



GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY^{AND} PEACE

HOW STATE CAPACITY AND REGIME TYPE INFLUENCE
THE PROSPECTS FOR WAR AND PEACE

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with Conor Seyle and Kristen Wall



The One Earth Future Foundation was founded in 2007 with the goal of supporting research and practice in the area of peace and governance. OEF believes that a world beyond war can be achieved by the development of new and effective systems of cooperation, coordination, and decision making. We believe that business and civil society have important roles to play in filling governance gaps in partnership with states. When states, business, and civil society coordinate their efforts, they can achieve effective, equitable solutions to global problems.

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ABSTRACT

This white paper offers a synthetic review of empirical evidence on the elements of state governance that affect interstate and intrastate armed conflict. In the first part of the paper we examine state capacity and institutional quality. We observe that peace is associated with security capacity and the ability of states to control and defend territory. It is also associated with social capacity, defined as the ability to provide public goods and support social welfare. The second half of the paper looks at regime type, focusing on the democratic peace effect and the characteristics of governance that are most strongly associated with peace. We find that democratic institutions are most conducive to peace when they are inclusive, representative, accountable, and transparent.

Introduction: Governance, democracy, and peace

The One Earth Future Foundation (OEF) is built around the central argument that peace can be achieved through the establishment of effective systems of cooperation, coordination, and decision making, more broadly called governance. It is our belief that good governance can significantly reduce the risk of armed conflict and can assist in preventing or resolving violence.

This white paper reviews the empirical evidence for one specific aspect of this overall argument, looking at the role of the state. While *governance* is broader than *government*, states are nonetheless the major actors in determining the prospects for war and peace. The question of how state-level governance helps to reduce violence is therefore of key concern to OEF's overall mission.

Drawing from the empirical literature, this paper identifies two underlying pathways through which state governance systems help to build peace. These are:

State capacity. If states lack the ability to execute their policy goals or to maintain security and public order in the face of potentially violent groups, armed conflict is more likely. State capacity refers to two significant aspects: security capacity and social capacity. Security capacity includes the ability to control territory and resist armed incursion from other states and nonstate actors. Social capacity includes the ability to provide social services and public goods.

Institutional quality. Research suggests that not all governance systems are equally effective or capable of supporting peace. Governance systems are seen as more credible and legitimate, and are better at supporting peace, when they are characterized by inclusiveness, representativeness, transparency, and accountability. In particular, systems allowing citizens to voice concerns, participate politically, and hold elected leaders accountable are more stable and better able to avoid armed conflict.

Both dimensions—state capacity and quality—are crucial to the prevention of armed conflict and are the focus of part one of this paper. Part two of the paper focuses on democracy as the most common way of structuring state government to allow for inclusive systems while maintaining state capacity. The two parts summarize important research findings on the features of governance that are most strongly associated with prospects for peace. Our analysis, based on an extensive review of empirical literature, seeks to identify the specific dimensions of governance that are most strongly associated with peace. We show evidence of a direct link between peace and a state's capacity to both exert control over its territory and provide a full range of social services through effective governance institutions. We apply a governance framework to examine three major factors associated with the outbreak of war—border disputes, ethnic conflict, and dependence on commodity exports—and emphasize the importance of inclusive and representative governance structures for the prevention of armed conflict.

The analysis here addresses both interstate wars, which have become less frequent in recent decades, and civil wars and armed conflicts within states, which have become the most prevalent form of conflict. Specifically, we are interested in major armed conflicts, which we define as those with more than 1,000 battle deaths in a calendar year.¹ The factors associated with interstate and intrastate wars are distinct and for the purposes of this study are analyzed separately, but we also seek to identify commonalities that may be present in all or many forms of armed conflict and that provide a foundation for strategic peacebuilding. Our goal is to distill from the vast empirical literature on peace and armed conflict a core set of governance principles that can help to reduce the likelihood of war.

Part One: State capacity and quality

No single factor can explain the outbreak of armed conflict, but the increasing body of literature looking at predictors of conflict suggests that many of the influences that reduce or increase the likelihood of war are linked to the strength or weakness of national and international governance structures. The risk of armed conflict in any society, according to the World Development Report (WDR), is “the *combination* of the exposure to *internal and external stresses* and the strength of that society’s ‘immune system’” [emphasis in original].² Preventing armed violence depends upon a society’s ability to cope with both endogenous and exogenous shocks or potential flashpoints for violence, which in turn depends on the presence of responsive and capable institutions that can prevent or end armed conflict. The risk of violence increases, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) notes, when government authority and institutional capacity erode, and when there is a “pronounced deterioration in the relationship between states and their societies.”³

States without adequate governing capacity are more likely to experience armed violence. They are also more likely to spawn or host militant groups and terrorist networks. It is no coincidence that regions with low levels of state governance—the Afghan-Pakistan border region, Somalia, South Sudan, eastern Congo—have high rates of armed violence. These are settings in which nominal states lack public legitimacy (an issue which we will address later in this report) and have little or no institutional capacity.

The WDR confirms what many studies have documented, that factors such as inadequate economic development, unmet political grievances, and political exclusion increase the risk of armed violence. Unlike these prior studies, many of which examined the role of specific variables distinct from a larger context, the WDR report acknowledges that these factors are linked to governance systems, and that good governance can help to lower the likelihood of war. The WDR asserts that “legitimate institutions and governments that give everyone a stake in national prosperity are the immune system that protects from different types of violence.”⁴

This perspective treats armed conflict as a disease that needs to be prevented and cured. In a 2005 article for the *Washington Post* Paul Stares and Monica Yacoubian propose an epidemiological framework for countering terrorism, treating militancy as if it were a virus or mutating disease.⁵ The same model applies in attempting to diagnose the causes and cures of international conflict and civil war. The first task is to contain the ‘illness’ and prevent its spread, which requires effective security capacity and the stable rule of law. It is also necessary to address the conditions that cause the disease, such as unresolved grievances, political exclusion, and proximity to regions in conflict. States and societies improve their ‘health’ through economic development and more inclusive and accountable systems of governance.

Failures of governance can set in motion a downward spiral that undermines both development and security. The WDR emphasizes the link between governance deficits and the likelihood of armed conflict.

Where states, markets, and social institutions fail to provide basic security, justice, and economic opportunities for citizens, conflict can escalate.... Countries and subnational areas with the weakest institutional legitimacy and governance are the most vulnerable to violence and instability and the least able to respond to internal and external stresses.⁶

The UNDP report traces armed violence to fragility, which it defines as contexts in which “public authorities no longer have the monopoly on legitimate violence, the ability to deliver services, or the capacity to collect public revenues.”⁷ These “overlapping deficits” reflect a collapse in governance mechanisms for mediating disputes and trigger independent action by aggrieved or greedy groups.⁸

The WDR and UNDP reports reinforce what many scholars have emphasized about the importance of governance structures that provide security, economic opportunity, and other essential political goods. We turn now to a review of some of the literature on these topics, examining examples and evidence confirming the linkage between effective, stable, and legitimate institutions of governance and the prevention of armed conflict.

State capacity

Governance can be defined as the system of rules and procedures created for the purpose of solving collective problems and instilling and maintaining order within a specific domain. Governance systems encompass institutions, laws, and norms that allow specific groups or societies to organize. Governance systems are found in formal systems, such as state governments, and informal systems such as the loose rules or generally accepted norms that can guide behavior in social groups. These systems can be analyzed in terms of their structure: the processes and strategies by which they attempt to accomplish the tasks of solving problems and maintaining order. They can also be analyzed in terms of their capacity: their ability to follow through on the collective decisions that are made, effectively provide the public goods and services that they are tasked with delivering, and enforce the decisions made in the face of actors who choose to dissent or resist collective decisions.

The capacity of the state is a foundational element in the relationship between governance and peace. Existing research suggests that a government will not be able to maintain peace if it lacks the institutional capacity to provide security and enforce state decisions in the territory it controls. In addition, research suggests that the question of capacity goes much further than simple questions of security capacity: the ability of the state to provide a wide range of social services is essential in supporting peace. Moreover, there is a direct relationship between the

effectiveness of the state's institutions and peace. In the analysis below we examine correlations between conflict risk and these three dimensions of state governance: security capacity, social capacity, and institutional quality.

Security capacity

State governments are defined in modern international law as the sole controllers of coercive force, famously described by Weber as holders of the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.⁹ There is a clear and direct relationship between the state's capacity to maintain security and exert control over territory and the maintenance of peace. The linkage between security capacity and peace is not linear, however, and in some circumstances may have negative impacts. Several empirical studies show that excessive military expenditures can exacerbate conflict risk. This section reviews the literature on these relationships to show that coercive capacity is a necessary but not sufficient dimension of the relationship between governance and peace.

