⁷
 - One criticism of this literature suggests that it is a mistake to consider each instance of an enduring conflict as an independent observation or as a new instance of conflict. Instead, it might be more appropriate to consider the rivalry as a single conflict with many outbreaks of violence or punctuated equilibrium. This is also an important empirical question.

Counterarguments

Despite robust evidence in favor of a link between rivalries and conflict, there are several counterarguments.

- It isn't power that drives enduring rivalry but an omitted variable; for example, contiguity.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Hensel, 1994.

⁶⁵ John Vasquez and Christopher S. Leskiw, "The Origins and War Proneness of Interstate Rivalries," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2001, pp. 295–316.

⁶⁶ Geller, 1993.

⁶⁷ Diehl, 1985.

⁶⁸ Diehl and Goertz, 2001.

- States involved in one conflict should be less likely to get involved in future conflicts, because fighting reveals information and makes subsequent violence less likely.⁶⁹

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Distribution of Power and Conflict

- COW and MID data are most common for measuring conflict and dispute.
- ICB data are also used to assess the effect of the distribution of power on escalation.
- Dyadic data are most common; dyadic data sets often include only major power and contiguous countries.
- To measure power, many studies use the CINC score (or some component of it), while others focus on military spending.
- Houweling and Siccama explicitly include demographic and political variables (Polity), and population characteristics.⁷⁰

Differences in Capabilities

- ICB data are also used to assess distribution of power on escalation.
- To measure power, many studies use the CINC score, while others focus on military spending.
- Dyadic data are most common, and such data sets often include only major power and contiguous data sets.

Arms Races

- Most research in this area relies on MID and COW data.
- Diehl and Goertz include a rivalry data code for enduring rivalries.⁷¹
- Wallace uses an arms race “index” but this measure is somewhat controversial. Diehl argues Wallace’s data set is affected by coding errors.⁷²
- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) offers data on military spending and arms purchases.
- Most research in this area relies on dyadic data; some dyadic data include only major powers.
- The remaining challenge is how to define an arms race in empirical terms.

⁶⁹ Diehl and Goertz, 2001.

⁷⁰ Houweling and Siccama, 1988.

⁷¹ Diehl and Goertz, 2001.

⁷² Wallace, 2001.

Alliance Formation

- Most research in this area relies on COW and MID data.
- Much research focuses on major powers because major powers are involved in most conflict.
- Singer and Small, along with ATOP data, are most commonly used as sources of alliances.⁷³ ATOP focuses on military alliances according to their most important provisions.
- Measures of relative capabilities between countries or alliance blocs rely on CINC scores from COW or military spending data (to identify states that are growing rapidly and that are dissatisfied).

Enduring Rivalries

- The Diehl and Goertz rivalry data set uses COW data (and includes the political shock variable).⁷⁴
- COW and MID data are used most often.
- Some work focuses only on major states or contiguous states—which might skew results.
- CINC scores (from COW) are used to measure capabilities, as are military spending data.
- Polity is used for regime type.
- Contiguity data are also collected through the COW project.
- ICOW is used for more-recent rivalry assessments, particularly those linking rivalry with territorial conflict/disputes.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Realist factors might help explain the mechanisms by which U.S. hegemony has reduced interstate conflict, by reducing uncertainty and preventing rivalries and arms races from escalating.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- The decline of U.S. power and hegemony could contribute to an increasingly equal distribution of power, which might foster new conflicts between the United States and its challengers (e.g., China), or small states that see a window to claim additional influence for themselves (small revisionist states).

⁷³ Singer and Small, 1974.

⁷⁴ Diehl and Goertz, 2001.

- Another alternative is that U.S. power remains sufficient to prevent any major shift in the international system. This stability might further reduce conflict.
- The United States could become more involved in international conflict simply by trying to maintain stability elsewhere. If the demands of this role are within U.S. capabilities, overall international conflict might be controlled, at some cost to the United States. If the demands exceed the capabilities of a declining U.S. hegemon, then international conflict could increase.
- Finally, the United States could become involved in new conflicts while trying to protect its position of primacy in the face of rising challenges.
- The effect of arms races on conflict might be different when nuclear weapons are involved (likely a stronger deterrent effect).
- The relationship between arms races and conflict might be different when nonstate actors are involved and when the conflict is unconventional. Proliferation of weapons to nonstate groups is likely to increase the potential for and intensity of conflict, especially for weak states, the existence of which might be seriously threatened by well-armed militants (e.g., Mali).
- The effect of alliances could shift as the balance of power within the international system changes (e.g., rise of China, decline of the United States, trouble in Europe) although it is hard to predict the direction of the effect.
- The United States might be pulled into conflict by aggressive, vulnerable, or strategically important allies, such as Israel, Afghanistan, South Korea, Japan, or “partners” in the war on terror.
- Norms against conflict and for territorial integrity make interstate war, even in enduring rivalries, less likely.
- Advances in nuclear and other weapons make the costs of conflict so high that war will not occur even in enduring rivalries.
- Enduring rivalries over territory will become more likely to lead to conflict as competition over resources intensifies.
- Enduring rivalries over political influence and the rules of the international system will increase and lead to conflict as U.S. dominance declines.

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13. Introduction to Intrastate Conflict

Introduction

While the incidence of war between states has been clearly declining for several decades, trends in intrastate violent conflict have been much more ambiguous. High-intensity intrastate conflicts (those with 100,000 or more deaths caused directly by violence in a single year) have been rare since the end of the Cold War. Similarly, the number of medium- and low-intensity intrastate conflicts (those with 1,000–100,000 and fewer than 1,000 battle deaths, respectively) peaked during the late Cold War. After an abrupt decline following the end of bipolar rivalry, their overall incidence has crept back up in the past few years—still below the high point reached during the Cold War, but substantially higher than most of the post–Cold War era.

Overview of the Literature

There is no one explanation for these trends; rather, there are a number of competing and complementary hypotheses, each of which can be debated. Taken together, these hypotheses and the evidence assembled to support or refute them yield a nuanced picture of intrastate violence. These hypotheses can be placed in ten broad categories, each of which is examined in detail in the remaining chapters of this report.

State Capacity

- Newly independent states are more prone to conflict.
- States with large and more-disciplined security forces are less prone to conflict.
- Poorly governed states—whether democratic or authoritarian—are more prone to conflict.

Demography

- Large (populous) countries are more prone to conflict.
- Countries with a high proportion of young males (“youth bulges”) are more prone to conflict, while aging populations might have a pacifying effect.

Repression

- Governments that repress their populations (or important subpopulations) are more likely to experience more intense forms of conflict.
- Governments that repress their populations (or important subpopulations) are less likely to experience conflict.

- The relationship between repression and conflict will take an inverted-U shape, with conflict highest when repression is moderate.

Democracy, Democratization, and Political Inclusion

- Democracy reduces the incidence of one-sided government violence, such as state repression and genocide.
- Due to their open societies and responsiveness to public opinion, democracies are particularly vulnerable to terrorism and likely to suffer higher levels of terrorist attacks.
- Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but partial democracies (“illiberal democracies” or “anocracies”) experience the highest level of civil war onsets.
- Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but states in the process of *becoming* democratic or autocratic (any state experiencing significant change in its regime type) are highly prone to civil wars.
- Conflicts are typically less intense in democratic polities, either because democracies are less prone to use violence indiscriminately during a civil war or insurgency, or because autocracies are more inclined to prolonged and highly intense fighting than to any significant accommodation.
- There exists an interaction effect such that democracy only exhibits pacifying effects in strong states or societies with high levels of development.

Economic Factors

- Economic grievances—particularly economic inequalities—lead to an increased incidence of violent conflict.
- Lower personal incomes or declines in personal incomes decrease the opportunity costs of engaging in violent conflict, therefore increasing its incidence.
- Sudden declines in income levels weaken state capacity to prevent or end violent conflict.

Natural Resources

- Natural resource wealth (dependence on such primary commodities as hydrocarbons, nonhydrocarbon minerals, and illicit narcotics) increases economic inequalities that in turn contribute to a higher incidence of violent conflict.
- Easily exploitable natural resources (those that are potentially high-profit, easily transportable, and easily appropriable, such as alluvial diamonds or illicit narcotics) increase the resources available to fund conflict.
- Primary commodity dependence makes states more economically vulnerable.
- The scarcity of renewable resources (e.g., water, arable land, forests, etc.) is a significant driver of violent conflict.

Legacies of Prior Conflict

- Social animosities and suspicions are inflamed throughout the course of fighting, leading to a raised risk of conflict onset in the post-conflict period.
- Civil wars leave behind organizational and material legacies that make the return to conflict more likely.

Technology

- The proliferation of traditional small arms and light weapons makes civil wars likelier, lengthier, and more deadly, and fuels large-scale criminal violence.
- New information and communications technologies (especially the Internet) facilitate the formation of armed nonstate actors, making intrastate conflict more likely.
- The diffusion of disruptive technologies (especially biotechnology and potentially cyberwar capabilities) potentially makes nonstate actors more dangerous than ever before.
- The diffusion of precision technologies and automation/robotics technologies has the potential to make state-supported nonstate actors more threatening to the U.S. Army than they have been historically.

International Norms

- The norms of sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders might have reduced conflict at the international level, but they have inadvertently perpetuated states with weak governing institutions and thereby fueled violent conflict at the intrastate level.
- The “international community” engages in a variety of activities—including international peace operations, democracy promotion, preventive diplomacy, and development assistance intended to strengthen the “resilience” of fragile states—that together have reduced the incidence of violent intrastate conflict.
- Norms of civilization and humanitarianism have gradually reduced the prevalence of violence in human relations.

Definitions and Data

Before reviewing the major findings of the literature, it is important to be explicit about the precise subjects being examined.

“Intrastate conflict” is defined here as violent conflict taking place predominantly within a single state and typically concerning the distribution of political power, economic resources, or identity-related rights within that state. We categorized all incidences of intrastate conflict into four major types:

- One-sided state violence, including genocide, “ethnic cleansing,” purges, and extrajudicial (state) killings
- State versus nonstate violence, including civil wars, wars of independence, insurgencies, and some riots
- Organized societal violence, such as ethnic or intercommunal war in which the state is not a major participant, some types of terrorism, some riots, and organized violent crime
- Spontaneous societal violence, such as pogroms, uprisings, some riots, and everyday violent crime.

Data on these types of conflict are available from a wide variety of sources. The most frequently used databases of civil wars (and related concepts such as insurgencies) are those of the UCDP and the PRIO—more commonly known as the Uppsala-PRIO data set—and the COW Intra-State War data set, as well as the modifications of these data sets used by a wide variety of academic researchers. Data on one-sided violence—including genocide, politicide, democide, violent state repression, and similar concepts—have been captured in the data set of the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) and the work of related scholars, the Political Terror Scale, the Minorities at Risk (MAR) project, Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) human rights indicators, and Barbara Harff’s genocide data set.¹ Data sets on terrorism include the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism’s Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB), the The International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE) data set, the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI), and others. Quality data on nonpolitical criminal violence are much more difficult to obtain. Most data sets use data reported by governments to entities such as the United Nations—a data-gathering method with a pronounced tendency toward bias. Some data sets—such as the Major Episodes of Political Violence and the Cross-National Time-Series Data (CNTS)—combine multiple categories of intrastate conflict.

¹ Barbara Harff, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder Since 1955,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, February 2003, pp. 57–73; David L. Cingranelli, David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay, “The CIRI Human Rights Dataset,” Version 2014.04.14, CIRI Human Rights Data Project website, 2014; PRS Group, *International Country Risk Guide*, undated; Monty Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Barbara Harff, *State Fragility Index*, Political Instability Task Force, 2014; World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, last updated July 1, 2015; Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand, “Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2002; World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (data), last updated March 2, 2014; World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (index), undated; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database*, last updated June 2015; Minorities at Risk Project, homepage, College Park, Md.: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, last updated July 28, 2014; RAND Corporation, *RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation and Memorial Institute for Prevention of Terrorism, undated; and Edward F. Mickolus, *International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events, 1968–1977 [ITERATE 2]*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, ICPSR07947-v1, 1982.

Major Findings

The following chapters explore the causes of violent intrastate conflict in detail. Many of the causes of wars and other violence are highly contested, and certainly no single theory of conflict emerges from the literature. A few major themes, however, deserve to be highlighted:

- Weak and poorly governed states are particularly at risk of intrastate conflict. This category includes newly created states, such as those that emerge from a secessionist conflict; highly corrupt states; and states with little capacity to collect taxes, offer public services, and generally exercise effective control throughout their territory. This finding is extremely robust—that is, a wide variety of measures of governing capacity are strong predictors of violent conflict, and the causal paths linking state capacity to violent conflict have been well specified.²
- Mature democracies appear to be the most stable form of governance, but democratization appears closely tied to the onset of violent conflict. The reason for the relationship between democratization and violent conflict, however, is hotly debated. Many contend that democratization itself is destabilizing because of its effect on the distribution of power and existing institutions, while others contend that this argument frequently reverses the cause-and-effect relationship. Unstable autocracies often offer partial political inclusion as a way of “buying off” discontent. Such partial concessions often lead both to partial democratization *and* to violent conflict. In such cases, the source of instability preceded the movement toward democracy, but statistical analyses might be unable to detect these different causal relationships.
- One of the strongest findings in the entire literature on intrastate conflict is the link between poverty and violence. The reasons for this relationship, however, are strongly contested, as are the policy implications. Some see poverty driving conflict through economic inequalities and resulting grievances. Others argue that income levels are actually an indicator of governance. Poor countries tend to have weak governments, which in turn are incapable of policing extralegal opposition or offering sufficient inducements to ensure citizen loyalty. Finally, some argue that the poverty-violence link should be understood in terms of a labor market. Where societies are wealthy enough to make labor in the licit economy more attractive than crime or rebellion, people will work there. These three understandings of the poverty-violence linkage have divergent policy implications. Depending on which one is accepted, a policymaker might prioritize reducing inequalities, investing in police and other security forces, or creating jobs.

² See, especially, James D. Fearon, “Governance and Civil War Onset,” World Development Report 2011 Background Paper, Washington, D.C., August 31, 2010.

- Demographic imbalances and resource scarcities might also lead to violence. In the past few decades, many scholars have claimed that environmental degradation might fuel conflict, as might the so-called “youth bulges” (where young men constitute a disproportionately large segment of the population). Most recent scholarship, however, suggests that these pressures by themselves are unlikely to spark large-scale violence; rather, it is only when they combine with other factors already discussed—such as poor governance or high levels of unemployment in the licit economy—that they become highly destabilizing.
- Technological changes might also be related to intrastate conflict. The Arab Spring, for instance, highlighted the ability of information and communications technology—social media in particular—to facilitate the organization of violent opposition to regimes. Technological advances also could be enhancing the lethality of nonstate actors; medical and scientific journals, for instance, have recently published highly sensitive details about how deadly diseases might be engineered. To this point, however, many of these claims remain speculative. The technologies that have had the most demonstrable effect on violent conflict have been extremely low-tech. The ready availability of conventional small arms and light weapons appears to have made violent conflict deadlier and possibly more frequent. The effects of more sophisticated technologies are less clear. Social media, for instance, has made it easier for nonstate actors to organize, but it has also made it easier for governments to eavesdrop on these groups.
- Finally, some argue that norms of peaceful conflict resolution have grown steadily stronger and now reduce the incidence of violent conflict. These norms have become institutionalized at the domestic level (e.g., in democracy’s commitment to the peaceful resolution of political conflicts) and at the international level (e.g., United Nations peace operations). Unfortunately, normative commitments are difficult to measure. They also might change. The United Nations, for instance, was seldom able to undertake effective peace operations during the Cold War, and renewed major-power rivalry at the international level might again paralyze the world body and similar institutions.

Implications for Global Trends and Future Conflict

Given these uncertainties, what can we say with any confidence about the likely course of future events? Attempting precise predictions of the future 20 or 30 years out is folly.³ However, a number of factors are particularly likely to shape the future of conflict and should be closely monitored.

³ See, for instance, Robert J. Lempert, Steven W. Popper, and Steven C. Bankes, *Shaping the Next One Hundred Years: New Methods for Quantitative, Long-Term Policy Analysis*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1626-RPC, 2003.

The Rise of Nonstate Actors

Overall, it is important to recognize that there has been a significant shift in power between states and nonstate actors. A variety of factors have contributed to this change, including the end of the Cold War, changing norms about political participation, and new mechanisms for political organization. Perhaps most important of all, however, has been the role of technological change in facilitating communication among nonstate actors (e.g., by means of the Internet and social media) and potentially increasing the lethality of nonstate actors dedicated to the use of violence.

Good Governance

Studies of intrastate conflict typically find that mature democracies are the most stable form of government, but that democratization processes and intermediate regime types (such as “illiberal” or “quasi” democracies) are associated with higher levels of conflict. The world has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of at least partially democratic governments over the past few decades. If these democracies are able to consolidate themselves in the coming two to three decades, it could significantly improve overall levels of intrastate conflict. Moreover, since a wide range of literature suggests that democracies are better able to cooperate with one another at the international level, successful democratic consolidation might facilitate agreements among democracies, which in turn would have second- and third-order consequences for the incidence of intrastate conflict.

Economic Growth and Instability

Economic development is strongly associated with stability—on this nearly all studies agree. The general trend of the past several decades has been toward ever-higher income levels (as measured, for instance, in GDP per capita). Even Africa, which had been a laggard through the 1990s, demonstrated reasons for optimism over the past decade, when it was the fastest-growing continent in the world. Some observers, however, fear that the global economic order that has endured since the end of the Second World War is coming under severe strain.⁴ If persistent economic crises prevail in the coming decades, then the incidence of violent intrastate conflict is likely to rise dramatically.

Proxy Conflicts

One of the clearest patterns in the historical data is the relationship of the Cold War to intrastate conflict. Civil wars and insurgencies peaked late in the Cold War era, then fell afterward. Were the current general agreement on the “rules of the game” among the great powers to collapse, however, we might well see the return of patterns of intrastate conflict that

⁴ See, for instance, World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2013*, 8th ed., Geneva.

predominated during the Cold War. As nuclear weapons and other high-end military capabilities proliferate, middle-rank powers might feel sufficiently secure against reprisals that they can afford to engage in proxy conflicts in regions of interest, much as the United States and Soviet Union did.

Technology

Technology by itself has an ambiguous relationship on the *incidence* of intrastate conflict. It can dramatically increase the *lethality* of conflict, however. The diffusion of increasingly lethal technologies, such as bioengineering and precision weaponry, could increase the costs of conflict, both globally and for the United States in particular.

Neo-Malthusian Crisis

A final source of change in intrastate conflict trends might come from neo-Malthusian pressures. Thomas Malthus was the British scholar whose writings in the late 18th and early 19th centuries popularized the idea that population growth would eventually cause humanity to exceed the resource base necessary to sustain itself, leading to widespread famine and disease. Human ingenuity and resulting gains in efficiency have thus far prevented such a crisis. In general, the literature has found that demographic pressures and resource scarcities can exacerbate existing problems, but the primary drivers of conflict lie elsewhere (for instance, in poor governance and weak economic performance). It is possible however, that climate change or other environmental dynamics might finally overtake humanity's ability to compensate through innovation. An intense and widespread neo-Malthusian crisis would almost certainly spark a rapid increase in intrastate conflict.

The following chapters review all ten categories of hypotheses on the causes of violent intrastate conflict, setting out the precise hypotheses, the evidence supporting or contradicting these hypotheses, how these hypotheses explain recent global conflict trends, and why the future might differ from the recent past.

14. State Capacity

Overview

Many arguments link state capacity and civil war, as well as state capacity and other forms of political violence. Most fundamentally, low-capacity states are more likely to experience conflict because they provide potential militant groups with the means and opportunity to initiate conflict and because these states are themselves unable to control or stop insurgencies.¹ Low-capacity states might even have characteristics that exacerbate violence. Many different mechanisms might explain the link between capacity and violence, some of which receive fairly robust support. The list below includes some of the more popular and empirically verified arguments.²

- States with low capacity are unable to provide public goods and services to their population, which leads to poverty and grievances that make militant groups popular.
- States with low capacity are easy targets for militant groups because they lack the institutions to solidify power or suppress violence.
- States with low capacity cannot provide security, leading individuals to seek militant groups for security provision or to provide their own security, leading to conflict.
- Low-capacity states cannot tax, which means they also lack revenue needed to provide public goods and lack an institutional tie with the population that might reduce grievance and public willingness to turn to militant groups for support and services.
- Low-capacity states might also be resource-rich states. If “lootable” resources are not secured, insurgent groups could emerge to seize them and might use income from these resources to fund their activities.
- Low-capacity states might not be able to secure all their territory, creating safe havens for terrorist and insurgent groups.
- Low-capacity states often suffer from weak and undisciplined security forces, which perpetrate abuses that lead to violent reaction by local populations.

¹ Perhaps the most commonly cited version of this argument is that made in James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75–90.

² For examples and evidence of these arguments, see for example, Fearon and Laitin, 2003; James D. Fearon, “Self-Enforcing Democracy,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 126, No. 4, November 2011, pp. 1661–1708; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On Economic Causes of Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1998, pp. 563–573; Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 6, 2004b, pp. 814–858; Nicole Ball, “Strengthening Democratic Governance of the Security Sector in Conflict-Affected Countries,” *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, pp. 25–38; and Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective*, April 2005.

- New and transitioning states often suffer from low institutional capacity as a result of their “newness” and tend to be more prone to conflict as a result. These states also could be forced to face large populations of displaced fighters or political competition between winners and losers from the transition that makes conflict more likely.

Although there does seem to be reasonably robust evidence that state capacity and violence are associated, the mechanisms that link the two are a source of greater dispute. The empirical literature is filled with different specifications of this relationship, each relying on different proxies for state capacity and civil war. Some results are more robust than others. There is a fairly well established link between GDP per capita and conflict (but no clear explanation as to why GDP matters), between transition states and conflict, and between weak or corrupt military institutions and conflict.³ The ratio of taxes to GDP, government spending, and measures of institutional quality are less consistently associated with violence. These varying results suggest that state capacity might matter in many different ways to different conflicts, depending on the specific context, political situation, and level of economic development. It also suggests that additional work to tease out how capacity leads to conflict might be necessary. Finally, there are some concerns about endogeneity in empirical specifications of the relationship between civil war and state capacity, since low capacity might contribute to civil war, but state capacity might also be destroyed by conflict.

Empirical work on state capacity uses a variety of indicators on capacity including the ratio of taxes to GDP, GDP per capita, the ratio of trade to GDP, government spending, the political terror scale, regime type, resource dependence, measures of human rights abuses (such as CIRI), measures of political institution such as Worldwide Governance Indicator (WGI) or International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), military spending, police or military force size, or state fragility index scores produced by PITF. Measures of conflict include the COW intrastate data, the UCDP data, civil war data sets compiled by Sambanis; Fearon; and Collier and Hoeffler, and data on extrajudicial killings, torture, assassinations, etc. Economic data come from the World Bank and many relevant socioeconomic variables are available through the World Development Indicators (WDI) data set produced by the World Bank.⁴

³ Although some scholars use GDP per capita as a measure of state capacity (see, for instance, Fearon and Laitin, 2003, pp. 75–90), this argument is conceptually distinct from the effects of economic factors, which are discussed in a separate section below. Using GDP per capita as a measure of state capacity has come in for considerable criticism; it is a very crude measure of the concept, at best.

⁴ Sambanis, 2004b, pp. 814–858; Fearon, 2011, pp. 1661–1708; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; David L. Cingranelli, David L. Richards, K. Chad Clay, “The CIRI Human Rights Dataset,” Version 2014.04.14, CIRI Human Rights Data Project website, 2014; World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (data), last updated March 2, 2014; World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (index), undated; PRS Group, *International Country Risk Guide*, undated; Monty Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Barbara Harff, *State Fragility Index and Matrix*, Political Instability Task Force, 2014; World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, last updated July 1, 2015; and Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand, “Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2002.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The number of sovereign countries swelled dramatically during the period of decolonization, roughly from the end of World War II to the 1970s. Dozens of new states were born in this period, and most of them were extremely weak. The legacy of their colonial histories often included comparatively low levels of education among their civil servants, governing institutions that were created nearly from scratch, populations with little reason to trust their governments, and so on. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of intrastate conflicts have been concentrated in these countries. Over time, however, many of these postcolonial states have gradually strengthened. This process might account, in part, for the general decline in intrastate conflict that the world has seen over the past several decades. The trend, however, remains highly uneven, with some countries (e.g., the Democratic Republic of Congo) trapped in lengthy and extremely bloody civil wars. Importantly, some scholars of state capacity note that while the overall trend is toward improvement on dimensions of state capacity, such as quality of political and economic governance, states with the lowest capacity are not keeping up with this trend, falling further behind global averages and into patterns of chronic state fragility and failure.

