

# Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?

## MULTIETHNICITY AND DOMESTIC CONFLICT DURING AND AFTER THE COLD WAR

TANJA ELLINGSEN

*Department of Political Science  
University of Oslo*

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This article investigates the relationship between multiethnicity and domestic conflict from 1946 to 1992. Multiethnicity is measured by the size of the largest ethnic group, the number of ethnic groups, the size of the largest ethnic minority group, and ethnic affinities to groups outside the country. Although ethnic heterogeneity is expected to stimulate conflict, other factors may alleviate ethnic tension. Moreover, most countries are heterogeneous in one way or another and yet do not engage in violent conflict. The type of political regime and the socioeconomic level within the country become important here. Using data for two different types of domestic conflict, the article concludes that multiethnicity does increase the propensity of domestic violence, although less so for large-scale conflicts. Such cultural factors seem to have become more important in the post-cold war period. However, the country's political regime and socioeconomic level are more important in predicting domestic conflict.

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### A RESURGENCE OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE?

During the better part of the cold war, most social scientists seemed to believe that modernization would lead to a decline in ethnic identities to be replaced by loyalties to larger communities (Gurr 1994, 347). The recent resurgence of conflicts based on ethnic claims has led to a renewed interest in ethnic conflict among scholars and policy makers. Despite the renewed interest in this topic, there is nothing new about such conflicts. A great deal is known about why ethnic conflicts begin and how they may end.

Because it is frequently asserted that most domestic conflicts today are of an ethnic character (Gurr 1994; Väyrynen 1994), this article focuses mainly on the problem of ethnicity. Starting from general theories of political violence, I will discuss why eth-

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nicity—that is, factors like shared history, beliefs, race, religion, language, or homeland—often makes conflict particularly pervasive and intractable. Nevertheless, political and economic factors also are included in the model with a view to contributing to the building of an explanatory general model of major intrastate violence.

Throughout the article, the concept “conflict” refers to “domestic conflict,” that is, a situation involving some degree of violence. I adopt the definition in Small and Singer (1982) of civil war as “a military conflict within a state where the national government is one of the active parties and where both parties in the conflict can and intend to struggle despite any costs” (p. 210). I also follow Wallensteen and Sollenberg (1999) in defining armed conflict as “a battle between incompatible interests over government and/or territory where armed force is being used, and where at least one of the parties involved represent the national government” (p. 605). Although Small and Singer set a threshold of 1,000 battle deaths during a single year, Wallensteen and Sollenberg distinguish between major armed conflict—the rough equivalent of Small and Singer’s civil war—and minor armed conflict, with a minimum of 25 annual battle deaths.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, both civil war and armed conflict will be referred to as domestic conflict. The analysis is based on data for all the countries in the period from 1946 to 1992.<sup>2</sup>

## POLITICAL CONFLICT AND THE PROBLEM OF ETHNICITY

Research on political violence has singled out three broad preconditions for a group to mobilize to violence: common identity, frustration, and opportunity.

### IDENTITY

For a group to mobilize, it first needs a common identity (Gurr 1994; Tilly 1978). Any individual identifies with something—be it gender, generation, organization, social class, ethnic group, or nation-state. Often, we identify with several such subgroups, depending on the context (Smith 1993). If the identity fails to coincide with territorial borders, as frequently happens, a conflict may arise within a nation-state. What makes the ethnic identity particularly conflict prone is that it is based on fundamental factors like language, history, ethnic group, or religion—factors that often seem more important than territorial boundaries and seldom match them perfectly. Events that threaten the identity will be met by some kind of resistance (Gurr 1994, 5).

1. Strictly speaking, Wallensteen and Sollenberg (1999) subdivide the majors into those conflicts that claim more than 1,000 battle deaths in a single year and those that have reached 1,000 battle deaths cumulated over several years. These distinctions are less important here because the large majority of their recorded conflicts are minor, and I have lumped all of their armed conflicts together in the empirical analysis.

2. The analysis is based on data from *Correlates of War* (Singer and Small 1994), Polity III (Jagers and Gurr 1995), the Uppsala University conflict project (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1999), as well as my own data on multiethnicity (Ellingsen 1995).