Several research studies have found a strong relationship between measures of security capacity and the risk of armed conflict. James Fearon and David Laitin emphasize this linkage in their classic 2003 article on the factors associated with the outbreak of civil war. They challenge the assumption that civil conflict is caused by ethnic or religious differences and cast doubt on the claims of Paul Collier that economic causes are primary. "Our theoretical interpretation is more Hobbesian than economic," they famously state.¹⁰ Their analysis shows that modern civil wars have been characterized by insurgencies: attacks committed by relatively lightly armed groups using guerrilla tactics and operating primarily from remote rural bases. They argue that a key factor in whether insurgencies take hold is state governance capacity. They use national income per capita as a proxy for measuring state security capacity, reasoning that the level of national income per capita is an indicator of a state's capacity for policing and counterinsurgent operations. Using data on more than 125 civil wars post 1945, they find that the most important factors in explaining the likelihood of insurgency are the government's police and military capabilities and the reach of government institutions into rural areas. Insurgents are better able to survive and prosper if the government and military they oppose are relatively weak—badly financed, organizationally inept, corrupt, politically divided, and poorly informed about goings-on at the local level.¹¹

In their 2006 review of the empirical literature on civil war onset, Nicholas Sambanis and Håvard Hegre also find evidence of a direct connection between military capacity and reduced risk of armed conflict. They measure the level of a government's military spending and the size of its armed forces and correlate this with the likelihood of civil war. They find a robust negative correlation between the risk of civil war onset and the size of a state's military capability as measured by the number of troops. The larger the size of the state's armed forces, the lower the risk of civil war onset. As they write, "countries with large militaries may be better able to deter insurgency or repress any opposition before it rises to the level of civil war."¹² They argue that states with strong militaries are better able to prevent or preempt civil war.

Other scholars agree that coercive capacity has a role in peace. David Sobek writes that state capacity is a critical mediating variable in explaining the onset of war, and that scholars who focus on the impact of economic factors or grievances as causes of armed conflict also need to “account for the effect of state capability.”¹³ Additional support comes in Hegre’s 2003 paper for the World Bank, which emphasizes the importance of state coercive capacity in explaining why autocratic governments tend to experience fewer civil conflicts than partially democratic states. Authoritarian states have less internal violence, he argues, “presumably because they are able to suppress the opposition so that no rebel movement can be organized.”¹⁴ Autocracies have fewer democratic constraints on the use of force. This finding is consistent with the conclusion that a direct relationship exists between coercive capacity and peace, but it also underscores a contradiction: autocracies may be more able to use force to prevent internal rebellion, but this use of force could itself rise to the level of a civil war or generate future conflict.

Additional research on the relationship between coercive capacity and peace corroborates the problematic relationship between the two. Military and police capabilities are essential elements of state capacity and play a role in preventing armed conflict, but an excessive reliance on coercive means may exacerbate conflict risks. Collier and his colleagues find that excessive military spending is associated with an increased risk of war recurrence. In *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, they observe that high military spending is correlated with increases in the risk of war recurrence in post-conflict settings and “is normally ineffective as a deterrent of rebellion.”¹⁵ High levels of military spending are “significantly counterproductive,” they write, increasing the risk of renewed war.¹⁶ While this analysis looks only at post-war conflict recurrence and may not be generalizable, it nevertheless demonstrates that military spending in and of itself is not sufficient to protect post-conflict peace.

Collier makes a similar point in *The Bottom Billion*: “High military spending is part of the problem in post-conflict situations, not part of the solution. It makes further conflict substantially more likely.”¹⁷ This rather surprising result comes from the signaling effects of government spending, according to Collier.¹⁸ States that prioritize military expenditures in the wake of a peace settlement are hedging their bets and either inadvertently or intentionally signaling an intention to renege on negotiated agreements. Prioritizing social programs such as education and health care, on the other hand, may signal an intention to focus on peaceful development and economic growth rather than further armed conflict. The importance of such social spending appears repeatedly in research on the relationship between governance and peace and will be addressed below.

Several studies have found that high military spending retards economic growth in developing countries, and may exacerbate the conditions that lead to armed conflict through this negative impact on economic development.¹⁹ Substantial research over the years by investigators at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other agencies have noted the harmful impacts of excessive military spending on economic development. In 1993, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation

issued a policy guidance document on participatory development and good governance. It stated:

When military expenditure is excessive, it can result in conflict and repression, contribute to instability in the region, and divert scarce resources away from development needs. DAC members emphasize the importance of establishing and maintaining the primacy of the role of civilians in political and economic affairs and the significance they attach to avoiding or reducing excessive military expenditure.²⁰

Economic growth is closely related to state capacity. Fearon and Laitin specifically base their analysis of coercive capacity on indirect measures of national income, not on direct calculations of coercive capability. They find a strong association between high per capita income and low conflict risk. The use of a broad indicator like national income to measure coercive capacity is problematic, however. Per capita income measures general economic development, which many studies have shown to be strongly associated with democracy and peace. Measurements of national income encompass a very broad range of factors and include virtually all forms of activity at every level of government. Some countries have very high levels of per capita income, such as Germany or Belgium, but relatively low levels of military and police capability. Other countries have low levels of per capita income, such as Afghanistan or Sudan, but very large military and police forces.

In his more recent background paper for the WDR, Fearon reaches a more nuanced conclusion about the relationship between state capacity and conflict risk. Fearon acknowledges the debate and discussion about interpreting low national income as a proxy for inadequate state administrative and coercive capabilities. In the paper he employs additional methodologies using governance indices to measure institutional capabilities more directly. By controlling for income levels and then assessing conflict risk in relation to specific governance indicators, Fearon finds a direct relationship between capacity and conflict risk. He analyzes the categories of government effectiveness, investment profile, corruption, and rule of law as defined in several of the governance ratings. It may be “interesting to learn,”²¹ he observes, that regardless of which governance indicator one chooses, all work similarly in showing a relationship to conflict risk. Higher ratings in the various governance categories are correlated with reduced incidence of armed conflict. This could mean that the different dimensions of governance have similar effects on conflict risk, or, as Fearon puts it, “good governance is like a syndrome and ‘all good things tend to go together.’”²² The finding suggests that state capacity levels correlate not just with coercive capabilities but with all levels of governance, civilian as well as military.

Social capacity

The research discussed so far focuses on state capacity in the context of security capacity—the ability of states to maintain effective control over territory and resources within their domain. However,

this is not the only responsibility of states. Governance systems in general, and governments in particular, are also responsible for the distribution and provision of public goods and services. Research suggests that this component of governance is also a key predictor of peace.

In a 2006 paper, Clayton Thyne examines a governance system's social capacity and the risk of armed conflict by measuring a state's ability to provide educational services. Even when controlling for other major predictors such as democracy, income, and prior war, the effectiveness of public education is an important predictor of a reduced risk of civil war. Correlating figures for primary school enrollment with data on civil war onset, he finds strong support for the hypothesis. Higher levels of primary school enrollment are directly linked to a reduced risk of armed violence. In testing for probability, Thyne finds that an increase in primary school enrollment lowers the prospect of civil conflict.²³ Other scholars observe similar results: high levels of primary and secondary school enrollment are associated with a reduced risk of armed conflict.²⁴

Thyne also examines government investment in health services as a measure of the quality of civilian governance. He uses World Bank data on child immunization as a proxy for a government's commitment to health services. His findings show a statistically significant negative effect on conflict risk.²⁵ Countries with the highest rates of child immunization have the lowest likelihood of civil war onset. This study shows that states providing basic services such as primary education and child immunization have a lower risk of civil war onset.

Zeynep Taydas and Dursun Peksen confirm and extend this analysis in a 2012 article in which they measure government spending on social welfare more broadly and correlate this with the probability of armed conflict. As spending for education, health, and social security increases, the risk of armed conflict declines significantly. Their statistical results indicate that an increase in welfare spending (as a percentage of GDP) lowers the probability of civil conflict. Government abilities to provide redistributive welfare services are of critical importance to political stability and the maintenance of civil peace, they argue. Spending on welfare programs "contributes to peace by improving the living standards of citizens and raising the opportunity cost of insurgency."²⁶ It also shapes citizen preferences in ways that discourage the use of violence to achieve political goals. Governments that provide effective public welfare services are more likely to obtain public loyalty, compliance, and support.²⁷ It may also be, as Collier suggests, that a state's commitment to social welfare sends a benign signaling message to aggrieved ethnic communities within its borders and neighboring states, thereby reducing fears of military intervention or repression and lowering the tensions that may lead to armed conflict.