A continued trend toward the strengthening of state institutions throughout the developing world might lead to further decline in the incidence of violent intrastate conflict. It is also possible that a prolonged period of global economic volatility or other wide-ranging crisis could undermine the governing capacity of fragile states, thereby halting or possibly reversing the trend toward lower levels of violence.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

There are several hypotheses linking state capacity to the incidence of armed conflict:

- Newly independent states are more prone to conflict.
- States with large and more-disciplined security forces are less prone to conflict.
- Poorly governed states—whether democratic or authoritarian—are more prone to conflict.

Hypothesis

Newly independent states are more prone to conflict.

What the Literature Says

- States in transition or newly independent states lack the institutions needed to exert full control or provide a full range of services to their populations. This might spark grievance that leads to conflict.⁵
- States in transition might not be able to secure “lootable” resources. This might increase the space (and the value of conflict) for rebels able to exploit gaps in state control.⁶
- In any transition state, there might still be tensions and hostility between former combatants or rival groups involved in the independence movement (or war) that might make continued conflict or resumed conflict more likely.
- New states formed through conflict might struggle to integrate former fighters, especially if they also have weak institutional capacity.⁷
- Gurr finds that democratization itself can promote political violence because formerly powerful actors might seek to preserve their authority in the midst of uncertainty fostered by the democratic process.⁸
- Vreeland suggests that in addition to institutional weaknesses, new states might have more-intense political competition (and few institutions to regulate), which could lead to conflict and civil war.⁹
- Transitions to statehood create winners and losers, which is likely to lead to new conflict.¹⁰
- If a new state were formed as part of a partition or succession, conflict might be especially likely because territorial conflicts like these are hard to solve and lead to recurring conflict.¹¹

⁵ Ted Robert Gurr, “Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1993, pp. 161–201; and Ted Robert Gurr, Monty G. Marshall, and Deepa Khosla, *Peace and Conflict 2001: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, College Park, Md.: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2000.

⁶ Fearon, 2011; and Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁷ Barnett R. Rubin, “Constructing Sovereignty for Security,” *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2005, pp. 93–106.

⁸ Gurr, 1993; and Gurr, 2000.

⁹ James Raymond Vreeland, “The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 3, June 2008, pp. 401–425.

¹⁰ Lars-Erik Cederman, Simon Hug, and Lutz F. Krebs, “Democratization and Civil War: Empirical Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2010, pp. 377–394.

¹¹ Vreeland, 2008; Cederman, Hug, and Krebs, 2010; and Gurr, 1993.

- New states could have large, displaced populations and weak or nonexistent formal economies, creating unemployed recruitable populations and economic grievances that fuel conflict.¹²
- Democratization and regime change do appear to increase the likelihood of conflict, but autocratization does not.¹³
- To the extent that foreign intervention occurs along with new state formation, foreign activities might stunt state capacity growth and trigger reactions that ultimately favor new conflicts.¹⁴
- Hegre and Sambanis find evidence that new states are more likely to suffer outbreak of severe civil wars (more than 1,000 battle deaths), although this result does not hold as consistently when conflict is defined at 25 battle deaths (using UCDP/PRIO).¹⁵
- Fearon finds that new states seem more likely to suffer from civil war across specifications.¹⁶
- Abadie and Iqbal and Zorn find that nonconsolidated democracies are more likely to exhibit terrorism and political violence.¹⁷

Hypothesis

States with large and more-disciplined security forces are less prone to conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Politicized, badly managed, or ineffective security bodies and justice systems have often been a source of instability and insecurity, ranging from corruption to abuses of human rights and significant loss of life and assets through violent conflict.¹⁸
 - People might be motivated to rebel by police corruption.

¹² Rubin, 2005.

¹³ Cederman, Hug, and Krebs, 2010.

¹⁴ Rubin, 2005.

¹⁵ Håvard Hegre and Nicholas Sambanis, “Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 508–535.

¹⁶ Fearon, 2011.

¹⁷ Alberto Abadie, *Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism*, National Bureau of Economic Research, KSG Working Paper No. RWP04–043, October 2004; and Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn, “The Political Economy of Assassination: 1946–2002,” presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 2003, pp. 3–6.

¹⁸ Ball, 2005.

- Without effective state security, people might try to provide their own security and this could lead to armed militias and competition that ultimately result in additional conflict or acceptance of violence as a dispute settlement mechanism.
 - Budgets skewed toward security forces might divert needed funds from other state building tasks.
 - Actions of corrupt security forces that seize the resources of local populations could exacerbate economic hardships and grievances that lead to war.
- Effective security forces might be able to control militant violence and provide security to local populations, limiting incentives to join militant groups only for protection.¹⁹
 - A strong security force can provide and implement a legal framework consistent with international law and democratic practice, which limits civil war.²⁰
 - State monopoly on means of violence is essential to ending civil war—a disciplined security force helps ensure this monopoly is both maintained and sufficient to prevent either the demand for more militant groups or the proliferation of violence.²¹
 - Effective security forces might be less likely to perpetrate unsanctioned acts of repression that trigger micromobilization and support for conflict.²²
 - State institutions backed by strong police and military capabilities, with administrative reach into rural areas, are essential elements of a government’s ability to project its force across the territory and impose order within its jurisdiction.²³
 - Hegre and Sambanis find that large militaries are associated with reduced conflict likelihood. Large militaries might be able to restrain insurgencies or repress violence before it gets to the level of war.²⁴
 - Undisciplined and poorly trained security forces might join in civil violence or facilitate it, leading to conflict escalation.²⁵
 - Fearon and Laitin argue that the state’s military, policing, and administrative powers influence the government’s ability to monitor, deter, and suppress dissent before it materializes into efficient rebel organizations that confront the state with armed force.²⁶

¹⁹ Ball, 2005.

²⁰ Ball, 2005.

²¹ Fearon, 2001; and Rubin, 2005.

²² Fearon, 2001; Rubin, 2005; and Ball, 2005.

²³ Jeffrey Herbst, “African Militaries and Rebellion: The Political Economy of Threat and Combat Effectiveness,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, May 2004, pp. 357–369.

²⁴ Hegre and Sambanis, 2006.

²⁵ Weinstein, 2006; and Rubin, 2005.

²⁶ Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

Hypothesis

Poorly governed states—whether democratic or authoritarian—are more prone to conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Weak governance contributes to violence in a number of ways.
 - Inability of the state to provide necessary services, support, security, etc., leads to grievances and creates space for militant groups to function, thrive, and recruit.²⁷
 - Inability of the government to secure lootable resources or to police banking and capital markets create financing for conflict.²⁸
 - Weak states lack the institutions and security forces to stop violence once it has started or prevent it from escalating.²⁹
 - Inability of the state to tax or accumulate resources limits its ability to provide public goods, which also undermines its legitimacy.³⁰
- Fearon finds that there are a number of potentially relevant state capacity variables that predict likelihood of new conflict—especially GDP per capita. He also identifies measures of institutional capacity and risk (e.g., the ICRG or WGI institutional risk guides) that are associated with civil war (relevant ICRG indicators include such things as bureaucratic quality, military in politics, and corruption).³¹ Each indicator might represent a slightly different type or manifestation of state capacity. That so many different variables might be relevant suggests the many ways in which state capacity might contribute to violence.
- Anocracies are the least institutionally capable countries.³² These states exhibit repression, some limited openness, corruption, and institutional challenge: “an

²⁷ Fearon, 2011; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2004a, pp. 563–595; and Sambanis, 2004b

²⁸ Weinstein 2006; and Weinstein, 2005.

²⁹ Fearon, 2011; and Sambanis, 2004b.

³⁰ Fearon, 2011; and Sambanis, 2004b.

³¹ Fearon, 2011.

³² Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, 2001, pp. 33–48; see, also, Scott Gates, Håvard Hegre, Mark P. Jones, and Håvard Strand, “Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800–2000,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 893–908.

unfortunate mix that enables the annoyed populace to protest against the inept regime, which all too often responds by” supporting militant and paramilitary groups.³³

- Weak governance lowers costs to mobilize and use violence against the government, which could affect calculations of local populations, thus increasing conflict.³⁴
- Transitional and institutionally inconsistent regimes, as well as impoverished countries, account for a large majority of contemporary civil wars.³⁵ The reason is simple: A state's monopoly on the use of force is secured only by its ability to dissuade potential challengers.
- A state's ability to enforce property rights might also be relevant, as a clear rule of law can reduce conflict at the local level.³⁶
- In addition to political correlates, several relevant economic variables suggest a relationship between economic capacity and civil war.
 - Fearon and Laitin show that, controlling for per capita income (as a measure of state capacity), democracies are no more or less likely to experience conflict than autocracies.³⁷
 - Poor states are unable to provide goods and infrastructure, which increases demands for militant groups. Poverty is also associated with inequality and corruption, which further lower the opportunity costs of rebellion.³⁸
 - Buhaug finds that low economic development and institutional capacity are linked with likelihood of conflict.³⁹
 - De Soysa proxies governance as a ratio of GDP to trade, arguing that this measure assesses the overall ability of the government to provide what populations need, to address scarcity with trade, and to maintain the existence of institutions to support trade. She finds a significant relationship between this ratio and civil war.

³³ Halvard Buhaug, “Relative Capability and Rebel Objective in Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2006, pp. 691–708.

³⁴ Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; and Collier and Hoeffler, 2004a.

³⁵ Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; and Hegre et al., 2001.

³⁶ Rubin, 2005; Ball, 2005; and Cameron G. Thies, “The Political Economy of State Building in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 2007, pp. 716–731.

³⁷ Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

³⁸ Collier and Hoeffler, 2004a.

³⁹ Buhaug, 2006.

Governments that are less able to provide for their population, due to poor economic conditions, therefore, are more susceptible to civil war.⁴⁰

As further evidence that both economic and political capacity matter, Collier and Hoeffler and Weinstein argue that both grievance rebellion and opportunistic rebellions are driven by weak governance (and seemingly by the presence of lootable resources).⁴¹ *This is the root of a link between resource dependence, capacity, and civil war.* There are three relevant mechanisms: (1) Corrupt, detached leaders more concerned with extracting personal gain than with providing for the population (likely where there are natural resources) foster grievances; (2) weak governance leaves space for militants to recruit and is often associated with poor economic outcomes that make recruitment easier; and (3) weak control of lootable resources increases incentives for militant groups.⁴²

- However, while capacity might matter, Fearon finds little evidence that institutional reform, in and of itself, explains conflict incidence or onset.⁴³

In addition to arguments focused on the link between capacity and conflict writ large, there are also specific arguments about capacity and terrorism.

- Piazza suggests that state failure and extreme forms of low state capacity (characterized by institutional weakness and the existence of ungoverned spaces), is a more significant predictor of terrorism than democracy.⁴⁴
- Militant and terrorist groups thrive in weakly governed states—those that have infrastructure and some level of economic development, but that are unable to control their territory. Note that these are NOT the weakest states, but those that are fragile and failing.⁴⁵

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- There are many ways to measure state capacity: tax capacity, military strength/size, GDP per capita, regime type, or spending. The choice of proxy determines the specific mechanism being tested.

⁴⁰ Indra De Soysa, “Paradise Is a Bazaar? Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil War, 1989–99,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2002a, pp. 395–416.

⁴¹ Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004a; and Weinstein, 2006.

⁴² Weinstein, 2005; and Collier and Hoeffler, 1998.

⁴³ Fearon, 2011.

⁴⁴ James A. Piazza, “Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure, and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern Countries,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 6, 2007, pp. 521–539.

⁴⁵ Abadie, 2004; Piazza, 2007; and Weinstein, 2006.

- Regime type is usually measured using the Polity data set, maintained by the Center for Systemic Peace. Other political indicators include the CPIA institutional indices.
- The WDI data set includes a wide range of political and economic indicators including population, GDP, GDP per capita, urbanization, and tax collection that are often used to study state capacity and civil war.
- Penn World Tables provide some relevant data.
- ICRG (institutional risk) measures are sometimes used as measures of state capacity and risk of state failure.
- Measures of violence used in tests of state capacity include intrastate COW data and UCDP data, as well as data sets developed (usually from COW or UCDP) by Sambanis, Collier and Hoeffler, and Fearon and Laitin.⁴⁶
- State failure indices, such as the PITF, are also used.
- The Political Terror Scale is used as a measure of state violence, along with CIRI human rights indicators.

Data and Modeling Caveats and Considerations

- There might be some endogeneity issues because civil war could result from low state capacity but civil war will also destroy state capacity.
 - Thies argues that conflict onset and state capacity are not associated once endogeneity between the two is accounted for.⁴⁷
 - The oil exporter variable is relevant—might be that state capacity does matter but works through other channels (economic and political).
- Polity data are often used to assess regime type, but polity indexes might be endogenous to civil war onset (certain regime characteristics might necessarily be associated with the existence of civil war—as a result, much of the data lag the polity measure).
- Different measures of state capacity (regime type, democratization, economic development, tax or trade ratios, police force or military spending, etc.) show different relationships, so they must be precise and careful when describing and tracking trends.

Different measures of state capacity appear to show different associations with different measures of civil war and conflict depending on the way these relationships are specified and which specific variables are selected. Certain variables, such as GDP per capita and regime type, are similarly relevant across specifications, while others matter in a more constrained set of situations. As noted above, this suggests that there are specific manifestations of state capacity

⁴⁶ Sambanis, 2004b; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; and Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

⁴⁷ Thies, 2007.

that are more relevant than others to incidence of conflict, but also that state capacity might affect conflict likelihood in many ways.

Other Relevant Factors

- There might be a link between state capacity and oil or other natural resources (and they might have a joint association with conflict likelihood): Having access to oil wealth might reduce incentives to develop state institutions needed to tax population—this might limit institutional development, negatively affect state governance, and ultimately drive a wedge between local populations and the leader, contributing to grievances that later spark conflict.
- Population and country size might matter: Larger countries or countries with larger populations might simply be harder to govern and control.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The gradual strengthening of many postcolonial states since their independence might help to explain the global decline (albeit gradual and inconsistent) in violent intrastate conflict.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- Low state capacity and state failure appear to be becoming increasingly common in certain parts of the world and could become increasingly important causes of conflict—especially low-intensity violence between militarized opposition groups and the state.
- Potential for future global economic shocks might further reduce the capacity of weak states—or at least prevent them from getting ahead or building productive economic institutions over the long run.
- The emergence of new democracies in the Middle East and North Africa region increases the number of transition states potentially at risk for conflict or violence driven by weak capacity.
- Several decades of weak capacity in the states of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia could eventually result in more widespread political violence, terrorism, or conflict.

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15. Demography

Overview

Theories that link demography with civil war fall into two main categories: those arguing that demographic pressures create grievances and dynamics that feed motivation and demand for conflict, and those suggesting that demographic characteristics in certain countries increase the feasibility or opportunity for conflict.

Malthusian arguments propose that large and rapidly growing populations are more prone to conflict and suggest several mechanisms that could explain this relationship. First, large populations could create internal pressures, greater demand for scarce resources, and competition over those resources. Ultimately, this competition might lead to violence and war. Scarcity might also contribute to poverty, thus increasing economic grievances, or it might leave the government in a position where it cannot provide sufficient services to meet the population's needs, spurring political grievances. Either type of grievance could contribute to conflict. Finally, larger populations, especially where economic opportunities are lacking, could increase the opportunity for violence by creating a larger pool of possible recruits able to join militant groups and participate in violence. There is empirical evidence to support the existence of a relationship between population and conflict: An extensive range of studies have found the log of a given state's population to be a significant and positive predictor of civil war.

However, there are also arguments against the relationship between population and conflict. For example, some research suggests that resources are unlikely to grow so scarce that scarcity leads to conflict. Instead, these studies show that countries and societies have adapted and benefited from a larger population, which can spur technological innovation and growth. However, a country's ability to achieve this type of development might depend on regime type and level of development.

Rather than population growth writ large, it might be specific types of population changes that affect the likelihood of conflict—for example, rapid growth in the labor force, unequal population growth, and migration. Some studies find that rapid urbanization contributes to conflict, possibly because rapidly growing urban areas are often poor and lack government services, and thus their populations are susceptible to recruitment by extremist or antigovernment groups promising to deliver such services. Unequal population growth that leads to shifts in the distribution of wealth and resources or political influence between groups, including ethnic groups within a country, might also trigger competition and conflict or exacerbate existing intergroup tensions.

Another set of arguments suggests that “youth bulges”—large increases in the population of 15- to 29-year-old men—increase the likelihood of conflict. Several studies confirm an

association between this group and the likelihood of conflict or rebellion and note that this group is responsible for a large share of political violence and crime. The conflict-inducing effects of youth bulges appear especially significant when economic opportunities are lacking, and this population of individuals is left unemployed and “available” for recruitment by antigovernment and other violent groups. There is little empirical evidence, however, of the opposite relationship—that aging of the population leads to a more pacific society less prone to conflict.

There is fairly significant empirical evidence in favor of a positive relationship between demographic characteristics, including population size and youth bulges, and the incidence of conflict. However, most studies make it clear that these factors in and of themselves are unlikely to cause conflict. Instead, population size, population growth, urbanization, and youth bulges are all factors that contribute to the risk of conflict in conjunction with other factors, such as slow economic growth, unemployment, resource scarcity, ethnic conflict, and weak government. They might also be factors that are becoming less relevant, because birth rates are almost universally falling (including in Muslim countries).

Data used to test theories of population growth rely on population data from the Penn World Tables, socioeconomic data from the World Bank, Polity data on democracy and regime type, and usually the UCDP/PRIODATA database to measure armed conflict. Some use the COW data or COW-derived intrastate conflict data used by Collier and Hoeffler or Fearon and Laitin.¹ Studies that instead focus on riots, protests, rebellions, and other types of political violence make use of the PITF data set, CNTS databank, or MAR.²

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

As the discussion above indicates, demographic factors are best understood as contributors to the incidence of conflict, in conjunction with other factors. The recently observed global decline in birth rates suggests that demographics might help reinforce the gradual decline in the incidence of intrastate violence over much of the past two to three decades.

¹ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On Economic Causes of Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1998, pp. 563–573; and James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75–90.

² Alan Heston, Robert Summers, and Bettina Aten, “Penn World Table,” Version 7.1, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania, November 2012; World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, last updated July 1, 2015; Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, “Polity IV: Political and Regime Characteristics, 1800–2013,” Polity IV Project, last updated June 6, 2014; Monty Marshall, *Major Episodes of Political Violence, 1946–2014*, Political Instability Task Force, last updated April 16, 2015; Cross National Time Series Data Archive, homepage, undated; and Minorities at Risk Project, “Minorities at Risk Dataset,” College Park, Md.: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2009.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

Demographic factors might be linked to variation in the incidence of violent conflict in a number of ways:

- Large (populous) countries are more prone to conflict.
- Countries with a high proportion of young males (“youth bulges”) are more prone to conflict, while aging populations might have a pacifying effect.
- Shifts in the relative strength of different religious or ethnic groups might contribute to conflict.
- Urban centers are often susceptible to factors such as crime, instability, and large economic inequalities, all of which could lead to radicalization and conflict.
- Gender imbalances (such as those in India and China) could lead to both internal and external conflict.

Hypothesis

Large (populous) countries are more prone to conflict.

What the Literature Says

- The log of a given state’s population has been found to be a significant and positive predictor of civil war by an extensive range of studies. In other words, intrastate conflict is more likely where the population is large. Large populations might increase resource pressure or simply increase the potential fault lines along which conflict might erupt.³

³ Nicholas Sambanis, “Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1),” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2001, pp. 259–282; John C. Anyanwu, *Economic and Political Causes of Civil Wars in Africa: Some Econometric Results*, African Development Bank, 2002; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2004a, pp. 563–595; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2002, pp. 13–28; Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, “How Much War Will We See? Explaining the Prevalence of Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2002, pp. 307–334; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti, “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 112, No. 4, 2004, pp. 725–753; Marta Reynal-Querol, “Does Democracy Preempt Civil Wars?” *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2005, pp. 445–465; James D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2005, pp. 483–507; Ambrose R. Jusu, *Problems in Sub-Saharan African Economic Development: An Analysis of the Economic Causes of Civil Wars*, New York: New School University, 2006; Päivi Lujala, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Elisabeth Gilmore, “A Diamond Curse? Civil War and a Lootable Resource,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2005, pp. 538–562; Patrick M. Regan and Daniel Norton, “Greed, Grievance, and Mobilization in Civil Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2005, pp. 319–336; Randall J. Blimes, “The Indirect Effect of Ethnic Heterogeneity on the Likelihood of Civil War Onset,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 536–547; Michael Ross, “A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War,” *Annual Review Political Science*, Vol. 9, 2006, pp. 265–300; Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2006, p. 335; Clayton L. Thyne, “Cheap Signals with Costly Consequences: The Effect of Interstate Relations on Civil War,” *Journal of*

- Malthusian arguments suggest that large populations lead to internal pressure and demand for resources, which, in turn, lead to internal competition for those resources and ultimately conflict and war.⁴
- Some arguments focus on how population size affects opportunity for conflict. Larger populations might provide a wider base for rebels to recruit supporters, thus making war more feasible.
- Scarcity caused by large populations or by population growth might lead to conflict because: (1) poverty might lead to grievances or provide ready recruits for militants; (2) government might lack capital to provide services and support to its whole population and this could lead to grievances.⁵
- Bruckner uses an instrumental variable (IV) approach (with randomly occurring drought as the IV) to show a strong link between population size and civil conflicts.⁶
- Collier and Hoeffler, and Fearon and Laitin find that larger populations are linked with heightened risks of intrastate war.⁷
- Homer-Dixon suggests that it is not just population size, but unequal population growth that contributes to conflict.⁸ Specifically, it is the uneven spread of resources across the population that results in suffering and can then lead to conflict.
- Population density might be more relevant to conflict than simply growth. There is little empirical support for an argument that population growth in and of itself leads to conflict.⁹
- Variables such as the ratio of urbanization to development (or rapid urban population growth), infant mortality, and life expectancy ratios are useful in PITF models that

Conflict Resolution, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2006, pp. 937–961; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Transnational Dimensions of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2007, pp. 293–309; and Susumu Suzuki, “Major Arms Imports and the Onset of Civil and Ethnic Wars in the Postcolonial World, 1956–1998: A Preliminary Reassessment,” *The Social Science Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2007, pp. 99–111.

⁴ Henrik Urdal, “The Devil in the Demographics: How Youth Bulges Influence the Risk of Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950–2000,” New Orleans, La.: *International Studies Association 43rd Annual Convention*, 2002; and Nazli Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence: Propositions, Insights, and Evidence*, Lexington, Mass., Lexington Books, 1974.

⁵ Markus Bruckner and Antonio Ciccone, *Growth, Democracy, and Civil War*, CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP6568, 2008.

⁶ Bruckner and Ciccone, 2008. Instrumental variables are used in statistical analysis to better establish causality and address concerns caused by highly correlated covariates.

⁷ Collier and Hoeffler, 2004a; and Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

⁸ Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.