## FRUSTRATION

Aggression is a key term in theories of political violence and political conflict. The general hypothesis that all aggression is based on frustration (Dollard et al. 1939) has been applied to political conflict by Davies (1962), Feierabend and Feierabend (1972), and Gurr (1970), among others. According to Davies, relative deprivation occurs when expected need satisfaction increases linearly over time, whereas the actual need satisfaction levels off after some time. This leads to a growing gap between the expected and the actual, which causes frustration and mobilizes people to engage in conflict. Gurr also views relative deprivation as a subjective characteristic that occurs when a person does not receive what he thinks he has the right to receive. This leads to frustration that in turn motivates people to political protests and violence:

The basic relationship is as fundamental to understanding civil strife as the law of gravity is to atmospheric physics: relative deprivation . . . is a necessary precondition for civil strife of any kind. The greater the deprivation an individual perceives relative to his expectations, the greater his discontent, the more widespread and intense is discontent among members of a society, the more likely and severe is civil strife. (Gurr 1970, 596)

## OPPORTUNITY

Gurr (1970, 112) conceded, however, that affect, fear, or frustration alone are insufficient to create rebellion. Tilly (1978, 59-87) also argued that they were unnecessary. In a rational-actor model of political violence, Tilly argued that when organization, resources, and opportunity become available, people will mobilize for collective action, including rebellion, if they calculate that it is in their interest to do so. In *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Tilly (1978, 81) notes the importance of a perception of common identity for mobilizing for political violence. Tilly's earlier work focuses on the importance of revolutionary organizations and leaders. But even where extreme ideas, organizations, and conditions exist, violence breaks out only when an opportunity arises. Opportunity is a vague concept: it may come from a government provocation, government weakness, or an opposition organization's calculation of its own strength. Gurr (1993) and Tilly agree that for organized group action, the decision to take to arms is largely a rational one based on calculations of the balancing of interest and power.

Laitin (1992) and others have applied this approach to ethnic conflict. Other researchers have built research programs around testing the apparent competition between the rational-action and relative-deprivation paradigms (see, e.g., Muller and Weede 1990; Weede and Mueller 1998). In the early 1990s, attempts were made to reconcile these approaches. Gurr (1994, 123-24) explicitly combines them, producing a list of key causal factors in ethnic violence similar to the one generated by Horowitz (1990). First, there is an external affinity problem: one of the local groups is a minority in the broader region—although perhaps a majority within its own borders. The smaller group may come to fear that it will be demographically overwhelmed, losing its identity due to coercion and assimilation (Crighton and MacIver 1991). This issue only matters, however, when the ethnic categories at stake are highly salient (Gurr

1993) and therefore highly emotive and coupled with stereotyped images. Another condition is that both sides have experienced ethnic domination. Regardless of which group was previously dominant and which was being dominated, either group fears domination by the other. A fourth condition for ethnic conflict is that intraethnic politics becomes a competition in ethnic outbidding. These theories have found support in case studies of countries such as Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and Ghana (Crighton and MacIver 1991; Rothchild 1991).

The views of mobilization theorists are compatible with this perspective, although not identical. In a recent article, Tilly (1991), for instance, notes that threats to group identity and demands for the subordination of other groups (the first and the third conditions above) characterize ethnic secessionist and autonomist movements. Most of the extremely violent ethnic conflicts, such as the conflict in Bosnia, are in this category. As a result, ethnic violence—indeed any sort of political violence—results from a particular mix of fear, interest, underlying conditions, and misguided state politics. To fully understand why ethnicity seems to be particularly problematic in this sense, we shall therefore take a closer look at how these factors mutually reinforce one another in multiethnic societies.

## PEOPLE VERSUS STATE

UN resolution no. 1514 of 1947 proclaims the following:

1. A people has the right to political autonomy or to establish its own state.
2. A nation-state has the right to exclude other people from its territory.
3. A people without a state has the right to fight to get one and in some cases to break the law to do so.
4. Other states should assist the struggle and recognize the state that might be the outcome of the fighting.

Historically, ethnic groups (peoples), states, and nations have existed side by side, but from the 17th century on, the state system has been the dominant form of social organization. The territorial-political unity known as *la patrie* with roots in the French revolution of 1789 has competed with the German national romantic concept of *das Volk*, based on a common language, religion, culture, and history. Because only a minor number of countries in Europe or elsewhere are ethnically, religiously, or linguistically homogeneous, the *patrie* concept has been the dominant definition of a nation-state, whereas the *Volk* concept has been used to define ethnic groups.