Institutional quality

The research presented so far addresses state capacity in both security and social domains. Common to both domains of governance are institutions, which are mechanisms that embody customs, practices and behavioral patterns to provide consistency and structure to human

relations.²⁸ The UNDP's Governance for Peace report focuses on the quality of institutions as a key element in helping societies avoid armed violence. Good governance systems are those that are accountable, resilient, and inclusive.²⁹ An increasing body of research confirms that systems which operate fairly and transparently and in an accountable manner are highly effective at supporting peace.

Several studies focus specifically on measures of civilian governance quality. In a paper delivered at the International Studies Association in 2007, Taydas and Peksen provide empirical evidence of a significant and robust association between indicators of civilian governance and the likelihood of civil conflict. The authors use four indicators as proxies for the quality of governmental bodies—corruption, rule of law, expropriation risk, and government observance of contracts. All indicators except for corruption are “significant predictors” of conflict onset. Taydas and Peksen find a positive and statistically significant relationship between civil war onset and the variables for rule of law, expropriation risk, and security of contracts.³⁰ They observe a similar positive correlation between conflict risk and a composite variable that incorporates all four governance indicators.³¹ The results show that the rule of law, expropriation risk and contract security are significant variables in predicting the likelihood of armed conflict.

Many other studies have found evidence of a direct relationship between the strength of governance institutions and reduced risk of armed conflict. Research for the WDR “supports the finding that states with weak institutions run the greatest risk of the onset and recurrence of civil war and of extreme levels of criminal violence.”³² In their study for the WDR, Jack Goldstone et al. observe that high ratings of institutional quality correlate strongly with a reduced likelihood of political crisis and armed conflict. Their assessment of institutional legitimacy combines what they identify as three key elements of institutional quality: capacity, inclusion, and accountability. Measures of institutional quality are an order of magnitude more important than other tested variables in accounting for the absence of armed violence.³³ Governance quality matters greatly in determining the prospects for peace.

In their respective papers for the WDR, Fearon and Barbara Walter provide new evidence on the linkages between weak governance and the risk of armed violence. Fearon again uses per capita income as a proxy for governance capacity, in addition to directly modeling the impact of elements of government quality. To address the methodological risk of selection bias he observes governance ratings of countries at the same level of per capita income. This allows him to identify what he calls “surprisingly good governance,” which exists in a country that has high-quality governance ratings in comparison to other countries at the same level of per capita income.³⁴ He then correlates the governance rating with subsequent conflict onset.³⁵ Using this methodology, Fearon finds “very large substantive effects” of high governance quality ratings on reduced likelihood of armed conflict.³⁶ His study shows that a country with “surprisingly good governance” has a lower risk of armed conflict in the subsequent 5-10 years than countries with similar per capita income but lower governance ratings.³⁷

Walter's background paper for the WDR confirms this linkage. She finds a direct correlation between favorable ratings of institutional quality and reduced occurrence of war. Countries that score high on the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment index (CPIA) index "are significantly less likely to experience armed conflict"³⁸ than those with lower governance ratings, she writes. All else equal, a higher CPIA score (75th percentile) is associated with a reduction in the likelihood of armed conflict compared to countries with a lower CPIA score (25th percentile).³⁹ Walter also finds "a strong negative relationship between the presence of a formalized constitutional democracy and renewed conflict. A formal constitution reduces the odds of conflict renewal by 64 percent."⁴⁰

Walter's explanation for these findings focuses on governance factors. She writes, "Political institutions are the key to explaining why some countries can escape the conflict trap while others do not."⁴¹ She concentrates particularly on the credibility of government. Armed conflict is a sign that governance is weak, unresponsive, and unreliable. Governments are more likely to experience rebellion when armed groups can evade state security forces and when political authorities cannot implement the decisions they make. According to Walter, "States that lack functioning political institutions, or are so weak that they have little control over their own borders, are more apt to harbor spoilers capable of sabotaging peace agreements."⁴² The best way to prevent armed conflict, Walter argues, is to build stronger and more credible institutions of political governance so that negotiated settlements can be reached and implemented. States that follow good governance practices are much less likely to face armed violence. A greater focus on building viable political institutions may be the most effective way to prevent the occurrence of armed conflict.

Example case: The 'resource curse' as weak institutional capacity

The role of governance institutions in determining the likelihood of armed conflict provides insight into the well-known relationship between dependence on primary commodity exports, especially oil, and a high risk of armed conflict. Michael Ross has produced several major studies on the subject, including a 2004 article in which he conducts a meta-analysis of 14 quantitative studies to arrive at two core findings that are backed up by strong empirical evidence: (1) dependence on oil exports is directly linked to an increased risk of civil war onset and (2) the presence of lootable resources, such as diamonds or drugs, does not cause war but tends to prolong war once it begins.⁴³

In a subsequent analysis, Ross notes the connections between separatist insurgencies and oil revenue generated by onshore wells. He finds that separatist insurgency is correlated with onshore oil production and domestic nonfuel rents but not with offshore oil production. Armed rebellions rooted in natural resource dependence are often struggles to gain control over territory that produces oil or mineral wealth. The incentive for armed conflict increases in proportion to the value of controlling resource-rich regions. Oil and other minerals tend to foster separatist conflict because they make independence more lucrative and desirable for those who wish to dominate such regions.⁴⁴

States that are heavily dependent on exports of oil, gemstones, and minerals suffer from a variety of other problems—slow economic growth, high poverty rates, and authoritarian governance—that may be associated with increased risk of civil conflict.⁴⁵ Countries in which oil exports are a major source of revenue account for one third of the total armed conflicts in the world today.⁴⁶

The association between dependence on oil exports and armed conflict is well-established, but recent research suggests that the ‘resource curse’ is mediated by state institutional quality. Initial studies by Collier and his colleagues focused on economic factors, reasoning that the availability of lootable resources such as oil or diamonds provides an economic incentive for the onset of civil war and the means to sustain it. Their research showed that “countries with abundant natural resources have a higher risk of armed conflict.”⁴⁷ Collier and Benedikt Goderis qualify this analysis in a more recent paper in which they find that resource-dependent states “with sufficiently good institutions” are less likely to face a high risk of armed conflict.⁴⁸ This suggests that governance capacity can in some instances trump economic incentives as a factor causing armed violence. Ross notes that the impact of natural resource dependency can be influenced by economic policy. If revenues from oil or diamond production are invested domestically to increase wealth and GDP per capita, the resulting benefits offset any detrimental effects of the resource curse.⁴⁹

Fearon explains the resource curse on the basis of governance factors rather than economic incentives. He traces commodity dependence to underlying weaknesses in state capacity. He argues that “States with high oil revenues have less incentive to develop administrative competence and control throughout their territory.”⁵⁰ When states are dependent on oil earnings rather than taxation from a diversified economy, they are weaker politically and have less developed governance systems. Regimes that rely predominantly on oil revenues tend to lack systems of broad public taxation and as a result do not have the political legitimacy that a taxation system requires.⁵¹ Such regimes tend to spend less on social needs and more on weapons and war. They often disregard the rule of law and are less able to attract sufficient investment and trade to diversify the economy and meet the needs of society.

Ross hypothesizes that the link between civil war and resource dependence might be caused by some unmeasured third variable, such as weakness in the rule of law.⁵² Leif Wenar probes this connection and looks specifically at the failure of states to enforce property rights.⁵³ Although international law enshrines the principle that natural resources belong to the citizens of the state, weak property rights protections allow authoritarian governments, political elites, and violent groups to capture and divert those resources for their own benefit. In governance systems with properly functioning and enforceable property rights, Wenar argues, the resource curse is less likely to appear.

Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal, in a related study, assess the impact of public versus private ownership of natural resources. States that own and control oil and other mineral revenues tend to have weak tax structures and fewer regulatory institutions to limit government decision making. When private corporations own a portion of natural resource wealth, however, the opposite is true. Private owners have an incentive to establish strong

institutions and fiscal regulatory mechanisms to protect their investments and maintain profitability. State control over mineral reserves makes a government less dependent on society and less subject to political constraint. It allows a government to use resource windfalls for any purpose, including repression and armed conflict. Domestic private ownership has the potential to strengthen governance structures and increase constraints on executive war-making authority.⁵⁴

This also points to a related finding: governments that are dependent on tax revenues from private economic activity are more likely to have quality institutions that help to mitigate conflict risk. In the field of fiscal sociology, scholars use taxation as an indicator of governance capacity. States that draw their financial resources from domestic taxpayers tend to have more representative governance and more robust institutional capacity for providing security and other political goods.⁵⁵ The ratio of tax revenue to GDP is considered a measure of economic and social strength and political legitimacy. Taxation in a diversified economy is an indication of stable bonds between state and society. A high tax ratio reflects the ability of political authorities to extract tax revenues from citizens and companies. It means that governing authorities have sufficient popular legitimacy to rely upon citizen compliance, however grudging that may be in the case of paying taxes. When states lack taxation capacity and a diversified economic foundation, they tend to have weak governance and are more likely to experience armed conflict.