⁹ Urdal, 2002; Choucri, 1974; and Jack A. Goldstone, “Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2002, pp. 3–21.

predict conflict, so even if population size is not a significant predictor, there are elements and characteristics of population and demographics that do matter.¹⁰

- Once countries experiencing enduring conflict are factored out, countries in the middle stages of demographic transition are more likely to experience conflict than others (those with high birth and death rates).¹¹
- Distribution and location of population growth or density might matter: Not all locations and types of population growth are the same. Unequal population density across a country could contribute to conflict.¹²

Counterarguments

- A handful of studies have failed to find a significant relationship between population and conflict.¹³
- Some suggest that resources are unlikely to grow so scarce that scarcity triggers conflict. Instead, where shortfalls exist, people are able to adapt.¹⁴
- Countries with the ability to adapt to scarcity might benefit from higher population growth, because more people could provide more inputs for technological innovation and growth. Here, regime type and level of development matter.¹⁵
- Rather than population growth writ large, specific types of population changes might be what affect the likelihood of conflict (e.g., rapid growth in the labor force, unequal population growth, migrations).¹⁶
- It is not scarcity that leads to war; rather, the abundance of lootable, exploitable resources is what will likely lead to conflict.¹⁷

¹⁰ Jack A. Goldstone, "Demography, Environment and Security: An Overview," in Myron Weiner and Sharon Stanton Russell, eds., *Demography and National Security*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2001, pp. 38–61.

¹¹ Urdal, 2002; Choucri, 1974; and Goldstone, 2002.

¹² Urdal, 2002; Choucri, 1974; and Goldstone, 2002.

¹³ Marta Reynal-Querol, "Ethnicity, Political Systems, and Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2002, pp. 29–54; Indra De Soysa, "Paradise Is a Bazaar? Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil War, 1989–99," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2002, pp. 395–416; Indra De Soysa and Eric Neumayer, "Resource Wealth and the Risk of Civil War Onset: Results from a New Dataset of Natural Resource Rents, 1970–1999," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2007, pp. 201–218; and Indra De Soysa and Angelika Wagner, *Global Market, Local Mayhem? Foreign Investment, Trade Openness, State Capacity, and Civil War, 1989–2000*, Vol. 28, European Consortium for Political Research Sessions, Edinburgh, 2003.

¹⁴ Michael Eric Dyson, "The Labor of Whiteness, the Whiteness of Labor, and the Perils of Whitewashing," in Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Miron, and Jonathan Xavier Inda, eds., *Race, Identity, and Citizenship: A Reader*, Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999, pp. 219–224; and Bjørn Lomborg, *Resource Constraints or Abundance? Environmental Conflict*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001, pp. 125–152.

¹⁵ E. Boserup, *Population and Technological Change: A Study of Long-Term Trends*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

¹⁶ Goldstone, 2001.

- Simon argues that population growth sparks technological innovation that makes scarcity less problematic and creates economic growth.¹⁸
- Technological change might offset population growth and pressures.¹⁹
- Urdal finds no evidence that neo-Malthusian population pressures (growth and density) are associated with conflict.²⁰
- Urdal finds no link between conflict and urbanization.²¹ Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion suggest that demographic factors matter but generally are not enough to motivate conflict on their own.²²

Hypothesis

Countries with a high proportion of young males (“youth bulges”) are more prone to conflict, while aging populations might have a pacifying effect.

What the Literature Says

- Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohrer find that the proportion of the population ages 15–29 is a significant predictor of conflict: This population serves as the recruiting pool for rebel groups.²³ This is especially true if these individuals are unemployed and easily recruited.
- Goldstone focuses on the inflammatory effect of youth bulges on conflict.²⁴ These inflammatory effects might be especially strong when there are constraints on income earning opportunities. The 15- to 29-year-old male population is heavily involved in crime and violence and is responsible for most political violence. To the extent that youth bulges lead to overcrowding, they might be associated with additional grievances.

¹⁷ Indra De Soysa, “The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity?” in Mats Berdal and David Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War*, Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 2000, pp. 113–135.

¹⁸ Julian L. Simon, “Lebensraum Paradoxically, Population Growth May Eventually End Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1989, pp. 164–180.

¹⁹ Boserup 1981; and Simon, 1989.

²⁰ Urdal, 2002.

²¹ Henrik Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2006, pp. 607–629.

²² Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, and Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict After the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: Population Action International, 2003.

²³ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, *Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War*, CSAE WPS/2006–10, Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, 2006.

²⁴ Goldstone, 2001.

- Urdal finds that youth bulges are associated with violence, especially for low-intensity conflicts (e.g., civil wars, insurgency, terrorism).²⁵ In addition, youth bulges and high dependency ratios (such as ratios of working age to retired populations) contribute to protests and riots but not violent conflict.²⁶
- Economic growth also matters: If the youth bulge coincides with economic growth, we would expect violence to decrease because there might be enough jobs to absorb the bulge of young men.²⁷
- Large youth cohorts are associated with high unemployment. This increases the pool of rebel recruits.²⁸
- According to Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion, countries in which young adults comprised more than 40 percent of the adult population were more than twice as likely as countries with lower proportions to experience an outbreak of civil conflict. States with urban population growth rates above 4 percent were about twice as likely to sustain the outbreak of a civil conflict as countries with lower rates.²⁹
- Goldstone, and Tir and Diehl show that urbanization, migration, strong growth in the agrarian population, unequal growth rates between ethnic groups, and changes in the age composition of a population all could affect the likelihood of conflict.³⁰
- Choucri shows that youth bulges play a role in conflict continuation, but not its initiation. Most likely this is because once a conflict starts, the youths provide a pool of recruits.³¹
- Little empirical work suggests that an aging population reduces the likelihood of conflict (which would seem to go along with the youth bulge notion).
- The Arab Spring is one anecdotal case where a youth bulge might have played a role in the conflict (60 percent of population is under the age of 25).

²⁵ Urdal, 2002.

²⁶ Urdal, 2006.

²⁷ Urdal, 2002.

²⁸ H. G. Moeller, "Corrections and the Community: New Dimensions," *Federal Probation*, Vol. 32, 1968, p. 25; Choucri, 1974; Richard G. Braungart, "Historical and Generational Patterns of Youth Movements: A Global Perspective," *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1984, pp. 3–62; Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, Berkeley, Calif.: the University of California Press, 1991; Goldstone, 2001; and Cincotta, Engelman and Anastasion, 2003.

²⁹ Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion, 2003, p. 49.

³⁰ Goldstone, 2001; and Jaroslav Tir and Paul F. Diehl, "Geographic Dimensions of Enduring Rivalries," *Political Geography*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2002, pp. 263–286.

³¹ Choucri, 1974.

Counterarguments

- One set of arguments suggests that aging populations reduce economic prosperity and cohesion and so could actually lead to more conflict (but there is no empirical supports for this).³²
- Youth bulges might only matter in certain contexts—for example, where economic opportunities are constrained or when resources or political power are unequally distributed across groups.³³
- Demographic arguments might be less relevant now and in most places as fertility rates have declined significantly. Muslim countries currently face more of a challenge from youth bulges, but even their population growth is slowing.³⁴
- Declining fertility rates might have a positive impact on economic growth and thus indirectly on conflict. Once a “youth bulge” ages, if it is not replaced by an equally high number of dependent youths, then the number of dependents in the society declines and the number of able workers increases—at least temporarily. This decline in the ratio of dependent members of the population can lead to a “demographic dividend” in the form of higher rates of economic growth for several decades. Because economic growth is associated with lower levels of violent conflict, this “demographic dividend” could yield a wealthier and more peaceful society. Obviously, if the society does not take advantage of this opportunity to lock in long-term improvements, then the “bulge” of former youths will become dependent retirees in several decades, placing a drag on the economy.³⁵

Empirical Evidence and Data Sets

- Penn World Tables provide population data.
- Data on economic development, income, percentage of arable land, population density/distribution, mortality, and urbanization are available through IMF and World Bank.
- Conflict and/or violence data are from UCDP or PITF.
- Few studies rely on the COW civil war data or COW-derived data.
- MAR data provide information on minority groups, their size, representation, and violence they have faced.

³² Urdal, 2002; Urdal, 2006; Simon, 1989; and Goldstone, 2002.

³³ Urdal, 2002; Urdal, 2006; Simon, 1989; and Goldstone, 2002.

³⁴ Urdal, 2006.

³⁵ For an example of such an analysis, see Economic Commission for Africa, *Creating and Capitalizing on the Demographic Dividend for Africa*, Abidjan, 2013.

- The CNTS databank provides information on riots and protests as well as data on urbanization and economic development.
- Youth bulges should be measured by evaluating the population ages 15–29 as a fraction of total adult population, rather than the total population.

Other Relevant Demographic Factors

- Urban centers are often susceptible to factors such as crime, instability, and grievances, all of which could lead to radicalization and conflict. Unequal population growth across cohorts or groups might also exacerbate grievances and create resource pressures.³⁶
- Shifts in the relative strength of different religious or ethnic groups might be what ultimately contribute to conflict. Duffy-Toft shows that the power transition theory can apply to groups within a state.³⁷ Shifts in balance of power between groups might lead to some potential for conflict, especially when the shifts are fast and there is dissatisfaction within the group. Imbalances in power (without transitions) could also be associated with conflict likelihood.
- Even in major Western European countries (which we do not think of as having a high risk of civil war), demographic shifts or increases in immigrant populations could lead to increased rates of conflict or of internal political violence that falls short of war (e.g., terrorism).
- Gender imbalances (such as those in India and China) could affect the internal dynamics of these countries, likelihood of internal conflict, and ability to fight external conflicts.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Rapid demographic shifts, urbanization, and industrialization have affected a large number of states over the past decades. However, these trends have had an ambiguous effect on violent conflict, contributing to intrastate war in some cases, but working against it in others. Youth bulges and other demographic factors might contribute to conflict but are unlikely to be enough on their own to instigate higher or lower rates of conflict.

³⁶ P. H. Liotta and James F. Miskel, “Dangerous Democracy? American Internationalism and the Greater Near East,” *Orbis*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2004, pp. 437–449; and Urdal, 2006.

³⁷ Monica Duffy Toft, “Indivisible Territory, Geographic Concentration, and Ethnic War,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, pp. 82–119.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- A bigger problem in the future might be aging populations rather than youth bulges. Birth rates are even declining now in some Arab countries where they had been high. Aging populations might have a pacifying effect (fewer potential recruits) but might also drain resources and create pressures that lead to new conflict.
- Even if large or rapid population growth does not drive the conflict, factors such as population density and urbanization might remain important potential triggers, especially in underdeveloped areas in Africa and Asia.
- Resource constraints are increasing as important natural resources are used up and as individual resource use intensifies.

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16. Ethnic and Sectarian Factors and Conflict

Overview

Most scholars agree that ethnic and sectarian identities—just like any other identities—do not in themselves cause conflict with other groups. The connection has often been assumed, however, especially in the nonacademic world, due to the unfortunate tendency of early scholarly observers and rebels themselves to attribute conflict to primordial ethnic identities.¹

While contemporary scholars still disagree about the degree to which ethnic identity can be a determinant of group behavior and a predictor of conflict onset, there is more compelling evidence that once ethnicity becomes an important factor for group identification in ongoing conflicts, it might serve to both prolong the conflict and intensify violence.

The disagreement about the role of ethnicity for conflict onset stems from a more fundamental debate over whether ethnic identity is even a meaningful category for understanding group behavior, or whether it is merely a convenient instrument used for the attainment of other socioeconomic or sociopolitical goals. The “primordialist-essentialist” school believes that ethnic identity is something ascribed to individuals through birth or circumstance, and thus—in many parts of the world—becomes a “fixed” category that provides members with status and belonging.²

The “modernist” or “strategic opportunity” school, on the other hand, sees ethnicity as a choice that individuals make in order to gain access to important collective goods that the group can provide, including information and access.³ Those modernist scholars who analyze the link between ethnicity and conflict argue that ethnicity provides a certain strategic opportunity for group mobilization and organization that can be used when fighting for economic and political goals.⁴

The “constructivist” school bridges these two schools to some extent in that it tries to understand why ethnicity seems to be a more potent identifier than other identities that groups

¹ David Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007.

² Clifford Geertz, “Primordial Ties,” in John Hutchinson, and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 40–44; and Edward Shils, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 1957, pp. 130–145.

³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

⁴ James D. Fearon and David Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 1–16; James Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, 1995, pp. 379–414; and Stuart Kaufmann, “Rational Choice and Progress in the Study of Ethnic Conflict: A Review Essay,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January-March 2005, pp. 178–207.

choose, and under what circumstances ethnic identities are likely to be more important. More recently, another group of scholars arguing that structuralist factors (such as territory and demographic patterns) might play a role in increasing the likelihood that ethnic groups engage in rebellion have also gained significance.⁵

Even the most ardent primordialists have admitted that not all ethnic identities are rigid all the time and ethnicity does not automatically contribute to conflict. Conversely, even the most rational-choice-oriented modernist would have to agree that the strength and potency of ethnicity varies over time and place. It seems clear that for many groups that fight wars around the world, ethnicity plays a huge role in determining many things, including how groups mobilize and who they designate as enemies. Such ethnicities can be “frozen” in time and significantly strengthened by the occurrence of violence and civil wars.⁶

Thus, rather than arguing whether ethnicity plays a role in causing conflict, we need to be asking more specific questions about *how*, *under what circumstances*, and *why* ethnicity plays a role in conflict and rebellion.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Identity is an inevitable part of human existence. Many of the forms of identity that allegedly drive conflict—such as national, ethnic, and communal identities—have existed for a century or more. Thus, these identities themselves are poor predictors of recent changes in the incidence of violent conflict. Rather, it is the *political salience* of these identities that might have changed.

The political salience of identities might change for a number of reasons. One of the most common hypotheses is that changes in communications technologies—especially television and the Internet—have brought identity groups into contact with other groups and influences with which they previously had had no relation. As these new influences affect traditions and power relations, leaders of various communities could strike back, invoking “us versus them” mentalities and traditional ways. Numerous observers, for instance, have claimed that radical Islam is a reaction against globalization. The resort to extremely rigid interpretations of “orthodox Islam,” in turn, has sparked intercommunal tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. It is possible that the further advance of globalization could lead to similar dynamics in other communities, thereby increasing the overall incidence of intrastate conflict.

⁵ Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003; and Miles Kahler and Barbara Walter, eds., *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁶ Daniel Byman, “Forever Enemies? The Manipulation of Ethnic Identities to End Ethnic Conflict,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 2000, pp. 149–190.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Ethnicity is a major determinant of group behavior, and is likely to increase the onset of violence, rebellion, and intrastate conflict.
- Ethnicity will increase the likelihood of conflict (as a secondary effect) if group belonging becomes the basis for determining political and socioeconomic access and control.
- Ethnicity will increase the likelihood of conflict (as a secondary effect) if an ethnic group is territorially based and has secessionist/separatist demands.
- Conflicts that include an ethnic component are likely to reach higher levels of intensity than conflicts that lack such an ethnic component.
- Conflicts that include an ethnic component are likely to make disputes more difficult to resolve, thereby increasing conflict duration.

Hypothesis

Ethnicity is a major determinant of group behavior and is likely to increase the onset of violence, rebellion, and intrastate conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Authors who argue against any connection between ethnicity and violence claim that the appearance of a relationship between ethnicity and conflict is driven by the strategic opportunity that ethnicity offers groups to mobilize for a cause, and has little to do with a supposed natural bond provided by ethnic belonging.⁷ Some of these modernist or “greed-based” scholars have claimed that the ethnicity link is “delusional” and that violence erupts due to other cost-benefit calculations, political or economic greed, and feasibility.⁸ Others admit that ethnicity can provide leaders with the strategic leverage needed for recruiting group members to fight for a cause,⁹ and still others argue that self-

⁷ Fearon, 1995; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; and Rui J. P. de Figueiredo Jr., and Barry R. Weingast, “The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict,” in Barbara F. Walter and Jack L. Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 261–302.

⁸ Fearon and Laitin, 2003; and Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2004a, pp. 563–595.

⁹ Erin Jenne, Steven Saideman, and Will Lowe, “Separatism as a Bargaining Posture: The Role of Leverage in Minority Radicalization,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 5, 2007, pp. 539–558.

serving individuals in leadership positions use ethnicity as an instrument in their own struggle to retain power and control.¹⁰

- Those scholars who argue that ethnicity plays a role in the onset of conflict have mostly moved away from the primordial theories that saw ethnicity as something fixed and unchangeable, created by “blood lines,” race, and religion.¹¹ Instead, a large group of scholars acknowledge that ethnicity is a strong force—especially in intrastate conflicts—and can have a profound effect on the relationship between ethnic groups and their choice for violent conflict. While these scholars agree that ethnicity is not fixed, they explain that ethnicity might be guided by different circumstances in different parts of the world, especially where groups have a historical experience of past conflict and suffering.¹² If memories of past conflicts, struggles, and expulsions are fresh, or are kept fresh by religious doctrine or national mythology, they can also become extremely influential in strengthening the ethnic cause.¹³ Gurr writes that resentment about losses in the past and fear of future losses are important causes for violence between groups.¹⁴ In fact, the opposite is also true: A lack of such a history of victimhood has the effect of making nationalism more benign.¹⁵ It has also been found that ethnic groups that have fought conflict in the past are more likely to fight again, and usually with the same (real or imagined) party as in the past.¹⁶
- Crises that are associated with specific characteristics—threats to existence or threats of grave damage to life or property—tend to evoke more violence from adversaries, thus

¹⁰ V. P. Gagnon, “Spiraling to Ethnic War,” *International Security*, Vol. 2, No. 21, Fall 1996; and Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: Norton, 2000.

¹¹ Geertz, 1996, pp. 40–44; and Shils, 1957.

¹² John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 27, 1993; Jerzy Jedlicki, “Historical Memory as a Source of Conflicts in Eastern Europe,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, September 1999, pp. 225–232; Steven Majstorovic, “Autonomy of the Sacred: The Endgame in Kosovo,” in William Safran and Ramon Maiz, eds., *Identity and Territorial Autonomy in Plural Societies*, Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2000; Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985; and Alexander B. Murphy, Mark Bassin, David Newman, Paul Reuber, and John Agnew, “Is There a Politics to Geopolitics?” *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2004, pp. 619–640.

¹³ Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1994, pp. 5–40; and Terrence Lyons, “Diasporas and Homeland Conflict,” in Miles Kahler and Barbara Walter, eds., *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 111–129.

¹⁴ Ted Robert Gurr, *People vs. States, Minorities at Risk in the New Century*, Washington, D.C.: USIP Press, 2000.

¹⁵ Van Evera, 1994.

¹⁶ Stuart Kaufmann, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic Wars*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001; and Ivelin Sardamov, “Mandate of History: Serbian National Identity and Ethnic Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia,” in John C. Micgiel, ed., *State and Nation Building in East Central Europe: Contemporary Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University, Institute on East Central Europe, 1996, pp. 17–37.

making conflict outbreak more likely.¹⁷ Historical identity-related elements are often connected to a homeland territory, which can play a large role as one of the defining elements of an ethnic group. A threat to the homeland or the struggle to reclaim a lost homeland therefore becomes existential.¹⁸ The memories of the Jews and the Serbs being driven out of the “Land of Israel” and Serbian Kosovo give both groups an almost “heavenly quest” to retake those territories.¹⁹ Other studies, including those by Newman and by Feige, look at how quickly homelands can be created and “territorialized,” especially in contemporary conflict settings.²⁰

- Some authors look at the structural relations surrounding an ethnic group engaged in violence and posit that ethnicity leads to violence because of settlement patterns, especially those that create an ethnic “security dilemma.” Geographically concentrated ethnic groups are more likely to rise up in violence against a state.²¹ Another way that settlement patterns could play a role is when ethnic groups expand into new areas, causing an ethnic security dilemma. As groups push into territory that has traditionally been inhabited by a rival ethnic group and resources become constrained, group members might take steps to ensure their collective survival and an ethnic “arms race” ensues. This explanation might be particularly powerful for explaining civil wars and ethnic violence in Africa or former Yugoslavia, such as Rwanda, Kenya, and Bosnia.²² However, this argument has not been statistically tested across large numbers of cases.

¹⁷ Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeldt, *A Study of Crisis*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

¹⁸ Ger Duigzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 2002; David Newman, “Real Spaces, Symbolic Spaces: Interrelated Notions of Territory in the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” in Paul F. Diehl, ed., *A Road Map to War: Territorial Dimensions of International Conflict*, Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999, pp. 3–34; Hein E. Goemans, “Bounded Communities: Territoriality, Territorial Attachment and Conflict,” in Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, eds., *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 25–61; and Lyons, 2006.

¹⁹ Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Lyons, 2006; and Donald H. Akenson, *God’s Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992.

²⁰ David Newman, “The Resilience of Territorial Conflict in an Era of Globalization,” in Miles Kahler and Barbara Walter, eds., *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 85–110; and Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2009.

²¹ Duffy Toft, 2003; and Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

²² See Daniel N. Posner, “Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 4, October 2004, pp. 849–863; Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, “Civil War and the Security Dilemma,” in Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; Erik Melander, *Anarchy Within: The Security Dilemma Between Ethnic Groups in Emerging Anarchy*, Report No. 52, Uppsala, Sweden: Department for Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 1999; and Kaufmann, 2002.

- There are also those who claim that modernization and secularization have caused the rise of nationalism as political and economic phenomena, and the rise of new strands of identity groups that make reality more multidimensional and complex.²³ Ethnicity and sectarianism have become more prominent as an organizer for violence as societies modernize and secularize and the world undergoes globalization, leaving some sectors of society outside of the organized international system. The fact that the world is highly ethnically diverse contradicts the assumption of cultural homogeneity on which modern nation-states are based, triggering waves of separatist wars, ethnic cleansing, and the rise of fundamentalist movements.²⁴
- Finally, it is important to note that while ethnicity cannot perhaps be said to explain the onset of civil war, it seems to be a strong indicator for various types of group mobilization short of rebellion. Analyzing the relationship between ethnicity and conflict at a group level rather than a state level, scholars using the MAR data set have found various relationships between different types of group identifiers and group mobilization and protest activities. What is important here is that a minority identity facilitates collective action. These authors confirm that while ethnicity might provide the label under which groups mobilize for rebellion, the triggers for full-scale rebellion lie in socioeconomic or sociopolitical grievances.²⁵ Several studies argue that the key to understanding civil war onset might lie in identifying the escalatory process that leads from one form of contention to another.²⁶

Measurement Problems

- The most obvious problems with measuring ethnic and sectarian identity is that it involves issues and values that are related to human perceptions and emotions and are thus difficult to measure. Those who try to quantify ethnicity have therefore run into problems.
- Most of the scholars from the strategic opportunity side of the debate rely on quantitative data for civil wars in general where ethnicity is one variable among many. In fact, there

²³ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, London: BBC Books, 1993; and Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007.

²⁴ See Gellner, 1991; and Pierre Van Den Berghe, “Does Race Matter?” in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity, Oxford Readers*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 57–62.

²⁵ Gurr, 2000; and Nicholas Sambanis, “Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1),” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2001, pp. 259–282.

²⁶ Nicholas Sambanis and Annalisa Zinn, “The Escalation of Self-Determination Movements: From Protest to Violence,” American Political Science Association conference, Philadelphia, Pa., 2002; Nicholas Sambanis and Annalisa Zinn, “From Protest to Violence: An Analysis of Conflict Escalation with an Application to Self-Determination Movements,” manuscript, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 2005; and Fearon and Laitin, 2003.

are some inherent problems with the variable that has often been used to measure ethnic identity, the “ethno-linguistic fractionalization” (or ELF) variable. ELF measures the likelihood that any two random individuals in a society will speak different languages. It has been criticized as a poor indicator for ethnic identity and is said to be responsible for some of the “negative” results (i.e., claims that ethnicity is not a significant predictor of violent conflict).²⁷ Some new research uses the “ethnic power relations index,” which assesses the degree of political and economic exclusion experienced by ethnic or sectarian groups within a state. Initial results using this variable to predict conflict have been promising.

Hypothesis

Ethnicity will increase the likelihood of conflict (as a secondary effect) if group belonging becomes the basis for determining political and socio-economic access and control.