According to Gurr and Harff (1994), conflicts between ethnic groups are partly explained by historical heritage. Africa's and Asia's liberation from the colonial powers in the 1960s resulted in many new states, but hardly a single one was ethnically homogeneous. The former colonial borders, based on the administrative and political interests of the colonial powers, were maintained. Thus, competing ethnic groups had to live side by side within a state, and, in some cases, ethnic groups were divided between states. Rather than obeying the "nation" and the territorial borders as the

political measure of a state, these groups are more interested in protecting and keeping their rights within existing states or even establishing their own state. The identity of these groups does not coincide with territorial borders. Multiethnic societies will therefore find it more difficult to define *demos*, or the people, than ethnically homogeneous states. This leads to legitimacy problems, which in turn may generate discontent and eventually domestic conflict as pointed out by Engene (1994, 54-59) in a study of European terrorism. I therefore expect to find that fragmented nation-states are more likely to experience domestic conflict than homogeneous states. Specific hypotheses relating to this expectation will be stated in the next section. This article investigates three different aspects of multiethnicity (or fragmentation) that may be expected to affect the likelihood of a country becoming involved in domestic conflict:

- The degree of fragmentation within a country:
  - a. The size of the largest linguistic, religious, and ethnic group within a country
  - b. The number of linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups
- The size of the largest minority within a country
- Ethnic affinities to other countries

#### THE DEGREE OF FRAGMENTATION

Only a few of the world's countries—Iceland is one—are linguistically, religiously, and ethnically homogeneous. However, not all countries are equally fragmented. If fragmented societies find it difficult to define "the people," one would expect the likelihood of domestic conflict to increase the more fragmented a society. The degree of fragmentation may be measured in various ways. My first measure is the commonly used size of the dominant group. If it is true that the more fragmented a society, the more difficult to define the people and thus the more likely domestic conflict is to occur, then logically the smaller the dominant group the more likely is domestic violence.

According to Auvinen (1997), a large and politically homogeneous group also can provoke domestic conflict if it excludes smaller groups from influence in society. Through monopolizing key positions within the government, the army, and so forth, the dominant group may create ethnic hostility. If power is concentrated in the hands of a single group, it will therefore probably lead to frustration and aggression in other groups. The minority and its leaders may have little choice but to use violence for self-defense and self-preservation. Following this line of argument, one would thus expect that the larger the dominant group, the greater the likelihood of domestic conflict.

These two statements cannot both be true at the same time. One way of dealing with this would be to treat the two as competing hypotheses.<sup>3</sup> Another possibility would be

3. Then, for the empirical part, use a continuous measure for the size of the dominant group; and finally, depending on whether the beta estimates were positive or negative, decide on which of the alternative hypotheses are to be kept.

to treat the two supplementary hypotheses. For a number of reasons, I have chosen the latter alternative.

First, there are highly fragmented societies (i.e., the United States, Switzerland) as well as relatively homogeneous societies (i.e., Norway, Iceland) that are at peace, internally as well as externally. Second, if the dominant group is close to 100%, one must assume that the small minority will be powerless and have no opportunity to rebel. Likewise, if the dominant group is too small, discrimination and exclusion of other groups within the society become more difficult and thus less likely. In the end, this also reduces the likelihood of domestic conflict. Together, one assumes that domestic conflict is most likely to occur in societies in which the dominant group is relatively large but not too large. The question then is what is “large but not too large”? I have chosen a threshold of 80% in line with Carment (1993). Thus, countries are considered homogeneous when the dominant group holds 80% or more of the total population.<sup>4</sup> My first hypothesis is the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Societies in which the size of the dominant group is less than 80% of the total population have a greater propensity for domestic conflict than societies in which the size of the dominant group equals or exceeds 80% of the total population.

Another way of measuring fragmentation is to look at the number of linguistic, religious, or ethnic groups within a society. It is likely to assume that if there are only a few groups, one of them is likely to be large and dominant. The presence of many groups often means that each group is small and, in turn, that no minority is large enough to mobilize to conflict. Following the same logic as above, I therefore expect that

*Hypothesis 2:* The number of linguistic, religious, or ethnic groups is related to domestic conflict in the form of an inverted U-curve; that is, conflict is higher with several groups than with few or many groups.

#### THE SIZE OF THE LARGEST MINORITY

Engene (1994, 59; 1998) argues that the use of violence is closely related to a group’s cultural identification and strength. This identification is strengthened by discrimination and through the feeling of membership. The larger the second-largest linguistic, religious, or ethnic group, the greater the cultural identification and strength or at least belief in one’s strength. As Tilly (1978) argues, the number of other participants affects one’s own participation. Theorists like Horowitz (1985, 347) and Jenkins and Kposowa (1992) also argue that the closer the size of the major ethnic groups, the greater the chance of domestic conflict or a coup d’etat. This can be interpreted as a rational choice in that both parties see the possibility to win a future conflict—that is, they have the opportunity. Thus,

4. Various thresholds were tried (95%, 90%, 85%, 75%), all giving approximately the same results.

*Hypothesis 3:* The larger the size of the largest minority, the more likely that domestic conflict will occur.