The role of territory and ethnicity

Research into the variety of forms and predictors of war has amassed an enormous body of literature on the underlying causes and conditions that are most frequently associated with armed conflict. Two dominant and interrelated elements often identified as key causes of war and major armed conflict are territorial disputes and ethnic exclusion. If our argument about the centrality of governance structure and capacity is valid, it should help to illuminate how and under what circumstances these underlying conditions affect the likelihood of armed conflict. This section of the paper examines these two dimensions of conflict from a governance perspective and assesses how they relate to the central argument that governance is a key mediator of whether internal pressures result in armed conflict.

Control of territory

Disputes over territory and political secession historically have been the most frequent cause of war between and within states. Nils Petter Gleditsch observes that territorial disputes are the number one cause of armed conflict in the modern era. Of 277 armed conflicts in the period 1946-2004, 60 percent were over territory.⁵⁶ Some of the most intractable intrastate military conflicts in recent decades—in the Balkans, Angola, Sudan, Kashmir and beyond—have been fought by ethnic and religious communities over contested claims to territory. They are the result of attempts to realign or break away from existing states and/or form new states. They are

settings in which boundaries are in dispute and aggrieved communities are striving for greater autonomy and in some cases sovereign independence.

John Vasquez argues that territorial disputes between contiguous states are the dominant factor in nearly all wars between states—“Concerns over territory . . . have been the underlying and fundamental source of conflict that ends in war.”⁵⁷ Drawing from the analysis of Kalevi Holsti and other scholars, Vasquez shows that contests over territory and boundaries have generated more wars than any other issue in modern history.⁵⁸ Claims over territory and the inviolability of borders are highly emotive and intangible, and they tend to arouse intensive and broadly based political mobilization. They often take on symbolic and transcendent importance that makes them highly intractable and difficult to resolve.⁵⁹

Over the centuries as states in Europe and other parts of the world have consolidated governance within relatively stable international borders, the number of interstate wars involving territorial disputes has declined. According to Holsti and other scholars, the importance of territorial disputes as a cause of major war between states has diminished.⁶⁰ As Mark W. Zacher observes, “The decline of successful wars of territorial aggrandizement during the last half-century is palpable. In fact there has not been a case of successful territorial aggrandizement since 1976.”⁶¹ The decline in interstate war in recent decades is partly attributable to fewer territorial disputes among major developed states. It also results from the rise of multilateral cooperation through such institutions as the United Nations and the European Union.

The states of Europe passed through many wars, revolutions, and rebellions before they could emerge as coherent states and form the pacific union of today. In southeastern Europe, the process of defining national territory and borders remains contested and since 1991 has generated significant armed conflict. In many parts of the contemporary world, struggles over state formation are far from complete, and in some areas have barely begun. Many regions have weak authoritarian states that claim to rule territory over which they have little actual control. These are states and regions where governance is undermined by corruption, impunity, bureaucratic inertia, and ethnic and religious fragmentation and marginalization.⁶² In many instances these semi-states face armed resistance from ethnic or national communities seeking to attain greater representation, autonomy, or independence in parts of their territory.

Many conflicts within states result from the assertion of ethnic or national identity, the quest of suppressed minorities for recognition, rights, and autonomy. When faced with demands for such rights, states often respond with force, which can exacerbate the conditions that lead to armed insurgency and civil war. Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr argue that “most of the ethnic wars of the last half-century have been fought over issues of group autonomy and independence.”⁶³ Ethnic wars rarely achieve outright independence, but they often result in legal or *de facto* autonomy for the contending rebel groups. Many of the civil wars since 1960 have resulted in “increased autonomy for the groups that fought them,” according to Gurr.⁶⁴ Of the 57 conflicts studied by Gurr and his team, 30 led to greater regional autonomy, power sharing, or independence for ethnic and national groups.⁶⁵

In essence these are struggles over governance, over the authority of centralized governments in relation to local communities. They are contests over the marking of borders and the extent and nature of political authority within those borders. When central governments lack effective mechanisms for managing territorial and ethnic disputes, the risk of armed conflict increases.

The research on territorial control echoes the earlier discussion of state capacity: ultimately, states must be able to exert control over their territory in order to secure peace. However, while effective security forces are important for preserving territorial integrity, they are usually not sufficient. An excessive reliance on coercive means, without efforts to address underlying political grievances, may be counter-productive, driving affected communities toward armed rebellion. If the governance system systematically excludes and marginalizes significant ethno-national communities, and if those communities lack mechanisms for airing and resolving their grievances, the likelihood of armed conflict increases.

Ethnic exclusion and civil war

At the end of the Cold War, as a wave of bitter ethnic strife erupted in the former Yugoslavia and other regions, political commentators identified ethnic differences as a major cause of armed conflict. Multiethnic countries were thought to be at greater risk of war. Although this is an active debate within political science, and some studies have confirmed such a link, several high-quality research studies conducted subsequently show that states with multiple ethnic communities are not more conflict-prone than ethnically homogeneous states. In their 2003 article, Fearon and Laitin demonstrate that “ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil violence” than other countries.⁶⁶ Hegre and Sambanis (2006) also find no link between ethnic fractionalization and armed conflict. This does not mean that ethnicity has no relation to war. Ethnic groups obviously engage in armed conflict, but they do so for complex reasons that go beyond the mere fact of ethnic, religious, or linguistic diversity. Ethnic-related violence results not from the number of ethnic groups in a country but from the way they are governed and the political relations among them. Especially significant is the degree of polarization between major ethnic groups. When substantial ethnic communities are marginalized and excluded from political power and economic resources, the prospects for violence increase.

The phenomenon of ethnic marginalization is closely related to what social scientists call horizontal inequality—the existence of governance structures that deny certain groups access to political power and economic opportunity. Horizontal inequality can be defined as differences of status and wealth among subgroups within a society that are based on ethnic, religious, or linguistic identity, without regard for the subgroup’s social needs or capacities. Frances Stewart at Oxford University has been a pioneer in documenting and studying this phenomenon. Her research shows that horizontal inequalities can be conflict promoting, while governance policies designed to ameliorate such inequalities can reduce the likelihood of conflict.⁶⁷

Several studies find that polarization has a large impact on the likelihood of ethnic conflict. Marta Reynal-Querol notes a “positive and significant effect of religious polarization in explaining the incidence of ethnic civil war.”⁶⁸ She finds that religious polarization has a greater impact than linguistic fragmentation. Joan Esteban and Debraj Ray use game theory models to suggest that highly polarized societies are likely to experience less frequent onset of ethnic conflict but that the resulting wars will be very intense⁶⁹—a prediction that seems to match the experience of the very bloody wars in the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya and other settings.

Ethnic conflict is closely related to nationalism and the struggle of communities to form states and systems of governance based on a common identity. Political conflicts often intensify as ethnonational communities struggle to gain control over state power and sources of wealth. Charles Tilly argues that this process is one of “categorical inequality” and that dominant groups often seek to exclude others in the name of the nation.⁷⁰ Political contests over forming nations and defining borders have a high risk of generating armed conflict, especially when large ethnic groups are denied access to power and resources and their interests are violated. Systems of governance that systematically marginalize large ethnic groups create conditions of social frustration and mobilization that can lead to violent conflict.

Finding ways to measure these relationships is difficult, but recent research provides evidence confirming that political and economic marginalization leads to armed conflict. In a 2007 paper in the *American Political Science Review* Lars-Erik Cederman and Luc Girardin examine whether significant ethnic groups excluded from power are more likely to use violence to redress this imbalance. In the absence of systems for equitable representation, the authors postulate, countries will face “a higher potential for escalation to political violence.”⁷¹ They construct a set of variables that measure when the population share of the “ethnic groups in power” (EGIP) is small and the population share of “marginalized ethnic groups” (MEG) is high. In their statistical analysis they find support for the assumption that exclusion leads to political violence, although they caution that the results are preliminary and based on a limited set of conflicts in Eurasia and North Africa, excluding Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

A subsequent article in 2011 extends this analysis and develops a global model for measuring the relationship between ethnic marginalization and civil war onset. Co-authored by Cederman, Nils Weidmann, and Kristian Gleditsch, the article tests the hypothesis that structural asymmetries increase the risk of civil war. The study employs a broad concept of horizontal inequality, measuring both political exclusion and lack of access to economic wealth. The authors measure the degree of political marginalization by determining whether large ethnic groups are politically dominant, share power with other groups, or are excluded. They find that “excluded groups are much more likely to experience conflict than included ones.”⁷² When measuring relative wealth they find that ethnic groups with wealth levels far below the national average are more likely to experience civil war. This study confirms the negative impact of ethnic marginalization and corroborates Stewart’s assertion that horizontal inequality is a multidimensional concept that includes both political and economic exclusion.