What the Literature Says

- If ethnicity determines a highly unequal allocation of resources in a multiethnic society, it could put a strain on group relations, resulting in ethnic rebellion, intergroup conflict, and civil wars. The asymmetric allocation of resources is said to affect groups in various ways. Ted Robert Gurr argued that it was not the absolute levels of resources (or poverty) that spurred violence, but the fact that groups were relatively worse off in comparison with rival groups.²⁸ Gurr has focused on perceptible factors of inequality, measured by group grievances, in trying to explain why groups initiate violence.²⁹ A number of other scholars have also focused on grievances being important for group mobilization.³⁰
- While ethnic diversity in itself does not lead to conflict, the state is not a neutral arena but a “prize” over which groups compete and a power instrument for those who control it.³¹ Thus, if government actively excludes one ethnic group in favor of another, conflict becomes more likely. The same authors found that the likelihood of armed conflict increases as the center of power becomes consolidated into the hands of a specific ethnic

²⁷ Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Brian Min, “Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Dataset,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2, 2009, pp. 316–337; Martha Reynal-Querol and Jose Montalvo, “Ethnic Polarization and the Duration of Civil Wars,” *Post-Conflict Transitions*, Working Paper No. 4192, The World Bank, April 2007; and Kanchan Chandra and Steven Wilkinson, “Measuring the Effect of ‘Ethnicity,’” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4/5, April/May 2008, pp. 515–563.

²⁸ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970.

²⁹ Gurr, 2000.

³⁰ Cynthia J. Arnson and I. William Zartman, eds., *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, and Greed*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004a; and Sambanis, 2001.

³¹ Wimmer et al., 2009.

group, with the result of political exclusion for nonmembers. Further, if governments routinely mistreat, repress, or disadvantage certain groups, those groups are also more likely to resort to violence.³² These dynamics are likely to become even more powerful if a state is in the process of collapse.³³

- This explanation is closely linked with the institutionalist approach to the study of identity conflict, which holds that the nature of political and economic institutions and how they distribute power and resources across ethnic or religious groups affects the types of identities individuals assume and the likelihood that they will enter into conflict with competitors. It is generally agreed that more equal distributions and nonexclusive institutions might reduce the likelihood of conflict, while the opposite will be true of institutions that exclude or unequally distribute resources along ethnic lines. Institutional explanations are particularly relevant for understanding ethnic cleavages in postcolonial situations where the former colonial administration's rule might have set the stage for future patterns of ethnic control and domination.³⁴

Hypothesis

Ethnicity will increase the likelihood of conflict (as a secondary effect) if an ethnic group is territorially based and has secessionist/separatist demands.

What the Literature Says

- The finding that territory is the most conflictual issue in both interstate and intrastate relationships has been found to be quite robust over a number of studies.³⁵ However, in investigating the relationship between territory and conflict, some leading authors have suggested that it is not territory by itself that causes conflict, but the notion that some territories elicit strong human territorial attachments. Since territory is often an important part of group identity, ethnicity and territory are often difficult to separate and a threat to territory quickly becomes existential. Goertz and Diehl's concept of "relational" space, describing a territory that lacks material or strategic value but is valued in and of itself,

³² Christian Davenport, David A. Armstrong II, and Marc I. Lichbach, *Conflict Escalation and the Origins of Civil War*, College Park, Md.: University of Maryland, 2005.

³³ de Figueiro and Weingast, 1997; and I. William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.

³⁴ See Posner, 2005; and Evan S. Lieberman and Perna Singh, "The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1–24.

³⁵ See Vasquez, 1993; and K. J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989: Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

was developed as a result of such a recognition.³⁶ Many similar efforts to describe the abstract and indivisible dimensions of territoriality have followed, including Hensel and Mitchell, Toft, Kahler and Walter, and Newman.³⁷ Hensel and Mitchell explore the impact of tangibility on issue salience, while Toft focuses on a territory's indivisibility and its impact on conflict incidence.³⁸

- The findings on territory can also be corroborated with those that examine the sources of secession, since secession can be defined as a territorial claim to self-government over a specific geographic entity. Additionally, in almost all cases of secession, separatist demands are made by an ethnically distinct minority group that does not feel represented by the state controlling it. Saideman and Ayers found a much stronger relationship between secessionist groups and conflict onset than for nonsecessionist groups.³⁹ Sambanis argues that secessionist conflicts have different sources than those that give rise to nonsecessionist conflict, with an emphasis being on political rather than economic demands.⁴⁰
- Where and how boundaries between ethnic groups (and nations) were drawn in the past could matter for whether ethnicities might clash in the future. In cases where boundaries between in-groups and out-groups are determined by cultural, religious, or racial identity, ethnic belonging will be a stronger predictor for group actions.⁴¹ There is also evidence that boundaries matter in a literal sense. Vasquez and Valeriano show that border conflicts that have not been resolved due to overlapping ethnoterritorial claims serve as one of the strongest predictors for conflicts between states.⁴²

Hypothesis

Conflicts that include an ethnic component are likely to reach higher levels of intensity than conflicts that lack such an ethnic component.

³⁶ Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict*, Studies in International Conflict, Vol. 5, London and New York: Routledge, 1992b.

³⁷ Paul Hensel and Sara Mitchell, "Issue Indivisibility and Territorial Claims," *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 275–285; Duffy Toft, 2003; Kahler and Walter, 2006; Newman, 1999; and Newman, 2006.

³⁸ Hensel and Mitchell, 2005; and Duffy Toft, 2003.

³⁹ Stephen M. Saideman and William R. Ayres, "Determining the Causes of Irredentism: Logit Analyses of Minorities at Risk Data from the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 4, November 2000, pp. 1126–1144.

⁴⁰ Sambanis, 2001.

⁴¹ Andreas Wimmer, "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 31, 2008, pp. 1025–1055.

⁴² John A. Vasquez and Brendan Valeriano, "Territory as a Source of Conflict and a Road to Peace," in Jacob Bercovitch, Viktor Kremenyuk, and I. William Zartman, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage, 2009, pp. 193–209.

What the Literature Says

- Ethnic and sectarian conflicts have been associated with some of the worst atrocities of the modern age, raising the question of whether ethnic and sectarian identifiers have a magnifying effect on conflict intensity.⁴³ Many scholars have claimed that this phenomenon derives from the nature of ethnic identity. Because identity tends to be related to more deep-rooted values, such as one's self-esteem and basic human needs, threats to identity often produce a strong response.⁴⁴ Burton claims that some of the most fundamental human needs—such as identity, security, recognition, participation, and autonomy—are deeply connected with ethnic identity.⁴⁵ When denied, threats become existential and responses tend to be both aggressive and defensive and can escalate quickly into an intractable conflict.⁴⁶
- A slightly different explanation is related to the often protracted nature of ethnic conflict, and the tendency of such conflicts to include a heavy baggage of collective memories of suffering and loss as well as of physical violence at the hands of the “other.” Such memories can quickly conjure up existential fears and breed a drive for revenge.⁴⁷ Bar-Tal writes that identity conflicts are often zero-sum conflicts, where the struggle is all-consuming and central to the participants' lives. Such involvement raises the willingness to sacrifice, especially if heavy investments (in lives) have already been made in the past.
- The third explanation for why ethnic and sectarian issues might raise the level of violence is connected to the sociopsychological dimensions at play in the relationship between adversaries. Protracted conflict tends to strain relationships and lead to hatred and alienation between opponent groups, something that creates a psychological distance that widens as conflict becomes more protracted. The psychological effects are often profound, allowing groups to separate themselves morally from the “other,” paving the way for patterns of dehumanization, prejudice, negative stereotypes, and enemy images.⁴⁸

⁴³ Rajat Ganguly and Raymond Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, London: Longman Publishers, 2002; and Barbara Walter, *Reputation and Civil War: Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent*, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁴⁴ Peter Coleman, “Intractable Conflict,” in Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman, eds., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000.

⁴⁵ John Burton, *Violence Experienced: The Source of Conflict Violence and Crime and Their Prevention*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997.

⁴⁶ Terrell A. Northrup, “The Dynamic of Identity in Personal and Social Conflict,” in Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup, and Stuart J. Thorson, eds., *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation*, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1989, pp. 55–82.

⁴⁷ Daniel Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 50, No. 11, 2007; Jedlicki, 1999, pp. 225–232; and Kaufmann, 2001.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Z. Rubin and Dean G. Pruitt, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 2nd ed., New York: McGraw Hill College Division, 1994; Janice Gross Stein, “Image, Identity and Conflict Resolution,” in Chester A.

Such categorization of the enemy—seeing the enemy as morally inferior and subhuman—justifies inhumane treatment that otherwise would not be morally acceptable. If one is convinced that the other side is bent on one’s own destruction or is less human than one’s own group, it is much easier to engage in war, human rights violations, or genocide against the opponent. The Rwandan genocide is a grotesque example of such dehumanization.

- Finally, a fourth view can be found among those scholars who focus on the notion of an ethnic security dilemma.⁴⁹ In a situation of high uncertainty, rising fears, and high stress, ethnic groups will take steps to protect themselves. Just as in a Hobbesian world where there is no overarching authority that can mitigate violence, force becomes the only guarantee for one’s own survival. Lake and Rothchild look at various factors that can increase violence in such a scenario, including fear of the future, strategic dilemmas (information failure, credible commitment problems, and incentives to use force preemptively), and such emotional factors as historical memories and myths.⁵⁰

Hypothesis

Conflicts that include an ethnic component are likely to make disputes more difficult to resolve, thereby increasing conflict duration.

What the Literature Says

- Scholars across a variety of disciplines have found that conflicts that include ethnic and sectarian issues tend to last longer than those that lack such elements.⁵¹ However, quantitative findings on civil wars show that this is only true where society is composed of a few large ethnic groups, rather than many small groups.⁵²
- While most agree that conflict duration is related to intractability of the conflict (i.e., the inability of the conflict to be successfully resolved), the exact causes of such intractability

Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, Herndon, Va.: USIP Press, 1996; and Kaufmann, 2001.

⁴⁹ Barry R. Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1993, pp. 27–47.

⁵⁰ David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Autumn 1996, pp. 41–75.

⁵¹ Paul Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1996; Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions, 1946–2004,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 2005, pp. 623–635; and James Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last Longer Than Others?” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, May 2004, pp. 275–301.

⁵² Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003.

are still debated.⁵³ Zartman and Licklider argue that the reason intrastate and ethnic wars last longer than interstate wars is because they often end in de facto secession, rather than victory, defeat, or a negotiated settlement.⁵⁴ However, the reason they do so is because negotiations are never able to successfully resolve the complex outstanding issues that plague many ethnic conflicts.

- Intractability comes from the complex nature of the issue (identity) and the high stakes and fundamental values involved. Because the issues that ethnic groups fight about (whether territory, recognition, or national symbols) are often indivisible or even absolute, compromise might not come easily, thus making negotiated solutions extremely difficult. A few studies have suggested that strong territorial attachments often imbue territory with such indivisibility, which complicates the prospects for resolution.⁵⁵
- Alternatively, intractability might be a product of the relationship between the adversaries and their commitments and positions in the bargaining process. Tanja Ellingsen attributes intractability to the bargaining process itself, and argues that intractability is created through the way actors use indivisible ethnic symbols and values as a representation of their bargaining positions.⁵⁶ Once such indivisibility defines demands, the parties are locked into a competition between incompatible commitments. Such commitments often get reinforced by promises to constituencies at home.
- Finally, conflicts that include ethnic and sectarian elements are more difficult to negotiate because they tend to have a history of suffering and loss that can generate entrapment and a tendency to want to recuperate sunk costs. Rubín and Brockner write that negotiation processes often see an escalation in commitment in order to justify or “make good” on

⁵³ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, eds., *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2005; and Bar-Tal, 2007.

⁵⁴ I. William Zartman, “The Unfinished Agenda: Negotiating Internal Conflicts,” in Roy E. Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, pp. 20–34; I. William Zartman, “Self and Space: Negotiating a Future from the Past,” in Jose V. Cipurut, ed., *The Art of the Feud: Reconceptualizing International Relations*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000, pp. 85–103; and Roy Licklider, “How Does Civil War End: Questions and Methods,” in Roy Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, pp. 1–19.

⁵⁵ Duffy Toft, 2003; Cecilia Albin, “Resolving Conflicts over Indivisibles Through Negotiation: The Case of Jerusalem,” dissertation, Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University, 1993; Hensel and Mitchell, 2005; Jaroslav Tir, “Averting Armed International Conflicts Through State-to-State Territorial Transfers,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 4, November 2003, pp. 1235–1257; Ron Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009; and Tova Norlén, *Sacred Stones and Religious Nuts: Managing Territorial Absolutes*, dissertation, Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, 2010.

⁵⁶ Tanja Ellingsen, “Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches’ Brew? Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict During and After the Cold War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, 2000, p. 228.

prior investments.⁵⁷ Morton Deutsch similarly talks about the willingness to suffer to make up for past losses.⁵⁸

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

- An important data set that has considerably advanced the qualitative understanding of ethnic identity is that of the MAR project, which has gone through several stages and was recently reconstructed (MARGene) to deal with problems related to its inherent selection bias.⁵⁹
- Another data collection effort on a variety of issues connected to armed conflict (with a minimum of 25 deaths per year) comes from the Peace Research Institute Oslo.⁶⁰

Other Relevant Factors

As already explained, identity factors seldom lead to conflict onset, longer conflict duration, or higher conflict intensity by themselves. Rather, they interact with a variety of other variables, such as economic and political institutions; opportunity-related factors, such as political or socioeconomic grievances; or structural factors—such as group size, concentration, or territory.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Identity conflict provides an important element of the explanation of the spikes in violence seen in the postwar period of decolonization and again in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

Recent decades have seen a shift in some parts of the world from identification with the ethnic group to a larger identification with a religious community, such as Islam. Similar to ethnic ideology, religion can be used as a rallying force and as a justification for higher levels of violence than otherwise would be employed in intergroup violence. This is because religious belief carries the added dimension of a divine commandment to carry out a certain action or goal.⁶¹ Arguably, globalization could increase the political salience of religious identities, which in turn might fuel a rise in intrastate conflict in the future.

⁵⁷ Joel Brockner and Jerry Rubin, *Entrapment in Escalating Conflicts*, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985.

⁵⁸ Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973.

⁵⁹ Minorities at Risk Project, homepage, College Park, Md.: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, last updated July 28, 2014.

⁶⁰ Peace Research Institute Oslo, *Data on Armed Conflict*, last updated 2014.

⁶¹ Smith, 2003.

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17. Repression

Overview

A large body of literature examines the relationship between repression and civil war and other forms of internal conflict, such as protests, riots, and rebellions. However, there is considerable disagreement about the nature and direction of this relationship. On one side, there are those who argue that repression will increase the likelihood of conflict. These arguments rely on micromobilization theories, which suggest that repression leads to grievances, which in turn increase the willingness of the population to engage in violence, as well as the personal payoff received from that violence.¹ Repression might also indirectly increase violence by having negative economic effects that increase grievances, thus fueling motivation for violence and increasing the pool of available recruits.² Those who argue that repression reduces violence take a resource mobilization view and maintain that the activities needed to support conflict are more difficult and costly in a repressive state, thus reducing the use of violence (as well as nonviolent opposition).³ Finally, there are those who suggest a U-shaped relationship, in which repression at very high and very low levels is associated with low levels of conflict and opposition activity, but medium levels of repression are associated with increased risk of conflict. At these points, there are enough grievances to fuel violence, and enough political space to allow violent opposition activities.⁴

Although there is empirical support for each set of arguments, the most convincing evidence is that which suggests a conditional relationship between repression and violence. These arguments propose that the link between violence and repression is mediated by other factors, such as the type of repression, the nature of the political regime, the alternative options available,

¹ Ronald A. Francisco, "After the Massacre: Mobilization in the Wake of Harsh Repression," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2004, pp. 107–126; Marwan Khawaja, "Repression and Popular Collective Action: Evidence from the West Bank," *Sociological Forum*, 1993, pp. 47–71; Edward N. Muller, "Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1985, pp. 47–61; Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl, "Repression, Micromobilization, and Political Protest," *Social Forces*, Vol. 69, No. 2, 1990, pp. 521–547; and Patrick M. Regan and Daniel A. Norton, *Greed, Grievance, and Mobilization: The Onset of Protest, Rebellion, and Civil War*, Binghamton, N.Y.: Department of Political Science, Binghamton University, 2003.

² Muller 1985; and Opp and Roehl, 1990.

³ Karen Rasler, "Concessions, Repression, and Political Protest in the Iranian Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1996, pp. 132–152; and Ted Robert Gurr and Mark Irving Lichbach, "Forecasting Internal Conflict: A Competitive Evaluation of Empirical Theories," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1986, pp. 3–38.

⁴ Gurr and Lichbach, 1986; Rasler, 1996; Francisco, 2004; and Opp and Roehl, 1990.

past history of opposition and outcomes, ethnic composition, and economic growth. Repression in and of itself might not increase the likelihood of violence, but repression combined with the right set of supporting conditions does seem to increase the potential for civil war.⁵

Empirical arguments in this literature use a number of different data sets, including the Political Terror Scale; the Polity data (which include measures of political rights); the CNTS databank, which includes measures of extrajudicial killing, arrest, torture, etc.; and the CIRI index scores, which also assess political rights and institutional legitimacy. Regarding the use of the Polity data, one potential concern is that this variable is also used as a measure of democracy, meaning that what is really being measured is not the response to repression or to specific repressive incidents but to regime type. Most conflict data come from UCDP/PRIO, although some studies use the intrastate COW data set. Economic data and other demographic variables are taken from the Penn World Tables or World Bank. Many of the studies in this area are focused on specific countries and case studies, raising some questions about generalizability.⁶

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The literature on repression offers valuable insights regarding the likelihood of violent conflict within a single country. It is not, however, a promising lens through which to understand global conflict trends. Instead, it should be understood as an intervening variable that mediates the effects of regime type and state capacity. For example, lower levels of repression might be associated with the consolidation of democracy, so an association between violence and repression could proxy for the relationship between violence and democracy.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Governments that repress their populations (or important subpopulations) are more likely to experience more-intense forms of conflict.
- The relationship between repression and conflict will take an inverted-U shape, with conflict highest when repression is moderate.

⁵ Gurr and Lichbach, 1986; Rasler, 1996; Francisco, 2004; and Opp and Roehl, 1990.

⁶ Alan Heston, Robert Summers, and Bettina Aten, "Penn World Table," Version 7.1, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania, November 2012; Alberto Alesina, Arnaud Devleeschauwer, William Easterly, Sergio Kurlat, and Romain Wacziarg, "Fractionalization," *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol. 8, June 2003, pp. 155–194; Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, "Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946-2013," Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013, last updated June 6, 2014; David L. Cingranelli, David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay, "The CIRI Human Rights Dataset," Version 2014.04.14, CIRI Human Rights Data Project website, 2014; and Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816–2007*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010.

Hypothesis

Governments that repress their populations (or important subpopulations) are more likely to experience more intense forms of conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Collier and Hoeffler find no relationship between political repression and civil war in their full model, although democracy is associated with a lower conflict risk in the “grievance model” that only uses political and ethnonreligious proxies (and no economic covariates).⁷
- Work on regime type finds that democracies are less likely to experience civil and ethnic war. The lower level of repression in democracy might be one explanation for this relationship.⁸
- Hegre et al. argue that both high and low levels of state repression will discourage protest in nondemocracies, whereas the opposite is true in democracies, making civil war most likely in transitional regimes.⁹
- Lichbach finds that repression by the state will not decrease violence by militant groups when it is applied inconsistently, but does reduce violence when it is applied consistently.¹⁰
- Lichbach finds that an increase in repression of nonviolent activity leads to increase in violence.¹¹
- The experience of repression, especially if it is illegitimate, increases mobilization and radicalizes individuals. This indirect effect is likely to offset any decrease in support due to cost of repression.¹²

⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On Economic Causes of Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1998, pp. 563–573; and Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Måns Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2004, pp. 253–273.

⁸ Jack A. Goldstone, Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael B. Lustik, Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder, and Mark Woodward, “A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2010, pp. 190–208.

⁹ Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, 2001, pp. 33–48.

¹⁰ Mark Irving Lichbach, “Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1987, pp. 266–297.

¹¹ Lichbach, 1987.

¹² Opp and Roehl, 1990, pp. 521–547; and Robert W. White, “From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 1989, pp. 1277–1302.

- Regan and Norton find that repressive policies are associated with an increase in conflict. State repression might give rebel groups a *raison d'être* that could increase the incidence and likelihood of conflict.¹³
- Sambanis, using case studies, suggests that repression does contribute to civil war.¹⁴
- Rasler reports that repression reduces conflict and violence in the near term, but micromobilization processes increase violence in response to repression over the longer term.¹⁵
- Repression that limits economic growth or opportunities could also lead to additional conflict through that channel.¹⁶
- Repression could increase refugees, which might contribute to conflict in a number of ways, including altering the ethnic composition of the state, undermining economic stability, or creating recruits for violence.¹⁷
- Micromobilization: Repression might create other motivations to protest or use violence, including a moral duty to resist repression or create some kind of social pressure/reward to those who do resist,¹⁸ especially if repression is viewed as illegitimate.
- Differential repression that affects certain groups more directly than others could lead to conflict or exacerbate intergroup conflict.¹⁹
- White finds that repression increases conflict when nonviolent opposition appears to have failed, political repression is viewed as illegitimate, and the people being repressed are available and able to respond (i.e., students rather than children or women).²⁰

Hypothesis

The relationship between repression and conflict will take an inverted-U shape, with conflict highest when repression is moderate.

What the Literature Says

- “When a country is highly autocratic there is a considerably lower probability of violent rebellion, but when the political institutions allow some forms of popular participation,

¹³ Regan and Norton, 2003.

¹⁴ Nicholas Sambanis, “Expanding Economic Models of Civil War Using Case Studies,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2004a, pp. 259–280.

¹⁵ Rasler, 1996, pp. 132–152.

¹⁶ Sambanis, 2004a.

¹⁷ Gurr and Lichbah, 1986; and Francisco, 2004.

¹⁸ Opp and Roehl, 1990.

¹⁹ Regan and Norton, 2003.

²⁰ White, 1989.

the likelihood of rebellion increases. From an inflection point, higher levels of democratic institutions lead to lower levels of anti-state rebellion.”²¹

- Violence is highest where “organization is possible, the cost of collective action is not prohibitive, but opportunities for effective participation are restricted.”²²
- Repression only works if the state is strong. When the state is weak, repression might be unable to stop violence but might cause additional opposition.²³
- Gurr finds evidence of the inverted U hypothesis and argues for a relative deprivation view, in which it is an individual’s perceived deprivation and the level of perceived grievance that gives motivation to fight.²⁴
 - Conflict occurs based on cost-benefit calculation.
 - Repression raises costs of involvement.
 - Repression increases motivation and benefits.
- Khawaja finds that repression increases collective action, especially at medium levels.²⁵
- Snyder argues that the nature and timing of repression matter.²⁶
- Repression increases the likelihood of civil war in weak democracies; repression at medium levels is most likely to increase the risk of civil war.²⁷

Empirical Evidence and Data Sets²⁸

- The Penn World Tables provide data on economic development.
- The Ethnofractionalization Dataset is used where ethnic group variables come into play.
- Polity (has measures of executive constraints and political rights).
- CIRI and other human rights indices provide insight on the levels of human rights abuses. Information on extrajudicial killings, arrests, etc., are included in CNTS data.
- Some studies use case studies.
- Region matters.

²¹ Regan and Norton, 2002.

²² Muller, 1985.

²³ Sambanis, 2004a.

²⁴ Gurr and Lichbach, 1986.

²⁵ Khawaja, 1993, pp. 47–71.

²⁶ David Snyder and William R. Kelly, “Industrial Violence in Italy, 1878–1903,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 1976, pp. 131–162.

²⁷ Håvard Hegre, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Association*, Vol. 95, No. 1, 2001.

²⁸ Heston, Summers, and Aten, 2012; Alesina et al., 2003; Marshall and Gurr, 2014; Cingranelli, Richards, and Clay, 2014; and Sarkees and Wayman, 2010.

- Civil war data are mostly gathered from UCDP or the intrastate COW data set, though the latter is used less.

What Else Might Mediate the Relationship

- Network effects, the diffusion of ideas throughout the population, and a commitment to conflict could determine how repression affects violence.
- There might be a feedback loop between repression and conflict, so that repression increases the likelihood of conflict, but conflict also increases the magnitude of repression.
- Repression might have different effects on civil war, political protest, terrorism, etc.: For example, repression will tend to decrease protest but increase rebellion and civil war.²⁹
- Democracies are less likely to be able to use repression as a tool. While this might limit the chances that repression leads to grievances, it could also increase the risk of civil war by limiting the means that states have to maintain control. Repression in incompletely transitioned democracies might be both inflammatory and necessary because these states have fewer “tools” to control their populations, meaning they are more likely to turn to repression and less able to control any backlash that results.
- The link between repression and civil war is affected by the relationship between civil war and other variables, such as regime type or economic development, leading to a conditional effect.³⁰
- Economic shocks that produce low growth can lead to repression and civil war.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Repression is probably best understood as an intervening variable that mediates the effects of regime type and state capacity, rather than as an independent explanation of global conflict trends. For example, lower levels of repression could be associated with consolidation of democracy, so an association between violence and repression might proxy for the relationship between violence and democracy.