### ETHNIC AFFINITIES

The size of the minority within a country does not necessarily reflect its true size because many ethnic groups live within two or more nation-states. A minority within one country may be a majority within another. This, of course, affects the size of the minority and its identification (Carment 1993). Transnational affinities between the ethnic minority and ethnic groups in other countries play an important role as sources of material, ideological, and political support (Lake and Rothchild 1998). Such affinities have in some cases led to attempts to detach land and people from one state to incorporate them into another. In other cases, attempts to detach land and people divided from more than one state to incorporate them into a single new one have found place—such as in the case of a “Kurdistan” (Horowitz 1991, 10). The more bonds between the groups, the stronger the affiliation (Carment 1994). To define affiliation is nevertheless rather difficult because of different ways of defining ethnicity (Horowitz 1985). Race, religion, and language that represent a group within one country do not necessarily represent a group within another. Transnational affinities are thus easily exaggerated. Ethnic affinities notwithstanding, two groups do not necessarily have the same interests. Nevertheless, I expect to find that

*Hypothesis 4:* An ethnic minority with ethnic affinities to other countries will have a stronger identification and belief in itself and can more easily mobilize to domestic conflict than an ethnic minority without such ethnic affinities.

### DEMOCRACIES—CONFLICT OR NONVIOLENCE?

So far, I have concentrated on the identity element. I now move to the elements of frustration and opportunity. A common explanation of ethnic conflict is that when people compete for scarce resources, their ethnic identity becomes more important. If some ethnic groups seem to gain more advantages at the expense of others, the frustration as well as the ethnic identity increases, leading to ethnic mobilization and conflict (Gurr 1994). In-groups and out-groups are defined in an extended struggle for material and political benefits. If the distribution of such benefits follows ethnic lines, and if one of the ethnic groups is satisfied with the situation and another is not, the likelihood increases that the discriminated part will rebel. The stronger the discrimination, the more likely the group will organize against the source of discrimination. Discrimination is understood here as differences between the economic and political rights of the group members compared to other groups. In *Minorities at Risk*, Gurr (1994) shows that all the 233 ethnic groups that he studied experienced discrimination, either economically (147 groups), politically (168), or both. In the period from 1945 to 1989, more than 200 of these 233 groups organized politically to defend their interests

against the government or other ethnic groups. In at least 80 cases, the conflict escalated to civil war (p. 6). Gurr and Harff (1994) conclude that “when a group with a common ethnic identity is discriminated against, it is likely to be aggressive and hostile” (p. 83).

The distribution of political and economic rights depends largely on characteristics of the political regime.<sup>5</sup> A democratic regime will normally accord greater political and economic rights to the people and therefore reduce the likelihood of frustration. The more unequal the distribution of rights, the larger the frustration.

The type of political regime also may affect the opportunity to mobilize to conflict. Obviously, the more restrictive the regime, the greater the frustration but the less the opportunity. Based on this contradiction, theorists have taken three different directions: those who believe that democracies are more likely to be involved in civil conflict, those who believe that autocracies are more likely to get into conflict, and those who point to the special perils of in-between regimes.

#### DEMOCRACY AS A CHANNEL FOR CONFLICT

The theory of resource mobilization argues that the more democratic the regime, the more conflict it will experience. Openness in a political system encourages political activity of all kinds, and all of the activity will probably not be expressed through political institutions or in a peaceful manner (Auvinen 1997). Eckstein and Gurr (1975) also conclude that a certain degree of conflict is “a price democracies have to pay for freedom from regimentation, from the state or from authorities in other social units” (p. 452). The more democratic a regime, the more likely that various groups express political protest, nonviolent as well as violent.

Strongly authoritarian regimes under single-party domination, on the other hand, are able to impose their will on restive minorities so effectively that they can repress incipient ethnonational rebellions before they get started. Massive use of state violence—such as massacres, torture, and so forth—makes open rebellion less likely because the opposition is unable to organize (Gurr and Harff 1994, 85). Authoritarian states also can close their borders to keep outsiders away and prevent refugees from leaving. The practice or threat of genocide in such curtailed states restrains ethnonationalism—until the regime’s collapse suddenly releases it. Thus, according to Rupesinghe (1992), the democratic wave after the cold war may result in new conflicts because democracy permits the release of old conflicts that have been repressed previously by autocratic forces. Mearsheimer (1990) specifically predicted a higher level of domestic conflict in Europe after the end of the cold war and that the greater freedom of maneuver of states and subnational groups would awaken old conflicts. Similarly, Jowitt (1991) argues that the sudden demise of the Eastern camp and the consequent triumph of democracy will lead to a radical reshaping of all the previously fixed

5. See Jagers and Gurr (1995) for details concerning the relationship between type of political regime (that is institutional constraints) and political rights.

boundaries of international politics. One result of this might be an increasing number of ethnic conflicts and local wars.