This finding about exclusion echoes the critical role of inclusion as an essential element of governance quality, which we argue is closely related to peace. The degree of marginalization and exclusion in a society is directly related to the structure of its governance system. Reynal-Querol finds that political inclusiveness reduces the likelihood of ethnic civil war.⁷³ Joan Esteban and Debraj Ray come to similar findings in noting that more representative systems perform well in guaranteeing peace.⁷⁴ The more inclusive and representative the political system, the lower the likelihood of civil war. Proportional representation systems provide the greatest opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and are the most inclusive form of political decision making. Empirical analysis shows that these systems also have the lowest probability of civil rebellion. This should not be surprising, since inclusion and representativeness are the very opposite of exclusion and marginalization. Governance systems with these characteristics are less likely to experience ethnic civil war.

The available evidence indicates that unequal social relations and ethnic group discrimination increase the risk of civil conflict.⁷⁵ These findings corroborate the analysis of Gurr et al. that armed conflict often results from marginalization and perceptions of relative deprivation—from the sense that others have unfair privileges or wealth relative to the aggrieved community. This form of inequality can be considered a failure of governance, the result of decision making structures that are not sufficiently inclusive and that lack mechanisms for sharing access to power and resources. When governance systems are discriminatory and polarized they generate resentments and grievances that can lead to violent conflict. On the other hand, representative governance systems that incorporate substantial ethnic, national, or religious communities are more likely to have the capacity to contain and resolve disputes peacefully.

Where governments are well established and have proven mechanisms for managing ethnonational disputes, political settlements can be reached without the risk of armed violence. Stable states with strong and effective governance systems are able to deal with territorial and ethnic disputes through political means. Consider the examples of independence movements in Quebec and Scotland. In both cases, substantial locally-based movements seek greater autonomy or complete political independence. Central governments in Ottawa and London vigorously oppose calls for secession and seek to preserve their territorial integrity. In the past such disputes might have led to civil war, but in these struggles the contending parties have relied largely on political means to assert their differences. Examples include the 1980 and 1995 independence referendum votes in Quebec and the proposed independence referendum for Scotland. Ottawa and London work against the independence movements not with armed repression but through political concessions, such as the bilingual mandate in Canada and economic and financial inducements for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Mechanisms of democratic governance provide avenues for addressing these contentious issues through political means rather than armed violence.

Governance systems provide institutions, rules, and procedures for effective decision making to resolve disputes. They also provide systems and capacity for ensuring compliance with the

decisions made. Nowhere is this more important than in establishing control and political order with a state's territory. The capacity to maintain political legitimacy and mediate ethnic grievances through political means is a fundamental element of governance. The existing research on ethnic conflict suggests a direct link between this characteristic of governance and armed conflict.

Governance and political stability

Our analysis of the literature so far has found that the risk of armed conflict diminishes when governments have sufficient capacity to enforce order, when they provide a wide range of public goods, and when their institutions are seen as strong, legitimate, and accountable. Conflict risk is also reduced in the presence of inclusive and representative political structures that are able to ameliorate issues such as ethnic disputes and territorial claims. These elements of governance capacity are associated with, and help to define, political stability. The link between political instability and armed conflict is well known and has been thoroughly explored in the pioneering work of the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), located at George Mason University. Through their analysis of a wide range of governance variables, the PITF research team has been able to identify the factors that lead to political instability and increase the risks of civil war and mass violence.

The flagship study of PITF is the 2010 article by Jack Goldstone et al., "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability." The PITF team focuses on four significant variables to predict the likelihood of political instability and armed conflict. These are regime type, infant mortality, conflict in the region, and state-led discrimination. Regime type measures the degree of democracy, based on indicators of political openness, competitiveness, and participation. Infant mortality is a proxy for the level of economic and social development. Conflict in the region measures the effect of armed conflict among neighboring states. State discrimination reflects government policies that repress or marginalize significant ethnic groups and minority populations.

The results of the PITF analysis show a strong correlation between the four factors and the risk of political instability and armed conflict. Using these variables Goldstone et al. report 80 percent accuracy in predicting all forms of instability within two years of measurement, and 87 percent accuracy in predicting adverse regime changes within two years of assessment.⁷⁶ Regime type and neighboring conflict are particularly important predictors, with both fully democratic and fully autocratic regimes proving to be more stable than partial democracies. The authors compare their model with a variety of more complex or alternate methodological approaches and demonstrate that their relatively simple model outperforms all others.

An earlier PITF study by Ted Gurr et al. attempts to forecast ethnic wars and political instability in Muslim-majority countries. Their 2005 study focuses on some of the same variables used in the 2010 analysis, including regime type, infant mortality, conflict in the region, and state-

led discrimination. The authors find that the first three are significant predictors of political instability and armed violence.⁷⁷ They find less effect for state-led discrimination but significant correlations for ethnic minority regimes and instances of prolonged rule by a single leader—predictors of political instability that seem validated by the recent wave of political upheaval within Arab countries.

The PITF findings confirm that the risk of armed conflict is strongly associated with the structure of governance systems and the ways in which citizens interact with their political leaders. All of the significant predictors identified in these studies are related directly or indirectly to governance. The greatest instability risk exists in partially democratic regimes characterized by high levels of factionalism, which Goldstone et al. define as “sharply polarized and uncompromising competition between blocs pursuing parochial interests at the national level.”⁷⁸ These and other dimensions of democratization and regime type are examined at length in Part II of this paper below. State-led discrimination is also important and is relevant to ‘voice and accountability’ measures of democratic governance. Infant mortality is related to governance quality and the provision of civilian services such as health care, sanitation, and nutrition. Even the indicator for conflict in neighboring states is related to governance in the sense that, as John Vasquez, Gurr, and others observe, territorial conflicts often spill across borders and are rooted in weak governance, as noted below.

The PITF study and the many others we have examined help to define the meaning of ‘good governance.’ The various elements that go into good governance tend to be highly correlated with one another and are mutually reinforcing. Security services, border control, the management of economic resources and public finances, the rule of law, representative democracy and human rights, public welfare services, multilateral cooperation are all essential elements of governance. No single dimension of governance by itself is sufficient to explain the irenic effects we have identified. It may be, as Fearon suggests, that “all good things go together.”⁷⁹ Good governance is a package of functions and capacities that fit together to enhance the ability of human communities to make and implement decisions in a way that reduces the risk of armed conflict.

Goldstone et al. emphasize the importance of effective governance for overcoming problems of political instability and armed violence. Their view of governance systems can be compared to the earlier epidemiological framework. Good governance systems are like healthy organisms, resilient and capable of fending off threats and infection.

We view the model not as one of instability but rather as one of resilience If the factors that appear associated with stability in the model are in place—high income, low discrimination, few conflicts in the neighborhood, and most important, a noncontested or unified political regime—the model suggests that the polity will remain stable. This result suggests that we may need to think more about the factors that underlie regime survival . . . and provide resilience in a troubled world, rather than about the diverse and often idiosyncratic causes of varied types of conflicts.⁸⁰

A policy approach that focuses on quality governance and capable institutions offers the best prescription for reducing the risk of political instability and armed violence.

Discussion: State capacity and quality

A key lesson of successful violence prevention and recovery, according to the WDR, is that “security, justice, and economic stresses are linked: approaches that try to solve them through military-only, justice-only, or development-only solutions will falter.”⁸¹ Conflict prevention policies require linked actions that incorporate diplomatic, security, and development activity within the rubric of good governance.

Building effective governance capacity is clearly relevant to the challenge of preventing armed conflict. Some of the most important causes of war, including border disputes and dependence on primary commodities, are related to issues of governance. States that have the highest scores on governance ratings have the lowest risk of armed violence. Quality governance means delivering the full range of public goods, including the provision of welfare services. The more complete the capabilities of a state, the better it is likely to be in addressing the needs of its citizens, and the more options it will have for preventing and co-opting violent extremism. Good governance is not only effective at providing the full range of public goods. It is also participatory, responsive and inclusive. It helps to reduce the risk of violent conflict by offering a stake in society to groups that might otherwise be tempted to resort to armed violence. Governance systems help to advance the prospects for peace through inclusive democratic political mechanisms—a subject to which we now turn.