²⁹ Regan and Norton, 2002.

³⁰ Sambanis, 2004a; Hegre et al., 2001; Rasler, 1996; and White, 1989.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

- Relationships are likely to be increasingly conditional in the future—in other words, to depend on political, economic, and social factors specific to the state and groups in question.
- Spread of democratic norms and emphasis on human rights might reduce the ability of states to use severe repression as a political tactic. This could increase opportunities for intrastate conflict in some cases, but decrease cause for grievances.
- Repression as a constraint on opposition movements might become less effective as the role played by external supporters (state and nonstate) and foreign fighters and donors become increasingly significant.
- Under the U-shaped theory, the birth of new transitional democracies in the Middle East (Arab Spring) will make state repression an increasing common cause of intrastate conflict.

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18. Democracy, Democratization, and Political Inclusion

Overview

The relationship between democracy and violent conflict is extremely complex. Nearly all observers agree that consolidated democracies are the most stable political systems around the world. Levels of democracy short of “full” or consolidated democracy—regimes variously characterized as “quasidemocracies,” “illiberal democracies,” or “anocracies”—might be much less stable, however. Moreover, the process of democratization could itself be perilous—a hypothesis that has become common in the popular press.¹

To make any sense of the debates surrounding the relationship between democracy and violent intrastate conflict, several factors must be considered:

- the type of violence (state repression, terrorism, or civil war)
- the overall extent of democracy
- the degree of change in democracy (either democratization or autocratization)
- the specific characteristics of democracy
- level of economic development
- the strength of the state and the rule of law
- the conflict cycle
- the issues at stake in the conflict
- foreign behavior.

Academic research has come to little consensus on any finding except for the stability of full democracies—although even stable democracies might be at greater risk of terrorist attack. The debates on the effects of quasidemocracy and democratization have nonetheless been very productive, leading to a much more nuanced understanding of the subject.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The past several decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of democracies worldwide. The democratization process has frequently been accompanied by violent conflict, as was seen in places such as the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and as might be seen today in many of the countries affected by the Arab Spring.

¹ See, for instance, Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2003; and Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, New York: Random House, 2009.

Should many nascent democracies eventually mature and consolidate their democratic institutions, we should expect this process to further contribute to the observed decline in levels of intrastate conflict of the past couple of decades. In fact, such democratic consolidation could produce a number of second- and third-order effects that would fuel a further decline in conflict. To the extent that mature democracies find it easier to cooperate at the international level, we should expect a broadening of the democratic community to reduce interstate conflict. A more stable international environment, in turn, might indirectly reinforce stability at the domestic level—for instance, by facilitating international trade and investment and other drivers of economic growth, and by reducing the likelihood of “proxy conflicts.”

None of these effects, of course, is inevitable. It is also plausible to foresee at least a partial erosion of recent democratic gains. Such cycles of democratic advances and retreat have in fact been common over the past century.² The long-standing trend, however, has been toward gradual expansion of democracy. Barring a global “shock,” such a trend appears likely to continue.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Democracy reduces the incidence of one-sided government violence, such as state repression and genocide.
- Due to their open societies and responsiveness to public opinion, democracies are particularly vulnerable to terrorism and likely to suffer higher levels of terrorist attacks.
- Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but partial democracies (“illiberal democracies” or “anocracies”) experience the highest level of civil war onsets.
- Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but both *democratizing* states and *autocratizing* states (any state experiencing significant change in its regime type) are highly prone to civil wars.
- Conflicts are typically less intense in democratic polities, either because democracies are less prone to use violence indiscriminately during a civil war or insurgency or because autocracies are more inclined to prolonged and highly intense fighting than to any significant accommodation.
- There exists an interaction effect such that democracy only exhibits pacifying effects in societies with high levels of development or strong states.

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

Hypothesis

Democracy reduces the incidence of one-sided government violence, such as state repression and genocide.

What the Literature Says

- Democracies are much less likely to commit genocide than are autocracies; on this there is considerable agreement.³
- There is less agreement on lesser forms of one-sided state violence, such as violent repression and human rights violations (e.g., violation of bodily integrity) outside of civil wars. A broad consensus exists that full democracies are the least likely form of regime to use violent repression.⁴ On the other hand, scholars are divided about the consequences of intermediate forms of democracy. Some claim that “quasidemocracies” or “illiberal democracies” are the most likely to resort to human rights violations.⁵ Others argue that there is a threshold effect: Improvements in democracy are inconsequential for preventing violent repression until a relatively high level of democracy is reached.⁶ Still others claim that any progress toward democracy is associated with better records on repression, while any decline from democracy toward autocracy is associated with greater repression.⁷

Hypothesis

Due to their open societies and responsiveness to public opinion, democracies are particularly vulnerable to terrorism and likely to suffer higher levels of terrorist attacks.

³ Barbara Harff, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder Since 1955,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, February 2003, pp. 57–73; Michael Colaresi and Sabine C. Carey, “To Kill or to Protect: Security Forces, Domestic Institutions, and Genocide,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 1, February 2008, pp. 39–67; and R. J. Rummel, “Democracy, Power, Genocide, and Mass Murder,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, March 1995, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 3–26.

⁴ Christian Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007a; Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 10, 2007b, pp. 1–23; and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Feryal Marie Cherif, George W. Downs, and Alastair Smith, “Thinking Inside the Box: A Closer Look at Democracy and Human Rights,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2005, pp. 439–457.

⁵ See, for example, Helen Fein, “More Murder in the Middle: Life-Integrity Violations and Democracy in the World, 1987,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1, February 1995, pp. 170–191.

⁶ Davenport, 2007a; Davenport, 2007b; and de Mesquita et al., 2005.

⁷ Sabine C. Zanger, “A Global Analysis of the Effect of Political Regime Changes on Life Integrity Violations, 1977–93,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2000, pp. 213–233.

What the Literature Says

- Numerous scholars have claimed that democracies are particularly susceptible to terrorism.⁸ Others have found the opposite;⁹ some have found no relationship;¹⁰ and still others have found an ambiguous relationship, with some aspects of democracies making them more vulnerable and others less vulnerable.¹¹
- Part of the reason for the disagreement is that the scholars are explaining different things: the presence and number of terrorist groups,¹² the number of terrorist attacks that occur within a country,¹³ the number of terrorist attacks that originate from a country,¹⁴ or the number of fatalities in terrorist attacks.¹⁵ The very definition of “terrorism” and what constitutes a terrorist group or a terrorist act are also highly disputed.
- As with other types of violence, the relationship between democracy and terrorism is also highly sensitive to how democracy is defined and which specific aspects of democracy are examined. Choi,¹⁶ for instance, finds that the rule of law, when fully developed and instantiated in a political system, is negatively associated with terrorism.
- Intervening variables also matter a great deal. Savun and Phillips,¹⁷ for instance, find no direct relationship between democracy and transnational terrorism. Instead, they argue that countries with more isolationist foreign policies are less likely to be targeted by transnational terrorism, and democracies are less isolationist. Thus democracies are more

⁸ See, for instance, Erica Chenoweth, “Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 16–30; William Lee Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, “Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1994, pp. 417–435; and William Lee Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, “Terrorism and Democracy: Perpetrators and Victims,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 155–164.

⁹ Seung-Whan Choi, “Fighting Terrorism Through the Rule of Law?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 54, No. 6, December 2010, pp. 940–966.

¹⁰ Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, “The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 2, April 2008, pp. 437–449.

¹¹ Quan Li, “Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 2, April 2005, pp. 278–297.

¹² Eubank and Weinberg, 1994, and Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism*, 2nd ed., New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 34.

¹³ Eubank and Weinberg, 2001; Chenoweth, 2010; Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, Mogens K. Justesen, and Robert Klemmensen, “The Political Economy of Freedom, Democracy and Transnational Terrorism,” *Public Choice*, Vol. 128, 2006, pp. 289–315; and Burcu Savun and Brian J. Phillips, “Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 6, December 2009, pp. 878–904.

¹⁴ Kurrild-Klitgaard, Justesen, and Klemmensen, 2006.

¹⁵ Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008.

¹⁶ Choi, 2010.

¹⁷ Savun and Phillips, 2009.

likely to be targets—but it is because of the foreign policies they adopt, not because of their domestic political structures *per se*.

- The literature on terrorism as a whole was extremely poor and underdeveloped prior to the attacks of September 11th. Since then, there has been an enormous expansion in this literature. The field as a whole, however, remains in its infancy, much less well developed than the literature on civil wars, for instance.

Hypothesis

Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but partial democracies (“illiberal democracies” or “anocracies”) experience the highest level of civil war onsets.

What the Literature Says

- Numerous studies suggest that democracy does indeed reduce the likelihood of civil war, but only at very high levels of democracy. Lesser forms of democracy—variously called “illiberal democracy,” “quasidemocracy,” or “anocracy”—might actually be *more* prone to violence.¹⁸ The general argument is simple. Autocracies can usually repress dissent. Democracies provide much more opportunity for dissidents to organize and press their claims against the government. In a full democracy, the organization of dissent can usually be channeled into constructive, peaceful channels: Large constituencies pressing for reform can successfully press their elected officials to change policies. But in poorly functioning democracies, even large, well-organized groups might be incapable of inducing change in government policy. These thwarted groups might therefore turn to violence.
- This claim is subject to a number of criticisms. The most important of these criticisms is what statisticians terms “endogeneity”—a condition where the hypothesized cause is actually the effect and vice versa. In this case, it could be that countries at high risk of violent conflict are the ones most likely to become partial or “illiberal” democracies. A relatively weak autocracy might be confronted with a strong opposition movement. It can either repress or accommodate this movement—or some combination of the two. A powerful, well-functioning autocracy can easily repress opposition, offering only minor concessions, if any at all. A weaker, more fragile autocracy, on the other hand, might fear

¹⁸ Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 33–48; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, *All International Politics Is Local: The Diffusion of Conflict, Integration, and Democratization*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, February 2003, pp. 75–90; and Jack A. Goldstone, Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael B. Lustik, Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder, and Mark Woodward, “A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 54, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 190–208.

that repression would backfire, causing an escalating spiral of violence. It would therefore offer more substantive concessions, perhaps in addition to the threat of repression if the opposition does not accept these partial concessions. Such a regime would become a partial democracy. But in this hypothetical example, the country is not at high risk of violence because it is a partial democracy. Rather, it is a partial democracy because it was at high risk of violence.

- Georgetown professor James Vreeland demonstrates that the early evidence in favor of this hypothesis was highly flawed.¹⁹ The relationship between quasidemocracy (or “anocracy” as it is typically called in the scholarly literature) and violent conflict, Vreeland argues, is entirely driven by one element of the Polity democracy index—an element known as “factionalism.” But “factionalism” in the Polity index is defined as political competition that is “intense, hostile, and frequently violent. Extreme factionalism may be manifested in the establishment of rival governments and in civil war.” If this element of the Polity index is removed, the remaining aspects of quasidemocracy show no relationship at all to violent conflict. Thus the previous findings on anocracy and civil war “may be driven by the fact that low levels of political violence beget higher levels”—an argument that is not entirely tautological, but close to it.²⁰
- More recent scholarship has acknowledged this criticism and sought to develop more-nuanced arguments and more-precise measures of the underlying logic. One recent study, for instance, examines the role of “irregular” leadership changes. Weak regimes, the authors argue, are subject to a variety of extralegal or violent leadership transfers (e.g., coups). Once these “irregular” transitions are taken into account, the authors conclude that “democracy has a clear negative effect on the risk of civil conflict onset. We take this to support the conclusion that there probably is nothing about the institutions of partial democracies per se that make such states prone to conflict, and that we should shift our attention to how state weakness might compel autocracies both to introduce half-hearted democratic reforms and provide political opportunities that might encourage resort to violence.”²¹
- Others have sought to understand what types of conflicts and what types of grievances are more susceptible to “democratic pacification,” and which ones would be unlikely to be ameliorated by democracy. Buhaug, for instance, distinguishes between territorial or

¹⁹ James Raymond Vreeland, “The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 3, June 2008, pp. 401–425.

²⁰ Vreeland, 2008, p. 420.

²¹ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Andrea Ruggeri, “Political Opportunity Structures, Democracy, and Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 3, May 2010, pp. 299–310, p. 308.

secessionist civil wars on the one hand, and wars focused on control of the central state.²² The author “demonstrates that territorial and governmental conflicts are shaped, in large part, by different causal mechanisms. The reputed parabolic relationship between democracy and risk of civil war [in which quasi-democracies are at greatest risk] only pertains to state-centered conflicts, whereas democracy has a positive and near-linear effect on the risk of territorial rebellion.”²³

Hypothesis

Fully democratic states are less prone to civil wars, but both democratizing states and autocratizing states (any state experiencing significant change in its regime type) are highly prone to civil wars.

What the Literature Says

- The logic behind this argument is clear and intuitive: Significant changes in a country’s regime will distribute power and resources in different ways and the “losers” from such redistribution are likely to resist such changes, with violence if necessary.
- The relationship between democratization and increased propensity for violence was first explored in the interstate conflict literature.²⁴ The hypothesis has since been applied to intrastate conflict. Early findings suggested that political change of any sort (either democratization or autocratization) was associated with a higher incidence of conflict.²⁵
- Later studies questioned the measurement of democracy, the Polity index that is commonly used in the literature.²⁶ Moreover, some scholars insisted that it is important to distinguish between different types of wars—in particular, wars fought over territory (wars of secession) and wars fought over control of the central government (coups, revolutions, and so on).²⁷
- As a result, subsequent research has sought to account for these problems. Using measures of democracy that eliminate the most problematic elements of the Polity score, one group of researchers, for instance, found that both democratization and

²² Halvard Buhaug, “Relative Capability and Rebel Objective in Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2006, pp. 691–708.

²³ Buhaug, 2006, p. 691.

²⁴ See, for instance, Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 5–38.

²⁵ See, especially, Hegre et al., 2001.

²⁶ See, especially, Vreeland, 2008; also, Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

²⁷ Buhaug, 2006.

autocratization are associated with increased incidence of violent conflict, although the effects of autocratization are immediate (as in a coup), while the effects of democratization take longer to manifest themselves. Interestingly, however, they find that these effects hold only in cases of conflicts over central government control (but not in conflicts over territory), and they find that the effects disappear when a higher threshold of violence (1,000 battle deaths as opposed to 25) is used to distinguish “conflict onset.”²⁸

- Subsequent research by the same group of authors highlighted the importance of the extent of democratization and its timing.²⁹ Their findings suggest that the holding of sham elections is problematic, and the early stages of democratization are much more dangerous than later periods.
- There has been a more general shift to refining the general linkage between political change and violent conflict, with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of democratization that are problematic and on sequencing issues. Carey, for instance, found that only certain types of elections are problematic in Africa.³⁰ Other scholars have focused on particular mechanisms of inclusion and guarantees of political participation for all major parties, finding that various power-sharing mechanisms can have important conflict-mitigating effects.³¹
- These results suggest that the relationship between change in regime type (both democratization and autocratization) and violent conflict exists, but it is a highly conditional one that perhaps explains low-level violence much better than it does severe conflict.

Hypothesis

Conflicts are typically less intense in democratic polities, either because democracies are less prone to use violence indiscriminately during a civil war or insurgency or because autocracies are more inclined to prolonged and highly intense fighting than to any significant accommodation.

²⁸ Lars-Erik Cederman, Simon Hug, and Lutz F. Krebs, “Democratization and Civil War: Empirical Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2010, pp. 377–394.

²⁹ Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Simon Hug, “Elections and Ethnic Civil War,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2012, pp. 387–417.

³⁰ Sabine C. Carey, “Rebellion in Africa: Disaggregating the Effect of Political Regimes,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2007, pp. 47–64.

³¹ Caroline Hartzell, Matthew Hoddie, and Donald Rothchild, “Stabilizing the Peace After Civil War: An Investigation of Some Key Variables,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 183–208.

What the Literature Says

- There has been significant debate about whether democracies are less likely to use violence indiscriminately in counterinsurgencies and other forms of civil war than are autocratic regimes.
- On the one hand, some scholars claim that all governments, regardless of their characteristics, will use violence indiscriminately if they are sufficiently desperate and the type of conflict does not permit an easy separation of civilians and combatants.³² These analyses focus on the military superiority of a government and the type of conflict (guerrilla or conventional warfare).
- On the other side are scholars who claim that democracies are more averse to using indiscriminate violence—even at the cost of losing wars.³³ Because rebels are more likely to target civilians more widely in wars against democracies, however, the overall relationship between democracy and levels of battle deaths could be either ambiguous or U-shaped.³⁴
- More-recent scholarship has tended to call attention to more-nuanced arguments about political inclusion, institutional characteristics (e.g., the type of democracy), and governmental accountability mechanisms.
- There are numerous ways in which commanders—both government and rebel—maintain discipline and accountability among their forces, and democratic oversight is only one of those mechanisms.³⁵
- Others have argued that the intensity of violence is shaped, at least in part, by the size of a government’s supporting coalition. Governments with a narrow support base typically distribute patronage intensively among their few supporters, so that all supporters of the regime have much to lose if they are defeated in an internal conflict. Such conflicts, therefore, are likely to be prolonged and extremely deadly affairs. Where coalitions are more broadly based, governments must distribute their services more broadly. Supporters

³² Alexander B. Downes, “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: The Causes of Civilian Victimization in War,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Spring 2006, pp. 152–195; and Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, “‘Draining the Sea’: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 375–407.

³³ Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; and Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, “One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War: Insights from New Fatality Data,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2007, pp. 233–246.

³⁴ Eck and Hultman, 2007; and Lisa Hultman, “Attacks on Civilians in Civil War: Targeting the Achilles Heel of Democratic Governments,” *International Interactions*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2012, pp. 164–181.

³⁵ See, for instance, Macarten Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3, August 2006, pp. 429–447.

might therefore have less to lose and hope to have more to gain in a transition to another regime. They might therefore be less inclined to fight to the bitter end.³⁶

- Unfortunately, the quality of cross-national data on the extent of battle deaths—much less whether fatalities were combatants or noncombatants—is extremely poor. It is unsurprising, therefore, that there is little consensus about the effects of democracy on the intensity of violence, and this high level of uncertainty could change little in the foreseeable future.

Hypothesis

There exists an interaction effect such that democracy only exhibits pacifying effects in societies with high levels of development or strong states.

What the Literature Says

- Various scholars have argued that democracy is highly unstable in either poor countries or countries without a strong tradition of the rule of law and other state institutions designed to regulate political conflict. This argument has a long history, going back at least to Samuel Huntington's classic and controversial *Political Order in Changing Societies*.³⁷ It has been revived in various recent popular writings.³⁸
- This argument is related to, but distinct from, claims that either partial democracy or democratization are highly unstable and prone to conflict. Countries at any income level, for instance, could begin democratic transitions. Those democratic transitions are most durable, however, in wealthier countries, while democracy is more likely to founder in poor countries.³⁹ Thus, proponents of this argument claim, it is not democratization *per se* that is destabilizing; it is democratization in unpromising circumstances.
- The economist Paul Collier is one of the foremost proponents of the claim that democracy only reduces the risk of conflict at higher income levels.⁴⁰ Political scientists,

³⁶ Lindsay Heger and Idean Salehyan, "Ruthless Rulers: Coalition Size and the Severity of Civil Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, 2007, pp. 385–403.

³⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968.

³⁸ See, for instance, Zakaria, 2003.

³⁹ Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1997, pp. 155–183.

⁴⁰ Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 64–65; and Collier, 2009.

on the other hand, are more likely to focus on the rule of law and other political “preconditions” for successful transitions to democracy.⁴¹

- It is unclear, however, precisely what accounts for the association between either poor societies and unstable democracy or weak states and unstable democracy. These arguments are subject to the same concerns about reverse causality or “endogeneity” that were reviewed in the discussion of “quasidemocracy” or “anocracy.”
- Nor are the policy implications of this correlation clear. There has been a lengthy debate in the development literature about whether democracy causes development or vice versa. Were “enlightened dictators” plentiful, then a case could be made that poor countries should be governed by enlightened autocrats until such time as they were ready for democracy. Unfortunately, enlightened despots appear to be few and far between, so a policy that relies on their prevalence, such as the notion that democracy should wait for the appearance of stringent “preconditions,” is highly suspect.⁴² It might well be that democracy is an important element of contemporary “state-building,” so that those who advocate state building before democratization are proposing a false dichotomy.⁴³
- It is also important to distinguish between the roles of democracy at different points in the conflict cycle. Even if democratization is problematic for countries that are otherwise peaceful and stable, it might be an important tool of conflict resolution in societies that are recovering from war and lack other means of reconciling competing claims to political power.⁴⁴ Democratic competition will typically need to be regulated by power sharing mechanisms in such circumstances,⁴⁵ and might need to be buttressed with international support.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

The sources of data on violence used by these studies vary tremendously. Given the limited number of genocides and democides, studies focused on these events typically use data sets created by the authors.⁴⁶ Data sets on terrorism include the GTD, the Memorial Institute for the

⁴¹ See, for instance, Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.

⁴² Thomas Carothers, “The ‘Sequencing’ Fallacy,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 2007, pp. 12–27.

⁴³ See, for instance, Michael Bratton and Eric C. C. Chang, “State Building and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Forwards, Backwards, or Together?” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 9, November 2006, pp. 1059–1083.

⁴⁴ For a broader discussion of this point, see Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁴⁵ Hartzell, Hoddie, and Rothchild, 2001.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Harff, 2003.

Prevention of Terrorism's TKB, the ITERATE data set, the RDWTI, and others. Studies of repression draw on a wider range of data sets. Some studies rely on event data collected from media sources, others on human rights reporting from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or governmental sources (especially the U.S. State Department's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*),⁴⁷ while others use survey data.⁴⁸ Data on civil war onsets and duration are available from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (especially the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, but also a variety of others), the Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) data sets of the Center for Systemic Peace, the COW project at the University of Michigan, and the MAR project at the University of Maryland.

Given the enormous range of potential causes of violent conflict reviewed above, it is not practical to review all of the data sources scholars use to assess their effects.

Studies of the relationship between democracy and violent conflict are afflicted by the same methodological issues that have appeared in reviews of other factors, including endogeneity (or reverse causation), omitted variable bias, and interaction effects. A number of these issues have been discussed in the previous sections, but the specific issues addressed in this review are by no means exhaustive of the full range of methodological problems that appear in the literature.

⁴⁷ U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, Washington, D.C.: multiple years.

⁴⁸ For a review, see Davenport, 2007b.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The number of democracies (as judged by the Polity index) in the world has vastly increased since World War II—from 20 in 1946 to nearly 100 today, with a particular expansion in the number of democracies coinciding with the end of the Cold War. This expansion represents a relative increase in the incidence of democracy as well as an absolute increase. In 1946, there were 19 autocracies and 32 anocracies, as compared with the 20 democracies. By 2011, there were 95 democracies, 22 autocracies, and approximately 48 anocracies.⁴⁹ Since consolidated democracies are generally agreed to be subject to lower levels of intrastate violence, this increase in the number of democracies should lower the overall incidence of intrastate conflict in the world. Were these democratization trends to continue, then eventually, of course, there would be fewer and fewer opportunities for continued improvements in conflict trends as the number of nondemocracies declined.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

The future might be different if democracy becomes either more or less widespread than it is today, or if its relationship to violent conflict changes.

There might be indications that even quasidemocracies have been less unstable recently than they have been historically. A number of reasons might explain this possible trend. Democracy has become a global norm, so many populations demand democracy and will not accept reverses of democratic gains. Moreover, the international community has become more engaged in promoting and buttressing democracy, potentially making it more stable.⁵⁰ If these trends continue, the pacifying effects of democracy might strengthen, accelerating the decline in intrastate conflict that we have observed recently.

On the other hand, if democracy becomes less attractive as a system of governance, or if powerful international actors become dedicated to undermining nascent democracies, it is possible these trends could be reversed. A sustained period of global economic instability might weaken many existing democracies. It is also possible that U.S. adversaries might seek to subvert democratic partners of the United States. At this point, there is little evidence of any broad trend in this direction, although the United States should certainly be attentive to indicators of a change in past trends.

⁴⁹ Monty G. Marshall and Benjamin R. Cole, *Global Report 2011: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, Vienna, Va.: Center for Systemic Peace, 2011.

⁵⁰ Marshall and Cole, 2011; and Burcu Savun and Daniel C. Tirone, “Foreign Aid, Democratization, and Civil Conflict: How Does Democracy Aid Affect Civil Conflict?” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April 2011, pp. 233–246.

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19. Economic Factors

Overview

Of all the possible causes of violent intrastate conflict, “the poverty-violence link is arguably the most robust finding in the growing research literature investigating the causes of civil wars.”¹ The meaning of this relationship, however, is highly contested.

First, different scholars use different aspects of income or development levels to explain violent conflict:

- **Overall Level of Economic Development:** Numerous studies use overall levels of economic development (understood in terms of GDP per capita or related variables, such as infant mortality).²
- **Change in Rate of Economic Development:** One problem with a focus on overall income levels is that they are relatively stable over time. Consequently, while they might suggest something about overall conflict propensity, they cannot explain why a conflict occurs at a given time rather than significantly earlier or later. Several scholars, therefore, focus instead on changes in the rate of economic development or income growth or the differential rates of growth across relevant groups.³
- **Economic Inequality:** Still other scholars argue that the issue is not overall income levels; rather, it is the distribution of incomes. High levels of economic inequality, they argue, fuel grievances that in turn foster violent conflict.

These aspects of income levels are usually connected to violent conflict through one or more of three causal mechanisms:

- **Grievances:** Much of the popular understanding of violent conflict focuses on the presence of grievances, especially economic grievances. For violent conflict to occur, people must care so deeply about an issue that they are willing to take tremendous risks to resolve the problem.

¹ Edward Miguel, “Poverty and Violence: An Overview of Recent Research and Implications for Foreign Aid,” in Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet, eds., *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007, p. 51; see also Håvard Hegre and Nicholas Sambanis, “Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 508–535; and Michael D. Ward, Brian D. Greenhill, and Kristin M. Bakke, “The Perils of Policy by P-Value: Predicting Civil Conflicts,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2010, pp. 363–375.

² Hegre and Sambanis, 2006.

³ See, for instance, Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti, “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 112, No. 4, August 2004, pp. 725–753.

- **State Capacity:** More recently, scholars have criticized the traditional focus on grievances. Severe and legitimate grievances are common throughout the world, but violent conflict is relatively rare. To explain this discrepancy, we must focus on opportunities for violence rather than motivations.⁴ In particular, many argue that the state's capacity to buy off or repress insurgency matters more than the insurgents' motivations in explaining the incidence of violent conflict.⁵ State capacity, in turn, is highly correlated with economic development and income levels.
- **Opportunity Costs of Insurgency:** The final mechanism most commonly linking income levels to violent conflict is one that focuses on insurgent labor markets. Where there are many opportunities for remunerative employment in the licit economy (as in wealthier societies), the opportunity costs of joining a violent movement will be much higher. Where there are few opportunities for such employment, the costs of joining an insurgency decline, providing armed opposition movements with a larger recruiting pool.

It is also important to recognize that the same variables and same causal pathways might have different effects on different levels of violent conflict. Large-scale civil wars might have very different causes than much smaller-scale terrorist campaigns, where small groups of committed activists can cause violence in even the richest countries. And organized violence (whether civil wars or terrorism) might have very different causes from unorganized violence (e.g., ordinary homicides).

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

The world has seen tremendous economic growth over the past several decades, with more people lifted out of poverty than ever before. Even Africa, which had long lagged well behind other regions of the world in economic growth, has provided reasons for optimism: It was the fastest-growing continent of the past decade, and such factors as wireless communications and increases in commodity prices suggest that the continent could continue its recent trends.

Since income levels are so closely tied to violent intrastate conflict, widespread economic development has likely been one of the major factors contributing to the general decline in intrastate wars in the past two to three decades. So long as that broadly based economic growth continues, we can expect to see continued declines in conflict. If a period of prolonged, global

⁴ Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoefler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁵ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75–90; and Robert H. Bates, "State Failure," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11, 2008, pp. 1–12.

economic instability sets in, however, these trends might be expected to reverse, both due to the direct effects of declining incomes and the indirect effects on state capacity.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Economic grievances—particularly economic inequalities—lead to an increased incidence of violent conflict.
- Lower personal incomes or declines in personal incomes decrease the opportunity costs of engaging in violent conflict and therefore increase its incidence.
- Sudden declines in income levels weaken state capacity to prevent or end violent conflict.

Hypothesis

Economic grievances—particularly economic inequalities—lead to an increased incidence of violent conflict.

What the Literature Says

- This hypothesis was particularly popular during the Cold War,⁶ although its allure remains strong. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001, for instance, this hypothesis was widely resurrected as an explanation for transnational terrorism.⁷
- If this hypothesis were broadly true, we would expect to see a correlation at the national level between levels of economic inequality and violent conflict. No such pattern exists for large-scale violent conflict (i.e., civil wars),⁸ although some evidence suggests it might be true for “unorganized” violence (i.e., everyday homicides).⁹ It also appears that income inequality might be linked to one-sided government repression as governments of highly inequitable societies resort to repression to maintain social order.¹⁰

⁶ See, for instance, the highly influential Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970.

⁷ For an early exposition of this hypothesis and why it might be problematic, see Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Fall 2003, pp. 119–144.

⁸ See, for instance, Collier et al., 2003.

⁹ See especially Marc Ouimet, “A World of Homicides: The Effect of Economic Development, Income Inequality, and Excess Infant Mortality on the Homicide Rate for 165 Countries in 2010,” *Homicide Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2012, pp. 238–258.

¹⁰ Edward N. Muller, “Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1, February 1985, pp. 47–61.

- The central problem with the hypothesis linking economic grievances to the incidence of civil war is overprediction. Many populations have grievances. The only ones that translate those grievances into organized, large-scale violence are ones that are not successfully policed by the state and have the organizational wherewithal (including resources) to build a sizable organization. These requirements suggest that state capacity and theories about the organization and financing of insurgency are likely at least as important as an understanding of grievances.
- Although the broad version of this hypothesis has little empirical support for large-scale, organized violence (civil wars), it is entirely possible that more-nuanced versions could have important explanatory power. In particular, economic inequality might interact with other variables (for example, levels of education, regime type, religious or ethnic cleavages) that either strengthen or mitigate the effects of economic inequality. Unless a model specified the appropriate interaction effects, it might thus provide an inaccurate account of the true consequences of economic inequality.
- Many scholars of ethnic conflict, for instance, claim that “overlapping cleavages”—that is, the congruence of economic inequalities with ethnic identities—are a powerful predictor of violent conflict. Difficulties in measurement have made it difficult to quantitatively test such propositions globally, but recent inroads have been made into this problem.¹¹
- Some other factors might ameliorate the consequences of these inequalities. Burgoon, for instance, argues that social welfare states are able to reduce the likelihood of terrorism by providing support to economically disadvantaged subpopulations.¹² Taydas and Peksen make a similar argument about intrastate conflict more generally.¹³
- It is also entirely possible that using entire countries as the unit of analysis masks the effects of inequalities by failing to disaggregate regionally concentrated inequalities. This is the argument of Buhaug and his collaborators, and it reflects a recent turn toward spatial disaggregation of conflict dynamics and attention to microprocesses.¹⁴

¹¹ See especially Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3, August 2011, pp. 478–495.

¹² Brian Burgoon, “On Welfare and Terror: Social Welfare Policies and Political-Economic Roots of Terrorism,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 176–203.

¹³ Zeynep Taydas and Dursun Peksen, “Can States Buy Peace? Social Welfare Spending and Civil Conflicts,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2012, pp. 273–287.

¹⁴ Halvard Buhaug, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Helge Holtermann, Gudrun Østby, and Andreas Forø Tollefsen, “It’s the Local Economy, Stupid! Geographic Wealth Dispersion and Conflict Outbreak Location,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 5, 2011, pp. 814–840.

Hypothesis

Lower personal incomes or declines in personal incomes decrease the opportunity costs of engaging in violent conflict and therefore increase its incidence.

What the Literature Says

- The logic behind this hypothesis is simple: Individuals can allocate their labor across a variety of licit and illicit activities. The less remunerative licit activities are (that is, the more difficult it is to hold down a reasonably well-paying job), the more attractive illicit activities—including violent ones—will be.¹⁵ In some cases, scholars focus on the overall level of personal income (e.g., GDP per capita), while in other cases scholars focus on change in personal incomes, particularly the disruptive effects of negative economic “shocks”.¹⁶
- Consistent with this hypothesis, a number of studies suggest that low incomes are indeed related to criminal activity, including homicide.¹⁷ One study found that government-sponsored cash transfer programs raise the costs of rebel recruitment in an insurgency, leading to depressed insurgent activity—also a finding that is consistent with the broad hypothesis connecting income levels with “labor markets” for violence.¹⁸
- Other studies, however, suggest that the relationship between either personal income levels or employment and engagement in political violence is not straightforward. Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, for instance, argues that lower personal incomes make individuals more inclined to join violent movements, but these individuals also tend to have poorer skill sets that are of less value to terrorist organizations.¹⁹ Other scholars have found an inverse relationship between unemployment and insurgent violence: As unemployment increases, levels of insurgent violence decrease.²⁰

¹⁵ For an early application of this framework to crime, see, for instance, Gary S. Becker, “Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 76, No. 2, March/April 1968, pp. 169–217.

¹⁶ See, for example, Miguel, Satyanath, and Sergenti, 2004.

¹⁷ Becker, 1968; Isaac Ehrlich, “Participation in Illegitimate Activities: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 81, No. 3, May 1973, pp. 521–565; Ching-Chi Hsieh and M. D. Pugh, “Poverty, Income Inequality, and Violent Crime: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Aggregate Data Studies,” *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Autumn 1993, pp. 182–202; and Ouimet, 2012.

¹⁸ Benjamin Crost, Joseph H. Felter, and Patrick Johnston, “Government Transfers and Civil Conflict: Experimental Evidence from the Philippines,” unpublished manuscript, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, September 18, 2012.

¹⁹ Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, “The Quality of Terror,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 49, No. 3, July 2005, pp. 515–530; see also Krueger and Maleckova, 2003.

²⁰ Eli Berman, Michael Callen, Joseph H. Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011, pp. 496–528.

- These empirical inconsistencies at the microlevel suggest that the dynamics linking income levels to violence are highly complex. Dube and Vargas, for instance, argue that there are two causal pathways linking income levels and violent conflict, and they have opposite implications for the overall effect.²¹ On the one hand, lower income potential in the licit economy reduces the opportunity costs of labor in illicit and violent enterprises, thus linking lower incomes to higher violent activity. On the other hand, higher incomes in the licit economy might mean there are greater opportunities to “appropriate” wealth from licit income-earners through violence, thus linking *higher* incomes to more violent activity. Dube and Vargas find evidence of both phenomena in Colombia, suggesting that the overall relationship will be conditioned by specific economic sectors.²² Relatedly, Berman, Shapiro, and Felter argue that lower income levels might make it cheaper for the government to “purchase” information about insurgent identities and whereabouts, thus making counterinsurgent activities easier when incomes are lower.²³

Overall, the relationship between personal income levels and violent activity is a complex one.

Hypothesis

Sudden declines in income levels weaken state capacity to prevent or end violent conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Fiscal crises have long been understood to be a primary cause of revolution and insurgency.²⁴ Sudden negative economic shocks can cause fiscal crises for fragile states, reducing their ability to accommodate or repress movements that might emerge as violent actors.
- Bates argues that fiscal crisis offers a better theoretical and empirical account of why economic shocks lead to violence than do accounts based on personal income: Without public revenues, governments cannot pay their civil servants (who might therefore turn to corruption) or their armed forces (which might then use their weapons to pay themselves).²⁵ When those in power lack the resources to induce influential groups—

²¹ Oeindrila Dube and Juan Vargas, *Commodity Price Shocks and Civil Conflict: Evidence from Colombia*, unpublished manuscript, New York: New York University, 2012.

²² Dube and Vargas, 2012.

²³ Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Joseph H. Felter, “Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 119, No. 4, August 2011, pp. 766–819.

²⁴ See, for instance, Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, New York: Vintage Books, (1938) 1965; and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

²⁵ Bates, 2008.

military officers or regional elites, for example—to remain politically faithful, then the state begins to disintegrate. These findings help to account for the temporal distribution of the data, which indicate that both the rate and stock of civil wars and state failures peaked at the time of the global recession of the late 20th century. In the 1970s, higher oil prices sent the industrial economies reeling, and exports from the poorer nations therefore declined; as the governments in the developing world drew their taxes from trade, their public revenues also declined. Governments borrowed to make up for this shortfall; but when the Federal Reserve raised interest rates in the United States in the early 1980s, these governments incurred an increased burden of debt. Pressured by their creditors to retrench their spending, governments froze salaries. Bureaucrats then turned to extracting bribes and security services turned to preying on shopkeepers or travelers on the roads. When those with public power turned predatory, the process of state failure began. Weighing private incomes on the one hand and the likelihood of state failure on the other, observers find that a decline in the first correlates with an increase in the second. But the evidence suggests that the causal path between economic decline and political implosion runs through the public treasury rather than through the private economy.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

At least three major problems afflict much of the literature on the relationship between income levels and violent conflict:

- **Omitted Variable Bias:** Income levels are highly correlated with other factors potentially affecting the incidence of violent conflict. If all of these other factors could be specified precisely and incorporated into the statistical models on which these findings are based, there would not be a problem. In fact, however, the strong inverse relationship between income levels and the incidence of violent conflict could just be reflecting the presence of variables correlated with income levels that are difficult to measure and incorporate into traditional statistical models.²⁶
- **Endogeneity:** Violent conflict depresses income levels.²⁷ Consequently, it is possible that the direction of the causal relationship is the opposite of the one hypothesized by those who claim that low income (or declining growth) causes violent conflict. Scholars frequently attempt to deal with this problem by introducing lagged variables into their equations (that is, they use income levels from a prior year to predict violent conflict in a future year). But such an approach assumes that the population does not anticipate the likelihood of violent conflict and make economic decisions accordingly, thereby

²⁶ Miguel, Satyanath, and Sergenti, 2004.

²⁷ Collier et al., 2003.

depressing economic development because of the risk of future conflict.²⁸ In fact, we have strong reason to believe that the risk of violent conflict figures prominently into ordinary people's daily calculations, with enormous implications for levels of development.²⁹

- **Interaction Effects:** When scholars attempt to parse the different causal mechanisms through which income levels and violent conflict are related, they are frequently confounded by a tremendous number of interaction effects. Income inequalities might have very different effects on violence, for instance, when they reinforce long-standing ethnic animosities compared with when they exist in an ethnically homogeneous society, or when they are mitigated by the redistributive policies of a welfare state rather than being matters of life and death in a subsistence-level rural economy. Such complex interaction effects are difficult to capture in traditional statistical models. Some scholars have proposed alternatives,³⁰ but so far, few studies have successfully employed methods to tease out these interconnected relationships.

Many scholars have criticized the quantitative methods that have been used to study violent intrastate conflict over the past two decades in particular, arguing that they have produced few robust findings.³¹ Two directions for future research have received particular emphasis:

- **Experiments and Improved Identification Strategies:** A number of researchers have employed experiments to attempt to isolate the effects of a single economic cause. In one case, scholars used drought as a “natural experiment” to test for the consequences of sudden economic “shocks.”³² In another case, researchers “piggy-backed” on a preexisting randomized control experiment conducted to evaluate development assistance impacts on a local economy, but linked the experiment to systematically collected data on local violence.³³ In principle, experiments allow for better identification strategies of a given causal relationship.
- **Local-Level Dynamics:** An enormous proportion of the quantitative literature on economics and violent conflict examines the subject using a country, a country-year, or a particular conflict dyad (e.g., a war between a government and one specific insurgency)

²⁸ Miguel et al., 2004.

²⁹ Robert H. Bates, *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

³⁰ See, for instance, Nathaniel Beck, Gary King, and Langche Zeng, “Improving Quantitative Studies of International Conflict: A Conjecture,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 1, March 2000, pp. 21–35.

³¹ See, for instance, Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel, “Civil War,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 48, No. 1, March 2010, pp. 3–57; and Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke, 2010.

³² Miguel, Satyanath, and Sergenti, 2004.

³³ Crost, Felter, and Johnston, 2012.

as the unit of analysis. A large number of scholars have recently emphasized the importance of disaggregating conflicts to the local level to tease out the “microdynamics” of civil conflict, and they have begun developing a range of quantitative methods for doing so.³⁴

Other Relevant Factors

As the discussions indicate, there are a large number of other relevant factors.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

The economic gains of the past several decades are likely a significant contributing factor to the observed decline in intrastate conflict after the end of the Cold War.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

A large proportion of the world’s leaders believe that the risk of major systemic financial failure is and will remain one of the greatest global threats in the coming decade or longer.³⁵ It might be that the 2008 financial crisis marked the end of a relatively stable era for the world economy and the beginning of an extended period of economic instability. Given the relationship between negative economic shocks and violent conflict, a more unstable global economy could lead to increases in violent conflict in the coming years, reversing the general downward trends observed over much of the past several decades.

Long-term problematic economic trends (such as sustained balance-of-payments imbalances) could interact with a broader redistribution of global power in ways that are particularly unstable. Emerging major economies (such as China, India, Brazil, and others) might seek to insulate themselves from global economic instabilities by reverting to economic regionalism and similar policies that reduce the returns from global markets.³⁶ The result could be a long-term reduction in global growth rates, which in turn might lead to an increased incidence in violent conflict.

³⁴ See, for instance, Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, 2011; and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War,” in Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud, eds., *Order, Violence, and Conflict*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

³⁵ World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2013*, 8th ed., Geneva.

³⁶ Max Von Bismarck, Nicholas Davis, Albrecht Dürnhöfer, Irvin Sha, Maliha Shekhani, Bernd Jan Sikken, and Andrew Turnbull, *The Future of the Global Financial System: A Near-Term Outlook and Long-Term Scenarios*, in Cologne/Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2009.

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20. Competition over Natural Resources

Overview

Two main variants of the argument link natural resources to violent conflict:

- **neo-Malthusian hypotheses**, which link resource scarcity (including climate change–induced scarcity) to violent conflict
- **“greed” hypotheses**, which make the opposite claim—that excess of natural resource wealth, rather than resource scarcity, leads to violent conflict.

Different quantitative studies have reached different conclusions about the links between natural resources and violent conflict, suggesting that there is not a robust relationship between the simple notions that natural resource scarcities or wealth directly lead to conflict. Instead, scholars have intensified their search to discover the precise causal pathways through which natural resources are related to violent conflict and to produce geographically disaggregated empirical studies.¹ It is worth noting that arguments focused on competition over natural resources are often linked with those about demographic change and population growth, as already described.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

A variety of commodities—both licit and illicit—have allegedly fueled civil wars around the globe, and it is the enormous “rents” that can be earned from exporting these commodities to wealthier countries that has had a corrosive effect on developing countries’ stability. At the same time, exports to wealthier countries and investments from those countries have also often been associated with economic growth in the developing world, so it is not clear that natural resources in the aggregate have had a net positive or negative effect on conflict trends.

While natural resource wealth has thus had an indeterminate effect on conflict, resource scarcity has had much less ambiguous effects. Resource scarcities—especially of water, food, and arable land—certainly contribute to violent conflict. On the other hand, “resilient” societies can generally absorb the effects of such scarcities. It is only when combined with such factors as poor governance and stagnant economies that resource scarcity has sparked violent conflict.

¹ See, for example, Michael L. Ross, “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases,” *International Organization*, Vol. 58, Winter 2004, pp. 35–67; and Macartan Humphreys, “Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4, August 2005, pp. 508–537.

Resource scarcity could play a much more important role in the future, however. If severe climate change or another global environmental catastrophe were to occur, the resulting pressures could exceed even the most resilient society's ability to withstand them.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Natural resource wealth (dependence on primary commodities, such as hydrocarbons, nonhydrocarbon minerals, and illicit narcotics) increases economic inequalities that, in turn, contribute to a higher incidence of violent conflict.
- Easily exploitable natural resources (those that are potentially high-profit, easily transportable, and easily appropriable, such as alluvial diamonds or illicit narcotics) increase the resources available to fund conflict.
- Natural resource wealth (dependence on primary commodities such as hydrocarbons and nonhydrocarbon minerals) decreases the quality of governance of the state.
- Primary commodity dependence makes states more economically vulnerable.
- The scarcity of renewable resources (e.g., water, arable land, forests) is a significant driver of violent conflict.

Hypothesis

Natural resource wealth (dependence on primary commodities, such as hydrocarbons, nonhydrocarbon minerals, and illicit narcotics) increases economic inequalities that, in turn, contribute to a higher incidence of violent conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Natural resource wealth is often geographically concentrated, potentially leading to pronounced disparities in wealth (or potential wealth) between different regions of the same country. A number of observers have claimed that such a situation creates obvious incentives for separatism. The economist Paul Collier, for instance, claims that Scottish separatism was confined to the margins of British political discourse until the discovery of North Sea oil off the shores of Scotland.² Similar dynamics have been central to the extremely tense relations between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq.³

² Paul Collier, "Primary Commodity Dependence and Africa's Future," in Boris Pleskovic and Nicholas Stern, eds., *The New Reform Agenda*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2003, pp. 139–161.

³ On the importance of geographically disaggregating the effects of income inequalities on conflict, see Halvard Buhaug, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Helge Holtermann, Gudrun Østby, and Andreas Forø Tollefsen, "It's the Local Economy, Stupid! Geographic Wealth Dispersion and Conflict Outbreak Location," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 5, 2011, pp. 814–840.

- The environmental consequences of resource exploitation also tend to be geographically concentrated. This highly inequitable environmental degradation, in turn, could lead to violent conflict. The link between environmental degradation and violent conflict in the Niger River Delta of Nigeria, for instance, is often cited as one example.⁴
- An overall assessment of this hypothesis is difficult because the links between natural resource wealth, inequality, and violent conflict are complex. Ross, for instance, argues that resource-based inequalities appeared to exacerbate separatist conflicts but played no significant role in non-separatist conflicts in his sample of 13 “most likely” cases of resource-fueled civil wars.⁵

Hypothesis

Easily exploitable natural resources (those that are potentially high-profit, easily transportable, and easily appropriable, such as alluvial diamonds or illicit narcotics) increase the resources available to fund conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Insurgents require resources with which to fund their insurgency (e.g., to buy weapons, pay supporters, etc.) During the Cold War, the superpowers provided funding to many non-state violent actors. But in the post-Cold War era, state sponsorship for insurgents or terrorists has been less widespread. Many non-state actors must therefore turn to criminal activities to fund their enterprises. Easily “lootable” natural resources (those that are potentially high-profit, easily transportable, and easily appropriable, such as alluvial diamonds or illicit narcotics) might thus prove an important predictor of violent conflict in that they provide the “start-up costs” for insurgents and terrorists. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) claim that statistical tests show a strong relationship between natural resources and conflict.
- Others have disputed these findings, arguing that these scholars’ causal mechanisms are poorly specified and their proxy indicators of the causal relationship are insufficiently nuanced. In a qualitative study of 13 “most likely” cases of resource-fueled conflicts, Ross argues that there is no evidence that insurgents financed their “start-up costs” from natural resource wealth.⁶ Fearon argues that the effect of commodity exports on violent conflict can be reduced to oil exports, which casts doubt on the notion that commodity

⁴ Akachi Odoemene, “Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April 2011, pp. 123–135.

⁵ Ross, 2004.