Part Two. Regime Type

Section one identified the existing evidence that tied specific components of governance and peace. It argued that good governance is characterized by state coercive capacity; the provision of public goods; and strong, accountable, and inclusive systems. While these features can be examined independently, in the modern world they are often likely to co-occur. Many governments which are characterized by these features are organized along democratic lines. Just as there is a strong association between state capacity and peace, a similar relationship exists between democracy and peace, as we examine below.

A mountain of empirical evidence confirms the linkage between democracy and peace. The definition of democracy includes the ability of people to have a voice in public decision making, and the presence of political constraints that hold leaders and institutions accountable. Seymour Martin Lipset describes democracy as:

. . . a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials. It is a social mechanism for the resolution of the problem of societal decision-making among conflicting interest groups which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence these decisions through their ability to choose among alternative contenders for political office.⁸²

Robert Dahl defines democracy as “an orderly and peaceful process by means of which a majority of citizens can induce the government to do what they most want it to do and to avoid doing what they most want it not to do.”⁸³ These definitions distill democracy to essential functions that social scientists define as ‘voice’ and ‘veto.’ Voice refers to the degree and form of citizen participation in holding leaders accountable, while veto includes institutional and political checks on the authority of leaders. Undergirding these functions are guarantees of freedom, inclusion, openness, and representativeness that enable systems of accountability and constraint to hold political leaders broadly responsible to the public interest. As the analysis below indicates, all are crucial to the prevention of war and armed conflict, although governance functions related to voice seem to be more important than others in reducing the risk of armed conflict.

The connections between measures of democracy and peace are well established in empirical research. The well-known ‘democratic peace effect’ has several components. The first and most familiar is that mature democracies rarely wage war on one another. While there are limits and qualifications to this statement, as noted below, the democratic peace effect stands as one of the most well documented findings in all of social science. It is central to understanding the linkages between governance and peace. A second general finding is that the democratic peace effect applies within states as well as between them. Fully developed democracies have fewer civil conflicts and are less likely to use violence against their own citizens. The third finding of democratic peace research is more troubling: countries making the transition to democracy are often highly unstable and have a greater risk of civil war. Evidence suggests that the peace

effect only kicks in when democracy reaches a high threshold, as measured in the Polity scale and other governance indices. A fourth dimension also deserves mention—the military interventionist policies of the major democratic states are sometimes justified as a means of spreading democracy.

This part of the paper addresses the first three dimensions of the theory, where empirical findings are extensive and show clear irenic tendencies at both interstate and intrastate levels. The question of military interventionism is not currently addressed: it invites broader discussion about means and ends and debates about long-term predictors of war that are outside the scope of this paper. It is, however, an important caveat to be considered when thinking about this literature. The pages that follow examine the different dimensions of the democratic peace effect and distill findings from some of the most significant empirical studies on the subject. They review differing degrees and forms of democracy and their relationship to the risk of armed conflict. The paper also draws on parallel findings from the literature on state repression to identify the distinctive elements of democratic governance that are most likely to foster peace. The discussion here focuses on presenting patterns and evidence rather than offering theoretical explanations. Some hints of broader causal explanations are contained in the findings, but a full treatment of theoretical frameworks is left for a later discussion.

Democracy and interstate peace

The tenets of what is known as the liberal peace theory were articulated by the philosopher Immanuel Kant more than 200 years ago. Kant based his approach on three fundamental principles, which he called “definitive articles”: (1) democratic governance; (2) a federation of nations, and; (3) the “cosmopolitan law” of mutual respect through trade and interdependence. He argued that the combination of mutual democracy, international cooperation, and economic interdependence would help to prevent war. All three dimensions are necessary for peace, Kant believed. No single factor alone would be sufficient—it is the unique combination of all three that creates the essential foundations for more peaceful relationships among nations. In recent decades these principles have been tested in rigorous empirical studies and have stood up well. Many scholars have found support for the mutually reinforcing impact of democracy, economic integration, and international organization on the prospects for peace—what Gleditsch terms the “liberal tripod.”⁸⁴ The evidence shows that Kant was remarkably prescient in identifying the fundamental political and economic conditions of peace. Many researchers have confirmed the democratic peace phenomenon.⁸⁵ Especially significant has been the work of Bruce Russett and John Oneal, presented in the important 2001 book, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. Russett and Oneal examine every incident of armed conflict between nations from 1886 to 1992, drawing from the Correlates of War database and other widely accepted sources of empirical evidence. They find that the relationship between democracy and peace is statistically significant throughout the entire period and becomes stronger after 1945 as the number of democratic states increases.⁸⁶

Russett and Oneal have performed pioneering work in giving strength and vigor to the democratic peace theory.⁸⁷ Over the years they have refined the analytic dimensions of their model and given it precise quantitative definition. The theory provides a statement of statistical probability, not an assertion of absolute certainty. The proposition is not that democracies are always peaceful, but rather that, all else being equal, two mature democratic states are significantly less likely to go to war with each other than non-democratic states.

“The more democratic each member of a dyad is,” Russett observes, “the less likely is conflict between them.”⁸⁸ Democracy is best at preventing conflict when it is comprehensive. “The higher the level of democracy a state achieves,” Russett and Oneal conclude, “the more peaceful that state is likely to be.”⁸⁹ These findings are highly robust and hold constant across a wide range of data sets and different independent variables. The relationship between mutual democracy and peaceful political relations is one of the most consistently valid propositions in all of international relations. Much less clear is the theoretical explanation for the observed effect, and how it is influenced by differing degrees and forms of democratic governance.⁹⁰

The internal democratic peace

The classic statement of Kantian peace theory applies to interstate conflict and focuses on dyadic relations between states. This leaves out the most common form of armed violence in the world today, civil conflicts and one-sided violence within states. In recent years, researchers have found evidence that the democratic peace phenomenon applies within states as well as between them. Regime type matters not only externally but internally. Mature democratic governments are not only less likely to wage war on each other, they also experience fewer armed uprisings and major civil wars and are more reluctant to use armed violence against their own citizens. As the studies below indicate, the evidence of a democratic peace phenomenon within states is strong and compelling.

Walter observes a direct relationship between levels of democracy and the likelihood of internal armed conflict. In her examination of the problem of war recurrence, she finds that countries characterized by open political systems and economic well-being—i.e., developed democracies—have a much lower probability of renewed civil war than autocratic countries with low levels of economic development.⁹¹ Walter measures the degree of political openness and democratic ‘voice’ by using Polity and Freedom House indicators. High scores on these indices correlate directly with a reduced risk of civil war. She notes, as other scholars have observed, that major civil wars do not occur in mature democratic states. She concludes:

It may be that liberal democracies are really the only types of regimes that can truly insulate themselves from violent internal challenges. This suggests that citizens who are able to express their preferences about alternative policies and leaders, who are guaranteed civil liberties in their daily lives and in acts of political

participation, are less likely to become soldiers. Offering citizens a real outlet for their concerns and having a government that is open to democratic change considerably reduces the likelihood of a civil war.⁹²

Civil conflicts within mature democracies are not only less frequent but also less lethal. Bethany Lacina assesses the severity of civil conflicts by measuring casualty levels according to several variables: regime type, state capacity, ethnic and religious diversity, and the impact of foreign military intervention. She finds that the political characteristics of a regime correlate significantly with differing casualty levels and are the strongest predictor of conflict severity. Democratic governments experience much lower casualty levels during civil conflict than autocratic states. Lacina's analysis finds that civil wars occurring within democratic states have less than half the battle deaths of conflicts in non-democracies.⁹³

State-sponsored violence against civilians is also less likely to occur in democracies than in autocracies. In his important book, *Death by Government*, Rudolph Rummel assembles mind numbing data and numerous examples demonstrating the myriad ways governments kill their citizens—directly through genocide and mass terror and indirectly through starvation and repression. He finds a stark contrast between the behavior of autocracies and democracies. Autocratic governments readily “slaughter their people by the tens of millions; in contrast, many democracies can barely bring themselves to execute even serial murderers.”⁹⁴

Through statistical analysis, Rummel shows that genocidal killing is directly associated with the absence of democracy, holding constant other variables such as regime type, ethnic diversity, economic development level, population density, and culture.⁹⁵ The lack of democracy is the most significant indicator of the likelihood of mass repression against the civilian population. As Rummel documents the appalling litany of governments murdering their own people, he is unequivocal about what he considers the necessary remedy—“The solution is democracy. The course of action is to foster freedom.”⁹⁵