⁶ Ross, 2004.

exports as a whole are a good empirical proxy for the causal argument.⁷ Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore find evidence that secondary diamonds (i.e., those that are easily accessible without capital-intensive mining operations) are related to the onset of ethnic civil wars, but not civil wars more generally, and primary diamonds (which typically do require capital-intensive mining operations) are inversely associated with the risk of civil war.⁸ Their findings suggest that easily “lootable” resources might indeed fuel violent conflict, but only under certain narrowly defined conditions, and in other cases the revenues that these resources offer the state might actually depress the incidence of violent conflict.

Hypothesis

Natural resource wealth (dependence on primary commodities such as hydrocarbons and nonhydrocarbon minerals) decreases the quality of governance of the state.

What the Literature Says

- An enormous literature claims that resource-dependent economies tend to foster more authoritarian and corrupt governance than more diversified economies.⁹ The primary claim is that governments that can reap windfall profits from easily exploitable resources (especially oil, but sometimes also mineral wealth such as diamonds) do not need to tax their citizens heavily. Taxes, in turn, lie at the center of the social compact between a regime and its population: States provide services in return for taxes, and citizens pay their taxes because they value the services that the state provides. If the state does not require the voluntary compliance of citizens for its revenues, then either it does not need to become responsive to citizen demands or it can be responsive in a way that does not directly involve citizens in decisions about governance (e.g., through the distribution of patronage).
- Consistent with this argument, some evidence indicates that natural resource wealth is associated with higher levels of corruption.¹⁰ Some have argued, however, that such

⁷ James D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution, Special Issue: Paradigm in Distress? Primary Commodities and Civil War*, Vol. 49, No. 4, August 2005, pp. 483–507.

⁸ Päivi Lujala, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Elisabeth Gilmore, “A Diamond Curse? Civil War and a Lootable Resource,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2005, pp. 538–562.

⁹ See, for instance, Michael L. Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics*, Vol. 53, April 2001, pp. 325–361; Nathan Jensen, and Leonard Wantchekon, “Resource Wealth and Political Regimes in Africa,” *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 37, No. 7, 2004, pp. 816–841; and Jay Ulfelder, “Natural-Resource Wealth and the Survival of Autocracy,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 8, 2007, pp. 995–1018.

¹⁰ Shannon M. Pendegast, Judith A. Clarke, and G. Cornelis van Kooten, “Corruption, Development and the Curse of Natural Resources,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 2, June 2011, pp. 411–437.

wealth can be used to accommodate (“buy off”) potentially violent opposition groups, thus depressing levels of conflict even in the presence of corruption.¹¹

- This argument has frequently been used to explain the prevalence of autocracy in the oil-rich Middle East.¹²
- The relationship between natural resources and autocracy is much more complex than this argument suggests, however. Oil has played a significant role in buttressing democracy in many countries in Latin America, and massive diamond deposits appear to have done the same for Botswana.¹³
- To the extent that intensive natural resource exploitation is indeed related to autocracy and corruption, and to the extent that autocracy and corruption are related to violent conflict, natural resources might fuel violent conflict through their effects on governance.

Hypothesis

Primary commodity dependence makes states more economically vulnerable.

What the Literature Says

- There are at least two mechanisms through which natural resources might make a country’s economy more vulnerable and ultimately make the country more prone to violent conflict: price and production volatility and “Dutch Disease.”
 - First, high dependence on natural resources might make an economy particularly subject to the price “shocks” which characterize commodities traded in the international economy and to supply “shocks” caused by environmental factors.¹⁴ Since negative economic shocks are associated with violent conflict,¹⁵ natural resources might lead to violent conflict by increasing economic volatility.
 - Second, high global prices for certain natural resources (e.g., oil) can contribute to currency appreciation in the exporting country, thereby making its other exports (e.g., manufactured goods) less competitive. This phenomenon—often called “Dutch Disease” after the declining competitiveness of the Dutch economy in the years after

¹¹ See Hanne Fjelde, “Buying Peace? Oil Wealth, Corruption and Civil War, 1985–99,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2009, pp. 199–218.

¹² See, for instance, Ross, 2001.

¹³ Thad Dunning, *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

¹⁴ Collier, 2003; and Macartan Humphreys, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Joseph E. Stiglitz, “What Is the Problem with Natural Resource Wealth?” in Macartan Humphreys, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Joseph E. Stiglitz, eds., *Escaping the Resource Curse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

¹⁵ Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti, “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 112, No. 4, 2004, pp. 725–753.

the discovery of its North Sea oil deposits—might hamper the development of a diversified economy, thereby inhibiting overall economic growth.¹⁶ To the extent that lower economic development contributes to violent conflict, natural resource abundance might cause violent conflict through “Dutch Disease.”

Hypothesis

The scarcity of renewable resources (e.g., water, arable land, forests) is a significant driver of violent conflict.

What the Literature Says

- Renewable resource scarcity (or environmental degradation) has been advanced as an explanation for a wide variety of conflicts.¹⁷ It has been advanced as a primary cause of genocides in Rwanda and Darfur and state collapse in Somalia.¹⁸
- As a corollary, numerous studies of climate change have asserted that widespread violent conflict is likely to be one of its consequences.¹⁹ Climate change might induce large-scale population movements, which in turn could inflame ethnic tensions as ethnic balances change or distributional conflicts arise (e.g., between farmers and herders).²⁰
- There are a variety of causal pathways that might link renewable resource scarcity and violent conflict. Most proponents of the theory argue that it is a complex conjunction of multiple causes—including environmental degradation, demographic pressures, and political context—that produces violent conflict.²¹
- Some skeptics of the resource-scarcity argument claim that the causal argument should instead be reversed. In highly conflict-prone societies, individuals are less likely to make long-term investments for fear of losing everything in a violent conflict. Consequently,

¹⁶ Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, “The Curse of Natural Resources,” *European Economic Review*, Vol. 45, 2001, pp. 827–838; and Humphreys, Sachs, and Stiglitz, 2007.

¹⁷ Thomas Homer-Dixon, “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, pp. 5–40; Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999; Wenche Hauge and Tanja Ellingsen, “Beyond Environmental Scarcity: Causal Pathways to Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1998, pp. 299–317; and Colin Kahl, *States, Scarcity, and Civil Strife in the Developing World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.

¹⁸ See review in Ole Magnus Theisen, “Blood and Soil? Resource Scarcity and Internal Armed Conflict Revisited,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 6, 2008, pp. 801–818.

¹⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007*, 2007; Stern Review, *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, 2006; and Defense Science Board, *Trends and Implications of Climate Change for National and International Security*, Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011, p. xi.

²⁰ Rafael Reuveny, “Climate Change-Induced Migration and Conflict,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2007, pp. 656–673.

²¹ See, especially, Kahl, 2006.

they are less likely to adopt resource-conserving practices and more likely to take actions that degrade their natural environment (e.g., clear-cutting forests for timber sales). For scholars making this claim, it is the threat of violent conflict that leads to environmental degradation and resource scarcity, more than the other way around.²² Others argue that political factors (bad governance, corruption, etc.) are the causes of both environmental degradation and conflict.²³

- Even many proponents of the resource-scarcity theory argue that political institutions mediate the effects of scarcity; resource-induced conflicts are much more likely to turn violent in countries with poor political institutions than they are in countries with good political institutions.²⁴
- Empirical support for the renewable resource-scarcity argument has been mixed. Most quantitative studies find little support for the strongest versions of the argument (that the link between scarcity and violent conflict is direct, strong, and widespread). A number of extremely detailed studies of particular regions have also cast doubt on the environmental degradation hypothesis.²⁵ More nuanced versions might be much more defensible.²⁶ The Defense Science Board makes a measured assessment: “Climate change is more likely to be an exacerbating factor for failure to meet basic human needs and for social conflict, rather than a root cause.”²⁷
- As with much of the rest of the intrastate conflict literature, there has been a recent movement toward geographical disaggregation of the scarcity-conflict relationship—i.e., moving beyond entire countries as the unit of analysis and looking instead at smaller regions within countries.²⁸

²² See, for instance, Indra De Soysa, “Ecoviolence: Shrinking Pie or Honey Pot?” *Global Environmental Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2002b, pp. 1–34.

²³ For example, Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, “Violent Environments,” in Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, eds., *Violent Environments*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001.

²⁴ See, for instance, Kahl, 2006.

²⁵ See, for instance, Tor A. Benjaminsen, Koffi Alinon, Halvard Buhaug, and Jill Tove Buseth, “Does Climate Change Drive Land-Use Conflicts in the Sahel?” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 97–111.

²⁶ For a review, see Theisen, 2008. See, also, Drago Bergholt and Päivi Lujala, “Climate-Related Natural Disasters, Economic Growth, and Armed Civil Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 147–162; and Halvard Buhaug, “Climate Not to Blame for African Civil Wars,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 107, No. 38, 2010, pp. 16477–16482. For a rebuttal, see Marshall Burke, John Dykema, David Lobell, Edward Miguel, and Shanker Satyanath, *Climate and Civil War: Is the Relationship Robust?* National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper No. 16440, Cambridge: NBER, October 2010.

²⁷ Defense Science Board, 2011, p. xi.

²⁸ See, for instance, Clionadh Raleigh and Henrik Urdal, “Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Armed Conflict,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 26, No. 6, 2007, pp. 674–694; and Marijke Verpoorten, “Leave None to Claim the Land: A Malthusian Catastrophe in Rwanda?” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2012, pp. 547–563.

- Relatedly, some argue that while there is little support for the link between resource scarcity and large-scale civil wars, there might be considerably stronger support for the link between scarcity and much smaller-scale, societal conflicts in which the state does not play a major role and violence tends to be sporadic and decentralized.²⁹
- Numerous scholars have emphasized that resource scarcity need not inevitably lead to violent conflict; there are ample opportunities to regulate conflicts over the distribution of scarce resources through institutions, both domestic and international.³⁰

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Cross-national quantitative studies (using country-level conflicts as their unit of analysis) typically use the standard data sets of civil wars such as the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset to code conflict onset and duration.

More recently, analyses of the links between natural resources and violent conflict have sought to disentangle local- and regional-level conflicts by georeferencing event data.³¹

“Natural resources” have been measured using a wide variety of indicators, with a general trend toward ever-increasing sophistication. One of the early and very influential quantitative studies of the link between natural resources and violent conflict used data on exports of primary commodities as a proportion of all exports to indicate a country’s vulnerability to resource-fueled civil wars.³² As many have pointed out, however, this measure was extremely blunt, capturing everything from highly decentralized agricultural production to the export of offshore oil and alluvial diamonds. More recent studies have tended to adopt much more precise measures of natural resource abundance (or scarcity), such as Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore’s study that distinguishes between types of diamond deposits that are easy for insurgents to loot and those that are not.³³

Similarly, the neo-Malthusian and climate change literatures have become more sophisticated in the specification of their arguments and the indicators used to capture these concepts. Verpoorten, for instance, studies the relationship among population density, land ownership, and killings in 1,294 small administrative units in Rwanda, while Adano and his collaborators use

²⁹ Theisen, 2008.

³⁰ See, for instance, Thomas Bernauer and Tobias Siegfried, “Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 227–239.

³¹ For the UCDP/PRIO geo-referenced data set, see Dittrich Hallberg, Johan, “PRIO Conflict Site 1989–2008: A Geo-Referenced Dataset on Armed Conflict,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 29, 2012, pp. 219–232. For an application, see Raleigh and Urdal, 2007.

³² This material was eventually published in Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56, 2004a, pp. 563–595.

³³ Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore, 2005.

archival data and information collected on site visits to examine differential *access* to natural resources in rural Kenya.³⁴

Other Relevant Factors

- There appears to be a widespread consensus that the effects of natural resources on conflict are significantly mediated by the political institutions of a country,³⁵ and many argue that a more-nuanced consideration of the evidence suggests that political competition is a superior explanation generally.³⁶
- These findings suggest that resource endowments (either wealth or scarcity) are not destiny. Their effects on conflict can be mediated by institutions and policies that mitigate their conflict-inducing potential.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

While natural resources offer an important explanation of many individual conflicts, the discussion suggests that they are not a major driver of global trends over the past several decades.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

There are many reasons why the future might be different. A nonexhaustive list of factors includes the following:

- The current global economy is heavily based on hydrocarbons (oil, natural gas, coal, etc.). Several scholars have argued that the “rents” that accrue to hydrocarbon producers can drive violent conflict.³⁷ Were new technologies such as hydraulic fracturing to create a glut of hydrocarbon resources and thereby drive down prices, or if cost-effective alternatives to hydrocarbons were developed (e.g., hydrogen power, more cost-effective power generation from renewable resources) then these resource “rents” might be eliminated or significantly reduced, thereby reducing one cause of violent conflict.

³⁴ Verpoorten, 2012; and Wario R. Adano, Ton Dietz, Karen Witsenburg, and Fred Zaal, “Climate Change, Violent Conflict and Local Institutions in Kenya’s Drylands,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 65–80.

³⁵ Robert H. Bates, “State Failure,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2008, Vol. 11, pp. 1–12; Dunning, 2008; and Kahl, 2006.

³⁶ Benjaminsen et al., 2012; Buhaug, 2010; and Ole Magnus Theisen, “Climate Clashes? Weather Variability, Land Pressure, and Organized Violence in Kenya, 1989–2004,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 81–96. For a reply, see Burke et al., 2010. For one example of the argument that political institutions are themselves in significant part the product of resource endowments, see Jensen and Wantchekon, 2004.

³⁷ See, for instance, Fearon, 2005.

- New technologies might require scarce and geographically concentrated resources, such as rare earth minerals, which might in turn become new or expanded sources of violent conflict (as in the Democratic Republic of Congo today).
- Scientific evidence suggests that climate change is likely to place extremely heavy strains on many ecosystems.³⁸ These changes might lead to widespread renewable resource scarcities (e.g., arable land, water), which, in turn, could spark violent competition over their distribution. As detailed, political institutions appear to play a critical role in mediating the potential for violent conflict inherent in this competition. Nonetheless, it is possible that the effects of climate change might be so severe as to overburden the conflict-resolution capabilities of even previously stable states and regimes.
- There are a number of international mechanisms (such as trust funds or buyers' cartels like the Kimberley Process) that have been used to try to manage resource-derived rents and conflict minerals. Thus far, they have had varying degrees of success.³⁹ With time, the effectiveness of these mechanisms might well be improved.

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³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, Washington, D.C., 2008, Chapter 4; and Defense Science Board, 2011.

³⁹ For a critical account of an early attempt at a trust fund mechanism, see Scott Pegg, "Can Policy Intervention Beat the Resource Curse? Evidence from the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project," *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 418, 2005, pp. 1–25.

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21. Legacies of Prior Conflict

Overview

Countries that have fought civil wars or insurgencies are much more prone to descend into intrastate war than are countries that have been at peace. Nearly half of the countries that experience an end to one civil war will return to conflict within five years.¹ This high rate of recidivism can be explained in a variety of ways:

- It is possible that countries recovering from civil war are little different from other countries. According to proponents of this school of thought, precisely the same factors associated with initial conflict onset—such as low levels of income per capita or weak states—are responsible for conflict recurrence.² If countries recovering from civil war are more likely to return to conflict, it is only because they score lower on these critical factors—perhaps as a result of previous conflicts. A World Bank study, however, claims that such standard explanations only account for about half the increased risk of civil war onset in postconflict states; other factors must account for the remaining risk.³
- A second school of thought claims that social animosities and suspicions are inflamed throughout the course of fighting, and this legacy of hatred and mistrust is difficult to overcome in the postconflict period.⁴ While some claim that such emotions are predominant throughout society in the wake of war, more-nuanced versions of this argument are also possible. A recent study, for instance, found that former combatants who had been members of units well-known as perpetrators of atrocities found it extremely difficult to reintegrate into society in the postconflict period; doors that were open to other former combatants were shut to them.⁵
- A final school of thought argues that civil wars leave behind organizational and material legacies that make the return to conflict more likely. Former insurgents, for instance,

¹ Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 83.

² See, for instance, Barbara F. Walter, “Does Conflict Beget Conflict? Explaining Recurring Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, May 2004, pp. 371–388.

³ Collier et al., 2003.

⁴ See, for instance, Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Spring 1996, pp. 136–175.

⁵ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51, No. 4, August 2007, pp. 531–567.

often retain the organizational or social links to reconstitute themselves as a fighting force if they choose or indeed might be drawn unwillingly back into such relationships.⁶ War also causes citizens to flee from their country, forming refugee communities in neighboring states or diasporas globally. Both refugees and diasporas, in turn, are associated with a higher incidence of conflict.⁷ The Tamil diaspora, for instance, played an important role in funding the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. Tutsi refugees in Rwanda formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front and ultimately seized control of Rwanda. Other examples abound.

For all of these reasons, Collier and his colleagues refer in their World Bank report to civil wars as “development in reverse,” creating a “conflict trap” from which it can be difficult to escape without international assistance.⁸

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

In general, legacies of prior conflict offer a better explanation of particular conflicts rather than global conflict trends. A global decline in conflict, however, could help to fuel virtuous circles. If conflict becomes less likely, and if one of the best predictors of conflict is whether a country has recently fought a conflict, then this variable has the potential to accelerate the global decline in conflict through positive feedback loops.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- Social animosities and suspicions are inflamed throughout the course of fighting, leading to a raised risk of conflict onset in the postconflict period.
- Civil wars leave behind organizational and material legacies that make the return to conflict more likely.

Hypothesis

Social animosities and suspicions are inflamed throughout the course of fighting, leading to a raised risk of conflict onset in the postconflict period.

⁶ Sarah Zukerman Daly, “Organizational Legacies of Violence: Conditions Favoring Insurgency Onset in Colombia, 1964–1984,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2012, pp. 473–491; and Maya M. Christensen and Mats Utas, “Mercenaries of Democracy: The ‘Politricks’ of Remobilized Combatants in the 2007 General Elections, Sierra Leone,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 107, No. 429, 2008, pp. 515–539.

⁷ Collier et al., 2003, pp. 84–86.

⁸ Collier et al., 2003.

What the Literature Says

- It is clear that countries that have experienced civil war are at heightened risk of violent conflict for years afterward.⁹ Why this is the case is less clear.
- It is a popular perception that wars lead to hatreds and suspicions between peoples in war-torn countries, which in turn can lead to renewed conflict if not addressed. Many practitioners share this perception. The peacemaking and democracy-promotion NGO International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), for instance, argues that reconciliation is necessary to overcome the legacies of hatred and suspicion in postconflict societies: “Meaningful reconciliation is a difficult, painful and complex process, but it must be grasped, because ignoring it sows the seeds of later, greater failure.”¹⁰
- Although less widespread in academic political science circles, arguments about mutual suspicions and hatred have also been articulated by various scholars. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) professor Roger Petersen is one of the best-known proponents of the role of such emotions in fueling conflict.¹¹ His colleague Barry Posen does not place emotions at the center of his account, but does suggest that a history of prior conflict can fuel mutual suspicions and ultimately a “security dilemma” between rival ethnic groups in periods of weak state strength and inadequate information about rivals’ intentions and capabilities.¹²

Developing rigorous empirical tests of such propositions are extremely difficult. One recent study suggests that such methods can be successfully applied, however. The political scientists Macarten Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein found that ex-combatants who had been members of highly abusive militias in Sierra Leone found it extremely difficult to reintegrate in the post-conflict period.¹³ Although the scientists do not speculate at length about the reasons for such reintegration failure, the association with militias suggests that hatreds and suspicions do play a role in individuals’ post-conflict trajectories.

Hypothesis

Civil wars leave behind organizational and material legacies that make the return to conflict more likely.

⁹ Collier et al., 2003.

¹⁰ International IDEA, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook*, Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003, p. 15.

¹¹ Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹² Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring 1993, pp. 27–47.

¹³ Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007.

What the Literature Says

Most political scientists emphasize arguments about the organizational and material legacies of civil wars in explaining postconflict societies' heightened risk of renewed conflict:

- In a study of conflict recurrence in Colombia, for instance, Sarah Zukerman Daly finds that “regions affected by past mobilization are six times more likely to experience rebellion than those without a tradition of armed organized action”—even when controlling for a variety of other factors that might explain this variation among regions.¹⁴ This finding suggests that it is the organizational legacies of prior conflicts—the ties that former combatants form with one another, with agents who can deliver the necessary resources for rebellion, and so on—that make postconflict states particularly vulnerable.
- Such political science scholarship is complemented by recent studies in anthropology that have yielded similar findings. The anthropologists Maya Christensen and Mats Utas, for instance, find that former combatants in Sierra Leone remained integrated for years after the conflict in the same social networks that gave birth to the various militias in that country's wartime era.¹⁵ Rather than slowly disintegrating, these social networks were repeatedly reactivated by ambitious politicians for their own purposes. The result was that the social and organizational prerequisites for the formation of newly armed opposition groups remained present in postconflict Sierra Leone.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Many quantitative studies using country-level data use the same data sets of civil wars (COW, UCDP, etc.) as are common in the field.¹⁶ Some quantitative studies have delved into civil wars in single countries, offering considerably more nuance and precision in their arguments.¹⁷ Many other scholars have used qualitative methods, offering important insights into how former combatants view themselves and the opportunities available to them.¹⁸

Other Relevant Factors

Much of the reason that countries recovering from civil war return to war so frequently is that prior conflicts exacerbate the many factors that make countries susceptible to civil war in the first place. Civil wars weaken a country's economy by driving away investors, causing well-

¹⁴ Daly, 2012.

¹⁵ Christensen and Utas, 2008.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Collier et al., 2003; and Walter, 2004.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Daly, 2012; and Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Christensen and Utas, 2008.

educated citizens to flee, destroying physical infrastructure, and so on. Civil wars weaken states by saddling them with massive debts, driving out committed and educated civil servants, etc.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Aside from the exception described next, legacies of prior conflict are better at predicting the probability of conflict in a specific country than at explaining global conflict trends.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

If a decline in the incidence of intrastate conflict is, in fact, occurring, this trend might be the beginning of a “virtuous circle.” The longer a country remains at peace, the more resilient it typically becomes. If fewer countries are falling into civil war, then more have an opportunity to develop both politically and economically, thereby making them less susceptible to violent conflict. The end result is a positive feedback loop that should make the future incidence of intrastate conflict lower than it is today.

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22. Technology

Overview

A variety of technologies, both old and new, exercise profound effects on violent conflict. Governments can seek to minimize the destabilizing consequences of these technologies, but the prevalence of many potentially disruptive technologies in civilian sectors makes such efforts highly challenging.

One of the great faults of the popular literature is the failure to distinguish between factors contributing to the increased *incidence* of violent conflict and factors contributing to increased *consequences*—either generally or for the United States in particular.¹ Many of the technologies described in this review could have ambiguous effects on the *incidence* of conflict (for instance, the debate about whether information and communications technologies on balance favor insurgents or counterinsurgents). But most of them are likely to increase the negative (from the U.S. perspective) *consequences* of violent conflict.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

Technological advances in general have not altered the likelihood of conflict over the past several decades. The major effect of technology on conflict has been decidedly “low-tech”: The availability of basic firearms might be a significant predictor of conflict.

In the future, however, technological advances might play a different role. Of the emerging technologies, further gains in telecommunications and information technologies and the changes in the biotechnology field are likely to be particularly revolutionary, offering many benefits but also deeply troubling dangers.² The U.S. Army might be most challenged by the proliferation of precision weaponry and nonstate actors’ growing access to these weapons.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- The proliferation of traditional small arms and light weapons (SALW) makes civil wars likelier, lengthier, and deadlier, and it fuels large-scale criminal violence.

¹ For one example, see Benjamin H. Friedman, “Three Arguments Against the Democratization of Destruction,” *The National Interest*, August 24, 2011, in response to Andrew F. Krepinevich, “Get Ready for the Democratization of Destruction,” *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2011.

² Loren B. Thompson, “Emerging Technologies and Security,” in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Grave New World: Security Challenges in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

- New information and communications technologies (especially the Internet) facilitate the formation of armed nonstate actors, making intrastate conflict more likely.
- The diffusion of disruptive technologies (especially biotechnology and potentially cyberwar capabilities) potentially makes nonstate actors more dangerous than ever before.
- The diffusion of precision technologies and automation/robotics technologies has the potential to make state-supported nonstate actors more threatening to the U.S. Army than they have historically been.

Hypothesis

The proliferation of traditional SALW makes civil wars likelier, lengthier, and deadlier, and it fuels large-scale criminal violence.