Barbara Harff's research on genocidal violence comes to similar conclusions. She examines 126 cases of internal war and regime collapse between 1955 and 1997 to identify the factors that led to genocidal violence in 35 of these cases. Her results match the findings of other studies. Autocratic regimes facing state failure are three and a half times more likely to experience genocidal violence than democratic regimes facing such failure.⁹⁷ She finds that genocidal violence is more likely in regimes that advocate exclusionary ideologies, an approach that is rare in mature democratic states. Harff observes that the lowest levels of mass killing occur in states with a high degree of economic interdependence, which is characteristic of mature democratic regimes.⁹⁸ Her conclusion is that states are less likely to employ genocidal violence when they have inclusive democratic systems and trade extensively with other countries. As Steven Pinker notes, these findings fit well with the Kantian triad of democracy, cosmopolitanism and trade—“another trifecta” for liberal peace theory.⁹⁹

A democratic threshold

Studies of political repression and state violence provide further evidence that the democratic peace effect depends upon the degree of democratic representativeness and inclusivity. Christian Davenport and other scholars show that the severity of human rights abuse is directly related to a state's level of democracy. Dozens of quantitative studies "confirm that democracy decreases state repression," writes Davenport, and that "increasing levels of democracy correlate with diminished levels of state repression."¹⁰⁰ Democratic political systems are far less likely to engage in violent practices such as torture, disappearances, and mass killing. As Davenport and David A. Armstrong note, this is "one of the most consistent results" in empirical research on violence within states.¹⁰¹

Davenport and Armstrong find that this pacifying effect occurs only in mature democratic states, where political freedom and accountability are fully institutionalized. They posit the existence of a democratic threshold above which repression is less likely. Below that level, where democracy is only partial, they find no discernible difference in the scale of human rights abuse. Democracy decreases repression only after a state has attained a certain threshold level of mature democracy, which can be measured on the Polity scale. They argue: "our empirical findings lead us to conclude that only those regimes which fully developed institutional practices and mass political behavior consistent with democratic principles will yield any pacifying effect on state repression."¹⁰²

Davenport argues that the likelihood of repressive violence is least in governance systems that are inclusive and participatory. His statistical correlations test the significance of voice and veto as factors that prevent state violence. Voice is a measure of the legal right of citizens to participate (suffrage), their degree of political involvement, and the level of competitiveness in the electoral system. Veto encompasses checks and balances, and both structural and procedural barriers to unrestrained executive action.

The greatest influence in limiting violent repression is associated with measures of voice. According to Davenport, "across types of conflict and repressive strategies, voice (specifically competition/participation) is . . . the most powerful mechanism of pacification, outpacing the influence of veto (specifically general executive constraints)."¹⁰³ Voice exceeds the influence of veto, Davenport argues, because citizens who can influence political decision-making through mechanisms of representation are less likely to use violence to be heard.

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his colleagues reach similar conclusions. They agree that "improvements in a state's level of democracy short of full democracy do not promote greater respect for integrity rights. Only those states with the highest levels of democracy, not simply those conventionally defined as democratic, are correlated with better human rights practices."¹⁰⁴ These human rights practices include protection of citizens from abuse or genocide. They note that "political participation at the level of multiparty competition appears more significant than other dimensions in reducing human rights abuses."¹⁰⁵ They also identify accountability as a critical feature that makes mature democracies respect human rights.

Dangerous democracies?

The internal democratic peace is limited to specific conditions and subject to significant qualification. It exists only when states have reached a high threshold of democracy. It does not apply to partial or incomplete democracies, which are sometimes referred to as anocracies. It does not exist in developing countries that are only semi-democratic or are just starting the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Such regimes tend to experience high levels of political instability and face a higher probability of armed conflict. They are more likely to experience armed conflict within their borders and more often repress their own citizens. When regimes are transitioning from autocracy to democracy, they often lack fully developed institutional means for accommodating political differences. Political and ethnic communities meanwhile have new opportunities for political mobilization. This gap between state capabilities and social expectations can lead to instability and a greater risk of violence.

Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder argue that partial democracies and states transitioning to democracy are highly unstable and are more likely to be involved in armed conflict with other states.¹⁰⁶ They examine all wars between 1816 and 1992 and claim to find evidence that transitioning states are more likely to be involved in interstate war. They argue that the bellicosity of these states results from their internal characteristics, not their relationships with other states.¹⁰⁷ Mansfield and Snyder identify two specific types of semi-democracies that have an increased risk of armed conflict: (1) those with generally weak political institutions and (2) those that have strong institutions but weak mechanisms of representative governance.¹⁰⁸ Avoiding the risk of armed conflict requires both strong institutions and effective systems of political representation.

Viprin Narang and Rebecca M. Nelson dispute these claims. They conduct an exhaustive review of the Mansfield and Snyder database and find few instances of semi-democratic states waging war on other countries. They argue that the purported relationship between incomplete democratization and interstate war rests entirely on a cluster of unrepresentative observations involving the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire prior to World War I. They “find no systematic empirical support for the theory that incomplete democratizers with weak institutions are more war-prone toward other states.”¹⁰⁹ This is not to say that partially democratic states face no risks. Such governments have a higher probability of state failure and internal conflict, but they are more prone to imploding, not exploding.¹¹⁰ The conflict risks they face are internal not external.

Many studies find that anocracies are more prone to internal conflict than either mature democracies or authoritarian states. When measuring the effect of regime type on the prospects for peace, researchers have identified an inverted U-shaped relationship in which mature democracies and autocracies have lower risks of civil war, while partially democratic states have the highest conflict risk.

Hegre et al. confirm that semi-democracies are prone to internal conflict, while mature democracies and harshly authoritarian regimes have fewer civil wars.¹¹¹ They confirm the

existence of an inverted U-curved pattern arguing that “Regimes that score in the middle range on the democracy-autocracy index have a significantly higher probability of civil war than either democracies or autocracies.”¹¹² They find that regime change sharply increases the probability of civil war in the short run. Fearon and Laitin also confirm the U-shaped pattern and find that anocracies have a substantially higher risk of civil war than autocracies.¹¹³

Matthijs Bogaards traces the risk of armed violence in semi-democracies to weak systems of political accountability and representativeness, minimal checks and balances, and biased information flows.¹¹⁴ In most transitions, the intended direction of change is toward democracy, although setbacks often occur and authoritarianism can return. If the democratic process continues and matures, the likelihood of regime failure and armed conflict decreases. Hegre et al. sound a hopeful note in assessing the prospects for states transitioning toward democracy:

... if we focus on countries that are at least half-way toward complete democracy, the prospects for domestic peace are promising. There *is* a democratic civil peace, and it may be achieved in the short run in some countries. In the long run most states, possibly all, may reach this condition, especially if we take into account the higher survival rate of open societies, which are less likely to move once again through the doubly dangerous zone of intermediate democracy and political change.¹¹⁵

Some scholars dispute the finding of an inverted U-shaped pattern and question the claim that semi-democracies are more conflict-prone than autocracies. James Vreeland argues that the observed linkage between partial democracy and civil war reflects methodological problems. Certain components of the commonly used Polity index measure factional violence and civil conflict. Using these indicators to measure the risk of armed conflict creates the classic dilemma of endogeneity: the independent and dependent variables are measuring the same thing. To correct for the problem Vreeland removes the ‘contaminated’ components of the Polity index. He finds that some of the countries coded as partial democracies were actually autocracies. His bottom line conclusion is that claims about the excessive bellicosity of anocracies are not supported by the data.¹¹⁶

Some scholars attempt to differentiate more precisely the large number of states categorized as semi-democracies. Goldstone and his colleagues divide these states into three subcategories: partial autocracies, which hold competitive elections for national office but tightly control participation (such as Singapore); partial democracies, which choose chief executives in competitive elections that are not fully free and fair and have limited participation (such as Albania); and partial democracies that have a high degree of political factionalism (such as Venezuela).¹¹⁷ The “most striking result” of their analysis is that among partial democracies, those with factionalism are “exceptionally unstable” and have by far the highest rate of political instability and civil war onset.¹¹⁸ Goldstone et al. conclude that the greatest risk of instability and armed violence occurs in the context of polarized politics of exclusive identities or ideologies, in conjunction with weak and only partially democratic governance institutions.

The concept of a U-shaped pattern implies that authoritarian regimes are equivalent to mature democracies in preventing armed conflict. While authoritarian states experience fewer armed conflicts than anocracies, they are more prone to civil war and mass repression than democracies and should not be equated with democracies. Evidence examined by Hanna Fjelde disputes the notion of an ‘authoritarian peace.’ Her study shows that authoritarian regimes have higher levels of armed conflict than democracies. Of the 157 civil conflicts recorded during the period 1973 – 2004, more than 80 percent (a total of 130 conflicts) occurred in authoritarian regimes.¹¹⁹ Among the various types of authoritarian regimes, military dictatorships have the highest level of armed conflict.¹²⁰

Other researchers report similar evidence. Reynal-Querol finds that more than half of the 68 cases of civil wars observed during the period 1960 to 1994 occurred in countries with high levels of autocracy. Among states with authoritarian governments, she observes, 11 percent experienced internal armed conflict, compared to only 4 percent among states rated free.¹²¹ Daniel Stockemer examines recent data through 2007 and also finds that partial democracies have a higher rate of minor civil conflict (those with fewer than 1,000 deaths) but that autocracies have higher rates of major civil war (those with more than 1,000 deaths). Like other scholars, he finds no evidence in recent decades of a major civil conflict in a mature democratic state.¹²² These studies show that semi-democracies are indeed conflict-prone but not necessarily more so than autocracies. If there is a U-shaped relationship, it is one in which autocracies and partial democracies have high rates of internal armed violence, while developed democracies have almost none.

Forms of democracy

A number of studies have attempted to identify the particular forms of democracy that are most associated with the presence or absence of armed conflict. In her study of cases from 1960 to 1994, Reynal-Querol assesses the risk of civil war in relation to presidential or parliamentary, and majoritarian or proportional representation systems. These forms of governance have differing ways of addressing issues related to group interest, executive accountability, and public participation. Majoritarian systems reflect pluralist interests, presidential systems have strong executive authority, and proportional representation systems are highly inclusive.

Reynal-Querol concludes that countries with more inclusive and participatory political systems have a lower risk of suffering a civil war. In countries with majoritarian or presidential systems, social groups with low levels of representation are more likely to begin armed rebellion than in countries with more inclusive systems. According to Reynal-Querol, “empirically we find that proportional systems have the lowest probability of experiencing a civil war.”¹²³ The more inclusive the system, the lower the probability of civil war. Specifically, Reynal-Querol finds that among democratic countries with a majoritarian system, 8.3 percent experienced a civil war, and among countries with presidential systems, 7 percent experienced a civil war. None of the democratic countries in her sample with a proportional parliamentary system experienced a civil war.¹²⁴ This seems to corroborate the point made by Russett and Oneal that the peace effect grows stronger as the political system becomes more deeply democratic.

Analysis of civil war termination provides similar findings on the importance of inclusive and representational forms of democracy for peaceful governance. Madhav Joshi brings together research on democratization and civil war termination to examine the phenomenon of post-war transitions to democracy (TTD), which are often fragile and can revert to armed conflict. Drawing from data on post war transitions during the years 1946 to 2005, Joshi finds that proportional representation parliamentary systems are more likely to sustain a peaceful transition to democracy than majoritarian or presidential systems. His results show that proportional representation systems have almost double the TTD survival rate of majoritarian systems and also have a higher survival rate than presidential systems.¹²⁵ Governance systems that provide greater opportunities for political participation to mobilized groups (including former armed groups) reduce the risk of democratic failure and civil war recurrence.

Political freedoms

Democracy depends upon the presence of political and civil rights, including freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and access to information. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states that “freedom, respect for human rights and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage are essential elements of democracy.”¹²⁶ For a system to be democratic, Dahl notes, citizens must enjoy an extensive array of freedoms, including the right to participate and express their views, to hear what others are saying, and to discuss issues freely and openly.¹²⁷ Guarantees of political freedom and civil rights are at the core of democratic governance. They are necessary ingredients for democracy to function fully, and are essential to the democratic peace effect.

Václav Havel wrote that peace and human rights are inseparable. Lasting peace and disarmament can only be “the work of free people,” he wrote.¹²⁸ He believed that “respect for human rights is the fundamental condition and the sole, genuine guarantee of true peace.”¹²⁹ The end of the Cold War confirmed the linkages among human rights, political freedom, and international peace. When the Berlin Wall fell, respect for human rights and democracy spread rapidly through Central and Eastern Europe. International tensions and nuclear dangers ebbed dramatically. In Latin America as well, the end of military dictatorships during the 1980s was accompanied by the spread of democracy and greater guarantees of political and civil rights.

Empirical evidence confirms that the denial of political freedom increases the risk of armed violence. Walter’s analysis of governance and war recurrence finds direct connections between the absence of political rights and the likelihood of armed conflict. She observes “a highly significant relationship” between government repression and the reemergence of civil conflict.¹³⁰ Especially significant are measures of extrajudicial killings and numbers of political prisoners. These factors make the outbreak of armed conflict significantly more likely. Walter concludes, “Governments that are beholden to a formal constitution, that follow the rule of law, and that do not torture and repress their citizens are much less likely to face renewed violence.”¹³¹

Fearon also examines the relationship between political rights and the risk of civil war. He raises a methodological caution, however: measurements of increased torture and human rights abuse could be indications of a civil conflict that is already beginning. To address this problem he adds a one-year and five-year time lag to his statistical analysis. The results show that political terror is very strongly related to subsequent civil war after one year. The resulting association after a five-year lag is only one-fourth as large but still significant. He concludes: “poor human rights performance is a *very* bad sign for a government: major civil conflict is then much more likely to begin, if it has not already started” [emphasis in original].¹³²

Official statements from the U.S. government and the United Nations have emphasized the link between human rights and counterterrorism. A U.S. National Academy of Sciences study in 2002 noted, “Terrorism and its supporting audiences appear to be fostered by policies of extreme political repression and discouraged by policies of incorporating both dissident and moderate groups into civil society and the political process.”¹³³ The White House *National Strategy* of 2006 observed that “terrorists are recruited from populations with no voice in their own government,” who have “no legitimate way to promote change in their own country.”¹³⁴ Terrorism thrives, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, “where human rights are violated and where political and civil rights are curtailed.”¹³⁵

Empirical studies provide evidence to support these assertions. Measures of political repression are positively correlated with terrorist recruitment: while terrorism is a slightly different construct than civil war, it is nevertheless a violent act closely related to insurgency. Moreover, research shows that terrorists and insurgents are most likely to come from countries that lack basic civil liberties.¹³⁶ By correlating the number of terrorists emanating from various countries with a wide range of variables, Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova find the strongest association between terrorism and measurements of political repression. They write, “The only variable that was consistently associated with the number of terrorists was the Freedom House index of political rights and civil liberties. Countries with more freedom were less likely to be the birthplace of international terrorists.”¹³⁷ Krueger makes a similar point in a *New York Times* article: “the freedom to assemble and protest peacefully without interference from the government goes a long way to providing an alternative” to violence and terrorism.¹³⁸

Support for this finding also comes from a study of terrorism in Latin America by Andreas Feldman and Maftu Peraelae. The authors analyze insurgency and terrorism in several states in the region and conclude, “The incidence of non-governmental terrorism shows a consistently negative and significant association with the human rights of the state. The deterioration of the state’s record is accompanied by an increase in non-governmental terrorist incidents one year later.”¹³⁹ States that protect political freedom and human rights are less likely to spawn terrorist movements and armed militancy.

Conclusion

A recurring trend runs through nearly all of the empirical studies on the democratic peace effect. Fully mature democratic states with high threshold scores on indicators of voice and accountability have the lowest risk of war and armed conflict. The characteristics of democracy that are most strongly associated with the absence of armed conflict and violent repression are political representativeness and inclusiveness. These are made possible by, and help to sustain, essential civil liberties and human rights.

Walter, Reynal-Querol, Joshi, Davenport, and other scholars come to similar conclusions on the irenic effect of inclusive and participatory forms of governance. Jeffrey Dixon confirms these findings in his synthesis of quantitative studies on the correlates of civil war. As democracies become more inclusive, their risk of armed conflict diminishes. Discriminatory policies increase the risk of civil war, while guarantees of political freedom reduce that risk.¹⁴⁰ The more participatory and open the political governance system the lower the chances of armed conflict and political violence. Peace is more likely when people are free to participate actively in choosing political decision makers and when diverse interests have effective political representation. Programs that foster citizen participation, inclusive institutions, accountability mechanisms, and greater public oversight bolster the conditions for peace.

The two parts of this paper examine state capacity and democracy separately, but the irenic features of these separate dimensions overlap and reinforce one another. Effective institutions prevent armed conflict when they provide security and civilian services, and when they are inclusive and representative. A narrow focus on one dimension of governance—for example building strong institutions while ignoring the need for democratic accountability—could be counterproductive. Effective capacity and democratic governance go hand in hand and need to be combined to create the greatest peace effect.

Social science research confirms that governments are better able to prevent armed conflict if they have strong institutions and maintain effective control over their territory, and if they provide the full range of public goods, including essential social services. The findings also highlight the importance of fostering governance systems with greater citizen participation and oversight, more inclusive and accountable forms of representation, and guarantees of political freedom and human rights. These and other policy approaches help to reduce the risk of armed conflict and are part of the process through which good governance promotes peace.

NOTES

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