What the Literature Says

- Many observers claim that the proliferation of SALW fuels violence.³ Rigorous analysis of the causal claim is much less frequent, although important efforts have been made to demonstrate the relationship empirically.
- The dimensions of the problem are enormous: “Approximately 875 million small arms are in circulation worldwide, and only about a third are in the hands of legally constituted security forces.”⁴
- Skeptics of the importance of SALW as a *cause* (rather than simply a means) of violence point out that there are many alternatives available for killing. Estimates suggest that a majority of those killed in the Rwandan genocide, for instance, were killed with machetes and other simple weapons.⁵
- The mere availability of alternatives to firearms, however, does not by itself indicate their unimportance. Indeed, in the example of the Rwandan genocide, indications are that firearms were so important that their use was strategically calculated for maximum effect.⁶
- One approach to estimating the importance of firearms is to use a simple economic model. All else being equal, higher prices should suggest a restricted supply. Effective

³ See, for instance, Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, March 1995; and Rachel Stohl and E. J. Hogendoorn, *Stopping the Destructive Spread of Small Arms: How Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation Undermines Security and Development*, Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, March 2010.

⁴ Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010, p. 1.

⁵ Philip Verwimp, “Machetes and Firearms: The Organization of Massacres in Rwanda,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2006, pp. 5–22.

⁶ Verwimp, 2006.

governmental programs to restrict the proliferation of firearms should drive prices up, while ineffective firearms control regimes should lead to increased supply and lower prices. In line with this model and the common assumption that an increased supply of the instruments of insurgency contributes to an increased incidence of insurgency, researchers have found that low prices for automatic rifles are a strong predictor of the incidence of civil wars.⁷

Hypothesis

New information and communications technologies (especially the Internet) facilitate the formation of armed nonstate actors, making intrastate conflict more likely.

What the Literature Says

Observers have argued that the Internet helps terrorist and insurgent organizations organize, recruit supporters, raise funds (through donations and the facilitation of other criminal activities), train, and share know-how.⁸ One observer noted, “The ‘adaptation rate’ of current and potential enemies has greatly accelerated in recent years, facilitated by the web, where digitally captured lessons have essentially limitless distribution. During the height of the war in Iraq, U.S. commanders said insurgents were at most three to four weeks behind U.S. tactical and technological adjustments.”⁹ All else being equal, increased insurgent capabilities should increase the expected payoffs of insurgency, making such conflicts more likely.¹⁰

On the other hand, telecommunications technology also helps facilitate communications between the population and government, including strategic communications by the government and the sharing of actionable intelligence by the population (e.g., via mobile phone). Moreover, Internet and other forms of communication can be monitored by counterinsurgents and

⁷ See Philip Killicoat, C. J. Chivers, P. Collier, and A. Hoeffler, “What Price the Kalashnikov? The Economics of Small Arms,” in *2007 Small Arms Survey: Guns and the City*, 2007, pp. 256–287.

⁸ See Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Cyber-Mobilization: The New Levée en Masse,” *Parameters*, Summer 2006, pp. 77–87; Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, pp. 35–48; Michael Jacobson, “Terrorist Financing and the Internet,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2010, pp. 353–363; and Seth G. Jones and Patrick B. Johnston, “The Future of Insurgency,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1–25.

⁹ Greg Grant, “Hezbollah on Steroids,” *DoD Buzz*, July 1, 2009.

¹⁰ This assumption follows the logic of economists and political scientists such as Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003; and James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75–90.

counterterrorist agents, potentially yielding treasure troves of intelligence.¹¹ The ultimate effect—in the direction of either fostering or reducing rebellion—is therefore uncertain.¹²

Hypothesis

The diffusion of disruptive technologies (especially biotechnology and potentially cyberwar capabilities) potentially makes nonstate actors more dangerous than ever before.

What the Literature Says

- Numerous technologies could pose tremendous dangers were they to find their way into the hands of technologically sophisticated and sufficiently dedicated nonstate violent extremist organizations. Probably the most dangerous of these are biotechnologies, although cyberthreats are also a significant concern.
- Dr. Roger Brent, director and president of the Molecular Sciences Institute, warned of the potential consequences in a statement to the House Homeland Security Committee: “There is a decentralized, Moore’s law-type, revolution in biological understanding and capability going on worldwide for more than half a century. In some cases, biotechnology is advancing faster than computer technology. For example, the density of components on computer chips continues to double every 18 months—while certain abilities to read and write DNA double more like every 12 months. There are tens of thousands of people worldwide who can now engineer drug resistant bacteria, and thousands with the ability to remake a virus like SARS, or perform other engineering tasks too numerous to mention. These projects could be carried out by individuals or small groups of people; there would be no need to recreate the Cold War programs of the nation states.”¹³
- Similarly, in the newsletter of the European Molecular Biology Organization, two scientists warned, “The revolution in biotechnology, namely the new tools for analyzing and specifically changing an organism’s genetic material, has led to an increased risk of bio-warfare due to several factors. First, nearly all countries have the technological potential to produce large amounts of pathogenic microorganisms safely. Second, classical bio-warfare agents can be made much more efficiently than their natural counterparts, with even the simplest genetic techniques. Third, with modern biotechnology it becomes possible to create completely new biological weapons. And for

¹¹ Sean Kennedy, “New Media: A Boon for Insurgents or Counterinsurgents?” *Small Wars Journal*, September 4, 2011; and Peter W. Singer, “The Cyber Terror Bogeyman,” *Armed Forces Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4, November 2012, pp. 12–15, 33.

¹² Jacob N. Shapiro and Nils B. Weidmann, *Talking About Killing: Cell Phones, Collective Action, and Insurgent Violence in Iraq*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, May 31, 2011; and Kennedy, 2011.

¹³ Roger Brent, *Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Prevention of Nuclear and Biological Attack*, House Committee on Homeland Security, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., Washington, D.C., July 13, 2005.

technical and/or moral reasons, they might be more likely to be used than classical bio-warfare agents.”¹⁴

- The potential for this technology to be used by terrorists is obvious. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton warned, “A crude but effective terrorist weapon can be made by using a small sample of any number of widely available pathogens, inexpensive equipment, and college-level chemistry and biology. Less than a year ago, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula made a call to arms for, and I quote, ‘brothers with degrees in microbiology or chemistry to develop a weapon of mass destruction.’”¹⁵
- Nor are the counterproliferation regimes that have been largely effective in the realm of nuclear technology likely to be effective in regulating biotechnology; the civilian uses of these technologies are too compelling to successfully restrict their diffusion. That is to say, rapid advances in biotechnology are catapulting us into an “unprecedented world.”¹⁶
- Cyberwarfare by nonstate actors also poses significant dangers, although considerably less apocalyptic than some of the scenarios sketched by those who warn of the destructive potential of biotechnologies.
- The threat posed by cyberwarfare is clear: “In cyber conflict, it is easier to attack than to defend due to many factors, including the relatively low cost of sophisticated attack tools and the weaknesses in operating systems and networks that create large numbers of significant, vulnerable targets. Moreover, stopping attacks even from small groups often requires coordinated actions by defenders in both state and nonstate organizations who might have little trust and few incentives to cooperate.”¹⁷
- Moreover, as Krepinevich warns, there could be little way of deterring a catastrophic cyberattack by nonstate actors: “Should a radical non-state entity acquire cyber weapons capable of inflicting large-scale destruction, there may be little if any restraint on their use. As these groups have no infrastructure against which to retaliate, it is not likely that deterrence through the threat of punishment will prove effective.”¹⁸
- On the other hand, nonstate actors face significant limits to their cyber capabilities: “Though even advanced capabilities can be obtained, it is difficult for non-state actors to

¹⁴ Jan van Aken, and Edward Hammond, “Genetic Engineering and Biological Weapons,” *European Molecular Biology Organization Reports*, Vol. 4, 2003, pp. S57–S60.

¹⁵ Quoted in Laurie Garrett, “The Bioterrorist Next Door,” *Foreign Policy*, December 15, 2011.

¹⁶ Christopher F. Chyba and Alex L. Greninger, “Biotechnology and Bioterrorism: An Unprecedented World,” *Survival*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Summer 2004, pp. 143–162.

¹⁷ Gregory J. Rattray and Jason Healey, “Non-State Actors and Cyber Conflict,” in Kristin M. Lord and Travis Sharp, eds., *America’s Cyber Future: Security and Prosperity in the Information Age*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2011.

¹⁸ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Cyber Warfare: A ‘Nuclear Option’?* Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012, pp. iii–iv.

master other tasks—such as gathering intelligence and analyzing centers of gravity for attack and defense—that are likely needed to have lasting strategic effects.”¹⁹ Singer points out that not a single person has yet been killed or injured by a cyberterrorism attack.²⁰ Numerous others are skeptical as well, with one calling cyberattacks “weapons of mass annoyance.”²¹

Hypothesis

The diffusion of precision technologies and automation/robotics technologies has the potential to make state-supported nonstate actors more threatening to the U.S. Army than they have historically been.

What the Literature Says

- “If history is any guide, these [precision guided weapons] will almost certainly appear in the hands of adversaries across a range of contingencies, from conventional war between state armies to irregular warfare against guerrillas or terrorist forces. Though guided weapons are seen as a ‘high-tech’ capability, they are likely to grow more accessible to actors of modest means for several reasons. First, as more states produce these weapons and make them available through arms sales, the resulting increase in supply and competition likely will result in greater availability and lower prices. Second, since World War II, various states have routinely provided advanced weaponry to allied and client states, even to non-state proxy forces.”²² Similarly, Mahnken warns, “Nor are states any longer the only actors in the precision-strike revolution. For example, Lebanese Hezbollah used anti-tank guided missiles against Israeli forces in its 2006 war with Israel. More recently, Hamas used such a weapon against an Israeli school bus.”²³
- The diffusion of precision technologies might transform how both the United States’ adversaries and the United States fight wars, and it might make some forms of war prohibitively costly. Mahnken, for instance, warns, “In a world where many states possess precision-strike systems, traditional conquest and occupation will become much more difficult. They might, in fact, become prohibitively expensive in some cases. Imagine, for example, if the Iraqi insurgents had been equipped with precision-guided

¹⁹ Rattray and Healey, 2011, p. 68.

²⁰ Singer, 2012.

²¹ James A. Lewis, *Assessing the Risks of Cyber Terrorism, Cyber War and Other Cyber Threats*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2002. See also Friedman, 2011; Singer, 2012; and Gabriel Weimann, “Cyberterrorism: The Sum of All Fears?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 28, 2005, pp. 129–149.

²² Krepinevich, 2012, p. 17.

²³ Thomas G. Mahnken, “Weapons: The Growth and Spread of the Precision-Strike Regime,” *Dædalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 140, No. 3, Summer 2011, p. 52.

mortars and rockets and had reliably been able to target points within Baghdad’s Green Zone. Or imagine that the Taliban were similarly armed and were thus able to strike routinely the U.S. and Afghan forward operating bases that dot the Afghan countryside. U.S. casualties could have amounted to many times what they have been in either theater.”²⁴

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

The empirical evidence used to assess the effects of various technologies on the incidence and intensity of violent conflict varies enormously. Much of this review has focused on the future effects of technological development, and this literature is often speculative—albeit speculation grounded in long-observed trends.

Other Relevant Factors

As with most other factors that drive the incidence and intensity of intrastate conflict, the effects of technology are greatly influenced by the actions of governments—that is, whether states take actions to mitigate the destabilizing consequences of technology or either neglect these forces or undertake actions that intentionally or unintentionally magnify their destabilizing effects.

Governments, for instance, can take many actions to stem the flow of SALW to conflict zones.²⁵ They can attempt—and, in fact, are attempting—to regulate the diffusion of particularly dangerous biotechnologies.

The primary problem that governments will encounter is that most of the technologies described in this review are “dual use” technologies—that is, they have substantial civilian as well as military uses. It will be extremely difficult to restrict the diffusion of biotechnologies that might be used to prevent or cure deadly diseases as well as being useful for creating genetically engineered bioweapons. It is difficult to prevent nonstate actors from using the Global Positioning System to support precision attacks. The United States has attempted to prevent al Qaeda from using the Internet for fundraising and recruiting purposes, but has found it extremely difficult to do so—and indeed have often found that U.S. companies are hosting the Internet sites used by al Qaeda!²⁶

²⁴ Mahnken, 2011, p. 43. See also Grant, 2009; Randy Huiss, *Proliferation of Precision Strike: Issues for Congress*, R42539, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2012; and Andrew F. Krepinevich and Eric Lindsey, *The Road Ahead: Future Challenges and Their Implications for Ground Vehicle Modernization*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, March 6, 2012.

²⁵ Killicoat, Chivers, Collier, and Hoeffler, 2007; and Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010.

²⁶ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, *Counterstrike: The Untold Story of America's Secret Campaign Against Al Qaeda*, New York: Times Books, 2011.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

In general, although technology has played an important role in specific conflicts, it has not provided a powerful explanation of changes in the global incidence of intrastate conflict over the past few decades. That could change in the future, however.

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

As described in this review, a great many dual-use technologies are evolving at incredible speeds, and the “entry costs” for their development and effective military use are declining at similarly rapid speeds.

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23. International Norms on Peacemaking and Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Overview

All human interactions are structured to a lesser or greater extent by norms—commonly understood “rules of thumb” that inform societies of what behavior is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Obviously people do not always conform to the expectations set by social norms—whether by simply being rude or by committing a criminal act, people sometimes flout the rules. However imperfect they might be, without these norms, human societies could not function.

Norms apply at the international level as well as at the level of everyday social interactions. Slavery used to be common; now it is relatively rare. Annexation of small and weak countries used to be the ordinary stuff of international affairs; now it is an extremely rare act, one that could prompt a global military response, such as Operation Desert Storm. At the international level as at the individual level, norms are not always honored, but they do help to shape world politics.

Summary of the Effects of This Variable

As these examples suggest, international norms have changed significantly over the past two centuries, and especially after critical junctures—particularly at the ends of the two World Wars, the colonial era, and the Cold War. Arguably, these changing norms have greatly influenced the incidence and intensity of intrastate violent conflict. Three arguments in particular have been advanced by various scholars:

- The norms of sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders have helped to reduce the incidence of war between states, but they have done so at the cost of creating chronically weak “quasistates” in parts of the developing world. These weak states are plagued by violent conflict. Thus the norms of sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders have helped to regulate violent conflict at one level, but only by exacerbating it at another level.
- At the same time, the international community has also accepted a number of norms that work against civil violence. Many international organizations and many powerful states are dedicated to such activities as international peace operations, democracy promotion, preventive diplomacy, and development assistance that together, despite their limitations, have generally reduced the incidence of violent intrastate conflict.

- Finally, some scholars claim to have detected a broader trend toward reduced violence—not just of war, but also violent crime. They argue that many aspects of modernity (e.g., strong states capable of enforcing the rule of law, markets based on contracts that stress equal rights and transparency) have created mechanisms of peaceful conflict resolution. As a result, populations have come to internalize norms of peaceful conflict resolution over time, accepting that violence is and should be a rare occurrence. Such a worldview is very different from that of previous eras. Although not all societies have been equally affected by these dynamics, the general trend has been extremely positive, according to the proponents of this argument.
- While nonviolent norms have spread, their diffusion has not been universal. There are still countries and nonstate actors that openly ignore norms against conflict and violence in their dealings with other states and their own populations. The conflicts in Syria and Ukraine are two clear recent examples of the limits of such norms.

In general, scholars have detected positive trends in international norms and their effects on intrastate conflict. This positive trend is not irreversible, however. Were rival great powers to embrace radically different normative systems, as during the Cold War, the result might well be an increase in levels of violence at the intrastate level, as each power sought to support proxy groups in regional conflicts. Furthermore, there are skeptics who question the value of norms and institutions in restraining conflict or affecting state behavior, especially at the intrastate level.

Hypotheses and Literature Review

This section considers the following hypotheses:

- The norms of sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders might have reduced conflict at the international level, but they have inadvertently perpetuated states with weak governing institutions and thereby fueled violent conflict at the intrastate level.
- The “international community” engages in a variety of activities—including international peace operations, democracy promotion, preventive diplomacy, and development assistance intended to strengthen the “resilience” of fragile states—that have together reduced the incidence of violent intrastate conflict.
- Norms of civilization and humanitarianism have gradually reduced the prevalence of violence in human relations.

Hypothesis

The norms of sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders might have reduced conflict at the international level, but they have inadvertently perpetuated states with weak governing institutions and thereby fueled violent conflict at the intrastate level.

What the Literature Says

- Since World War II, international relations have been governed in substantial part by a norm that stipulates that international borders should not be changed by force. The last major effort to annex a sovereign nation in its entirety was Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait—an act of aggression reversed by a U.S.-led coalition in Operation Desert Storm. Russia, of course, has de facto if not de jure annexed Crimea, and it has prevented the governments of Ukraine, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh from regaining control over separatist regions in each of those countries. Nonetheless, such acts have been extremely rare since 1945.¹
- This norm has had important pacifying effects for interstate relations. The implications for intrastate conflict, however, have arguably been very different.
- Some scholars have argued that the norms of “border fixity” and sovereignty have permitted the survival of “quasistates”—states that are unable to govern themselves effectively, but which are (in theory, at least) accorded the same rights as other sovereign states.²
- As summarized by Atzili, there are numerous reasons why the norm of “border fixity” might sustain weak states and ultimately fuel conflict at the intrastate level: “First, an international system of states with fixed borders deprives states of what were historically their greatest incentives to develop strong institutions: external threats to their territorial integrity and opportunities for territorial expansion. Second, without such territorial threats, a coherent in-group identity and loyalty to the state are difficult to establish. Third, without a mechanism through which weak states can be overtaken by stronger ones, the former might persist and perhaps become even weaker.”³

Hypothesis

The “international community” engages in a variety of activities—including international peace operations, democracy promotion, preventive diplomacy, and development assistance intended to strengthen the “resilience” of fragile states—that have together reduced the incidence of violent intrastate conflict.

¹ Tanisha M. Fazal, “State Death in the International System,” *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 311–344.

² Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. See also Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

³ Boaz Atzili, “When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Winter 2006/7, pp. 139–173.

What the Literature Says

- Numerous scholars have argued that peace operations make an important—and arguably highly cost-effective—contribution to the durability of peace in the wake of civil wars.⁴
- The effects of peace operations are not limited to the countries in which they occur. Because one of the strongest predictors of civil war onset is the presence of violent conflict in neighboring states, peace operations have important “positive spillover effects” throughout the regions in which they occur.⁵ The threat of intervention in a civil war—humanitarian or otherwise—might also deter potential instigators of civil war.⁶
- Other scholars have made more ambitious claims, arguing that the increased prevalence of peace operations and humanitarian intervention in the post–Cold War era accounts for much of the overall decline in intrastate conflict.⁷
- As discussed elsewhere in this review, consolidated democracies are much more stable than other forms of government. Various international democracy promotion efforts have made positive contributions, at least at the margins, in fostering democratic development.⁸ Moreover, the international community has become more engaged in buttressing democratic transitions, potentially making the democratization process more stable.⁹ Thus, the rise of democracy as a broadly accepted international norm should also be expected to have conflict-reducing effects—in the long run and in the aggregate.
- Many international organizations and international treaties insist on peaceful conflict resolution, and many have specific mechanisms intended to promote international

⁴ See, for instance, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *The Challenge of Reducing the Global Incidence of Civil War*, Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper, 2004b; Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006; V. Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices After Civil War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008; and Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Summer 1997, pp. 335–364.

⁵ Kyle Beardsley, “Peacekeeping and the Contagion of Armed Conflict,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 4, October 2011, pp. 1051–1064.

⁶ David E. Cunningham, *Preventing Civil War: How the Potential for International Intervention Can Deter Conflict Onset*, College Park, Md.: University of Maryland, unpublished manuscript, 2011.

⁷ Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War*, New York: Penguin Group, 2011; and Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁸ Thad Dunning, “Conditioning the Effects of Aid: Cold War Politics, Donor Credibility, and Democracy in Africa,” *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 409–423; and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democracy from the Outside In? International Organizations and Democratization,” *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 3, June 2002, pp. 515–549.

⁹ Monty G. Marshall and Benjamin R. Cole, *Global Report 2011: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, Vienna, Va.: Center for Systemic Peace, 2011; and Burcu Savun and Daniel C. Tirone, “Foreign Aid, Democratization, and Civil Conflict: How Does Democracy Aid Affect Civil Conflict?” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April 2011, pp. 233–246.

peacemaking activities. The effect of these treaties and organizations on intrastate conflict is variable, however. One scholar finds little evidence that human rights treaties play any positive role in protecting human rights such as bodily integrity.¹⁰ On the other hand, other scholars have found evidence that international organizations with dense interconnections among their members have been successful in reducing violent conflict.¹¹ Some claim that the cumulative effect of various UN peace-facilitating activities has reduced the overall incidence of intrastate conflict.¹²

Hypothesis

Norms of civilization and humanitarianism have gradually reduced the prevalence of violence in human relations.

What the Literature Says

- Citing evidence from a wide variety of disciplines, the Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker argues that all forms of violence—wars, government oppression, domestic violence, etc.—have gradually declined over the past several centuries.¹³
- Similarly, Mueller argues that most of humanity has transformed the way it thinks about war.¹⁴ Citing numerous passages from noted figures such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel, Emile Zola, Igor Stravinsky, and even A. A. Milne (better known as the creator of Winnie the Pooh than as someone who glorified war), Mueller argues that war was very widely considered a “glorious undertaking” before the 20th century. The glorification of war was already under attack in the 19th century, but it rapidly declined following World War I.

Empirical Evidence and Relevant Data Sets

Quantitative studies of the effects of norms on violent conflict typically use the same data sets of civil wars that are common in the literature. Discussions of the effects of norms on state capacity and discussions about centuries-long shifts in norms typically rely on more qualitative approaches.

¹⁰ Daniel W. Hill, “Estimating the Effects of Human Rights Treaties on State Behavior,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 4, October 2010, pp. 1161–1174.

¹¹ Johannes Karreth and Jaroslav Tir, *International Institutional Environment and Civil War Prevention*, Boulder, Colo.: University of Colorado at Boulder, unpublished manuscript, September 29, 2011.

¹² Human Security Report Project, 2011.

¹³ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, New York: Viking Adult, 2011.

¹⁴ John Mueller, *The Remnants of War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Other Relevant Factors

Norms do not exist in a vacuum; they are heavily influenced by a variety of other factors, while at the same time influencing those other factors (e.g., the effect of state capacity on violent conflict). Norms' institutionalization in international organizations and in the governing practices of influential states is particularly important.

How This Factor Might Explain Current Conflict Trends

Some observers claim that changes in global norms explain much of the post–Cold War decline in intrastate conflict. The effect might be direct (that is, potential agents of conflict are less inclined toward violence) or indirect (third parties such as the UN are able to restrain violence when it does occur or is likely to do so).

Why This Might Be Different in the Future

The incidence of violent intrastate conflict might increase in the future if norms about violence change or if the mechanisms by which violence is restrained grow weaker.

Many believe that norms regulating violence in modern society are rooted in institutions that would be difficult to transform quickly—institutions such as modern states or contract-based modern economies.¹⁵ If these norms are not so deeply rooted, however, they could change relatively rapidly—for instance, if several new states with different normative commitments assumed much greater prominence in the international community.

The mechanisms by which violence is (arguably) currently restrained are much more susceptible to rapid change. Many argue that various international peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts became considerably more effective in the wake of the Cold War, when the UN was no longer paralyzed by superpower rivalry. A new rivalry among permanent members of the UN Security Council, however, could paralyze the world body, as has happened before. Similar interstate tensions could also weaken regional organizations and others that have helped to broker and sustain peaceful ends to intrastate conflicts.

Alternatively, the long-term trends observed by scholars such as Pinker and Mueller could intensify, making violent conflict even less prevalent than it is today.¹⁶ Such an acceleration of these trends might occur, for instance, if more states improve their capacity to regulate conflict.

¹⁵ Pinker, 2011; and Michael Mousseau, "Market Prosperity, Democratic Consolidation, and Democratic Peace," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 4, August 2000, pp. 472–507.

¹⁶ Pinker, 2011; and Mueller, 2004.

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