### DEMOCRACY AS A METHOD OF NONVIOLENCE

Most theories on the relationship between democracy and political violence lean toward the opposite view, that democracies are less likely to experience political violence and conflict. Riggs (1994, 14) argues that because democracies use methods like cooperation and autonomy to handle ethnic conflict, they also are less likely to experience violence. Auvinen (1997) contends that although the existence of a democratic regime does not guarantee against conflict, democratic political institutions are more generally accepted. Consequently, discontent does not lead to serious challenges to the regime, and democracies are less prone to experience outright rebellion.

Although democracies accept dramatic forms of political participation like protests, strikes, and demonstrations, at the same time, they grant their citizens civil and political rights, making discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, language, or politics less likely. For this reason, the most drastic forms of political change are not required, and violence and domestic conflict are less likely. Rummel (1995) concludes that the best way to predict internal and external violence is to measure whether a regime is democratic or autocratic. Autocratic regimes will try to force people into a specific ideology, religion, or political system and thereby try to control the society. Opposition will be met with force. In democratic regimes, on the other hand, conflict will be solved through voting, negotiation, and compromise. Therefore, domestic conflict is less likely to occur, and "democracy is a general method of non-violence" (p. 26). Related propositions have been made by Carment (1993) and Carment and James (1995, 1996), who assert that the decision to intervene in ethnic conflict depends on the interaction between political constraints and ethnic composition within the country. This basically is derived from the fact that the elite usually makes such decisions. Thus, ethnically diverse countries with high institutional constraints have only a minimal interest in intervening in such conflicts, whereas countries with low institutional constraints and that are ethnically dominant have the most interest in intervening (also see Hardin 1995 and Heraclides 1990). Because democracies in general have more institutional constraints than autocracies, one would expect domestic conflict to occur less frequently.<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, Gurr (1994) and others argue that conflicts are more likely in autocracies, notably because discrimination in autocratic regimes provokes violence. Citizens in autocracies are more likely to experience injustice and deprivation and therefore also more likely to mobilize to conflict. Autocracies use violence against the population, and violence will be countered by violence.

6. Not all democracies have equally high institutional constraints. Presidential regimes, for instance, have fewer institutional constraints than parliamentary democracies. Results from Schjølset (1996, 1998) indicate that this has an affect on international war, and a preliminary study by Ellingsen and Schjølset (1999) points in the same direction for civil war.

### ARE SEMIDEMOCRACIES THE MOST VIOLENT PRONE?

Adding together these two theories, the relationship between democracy and domestic conflict assumes an inverted-U shape.<sup>7</sup> According to the rational-actor perspective of Muller and Weede (1990), if discrimination is high, rebellion is irrational because of high costs and little opportunity to succeed. If discrimination is low, peaceful negotiation will exceed the prospective gain from conflict. If discrimination is somewhere in between, domestic conflict may emerge as the preferred option.

The type of political regime seems primarily to affect what kind of conflict will arise. Autocracies suppress political protest but are more likely to get into violent conflict than democracies, whereas democracies avoid violent conflict but are much more likely to experience protest (Gurr and Lichbach 1979, 69). Because this study focuses on violent forms of internal conflict, I expect to find that

*Hypothesis 5:* Domestic conflict is less likely in democracies than in autocracies or semidemocracies. Domestic conflict is less likely in autocracies than in semidemocracies.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

A high level of economic development has been considered positive for the evolution of democracy (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Dahl 1971; Lipset 1959). Wealth is usually accompanied by a number of factors contributing to democracy, such as a higher level of literacy, urbanization, and growth of the mass media. Increasing wealth produces resources necessary to dampen the tension generated by political conflicts (Boswell and Dixon 1990, 554; Muller and Weede 1990, 152-59). Many empirical studies are based on the classic hypothesis of Lipset (1959): "The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chance that it will sustain democracy" (p. 75). Modernization works through education, occupational mobility, free flow of information, and organizational experience. Together, they encourage adaptability and stimulate competence, tolerance, and moderation. Increased access to material and thus political resources together with greater institutional diversity act as preconditions for a stable democracy.

However, economic development does not invariably lead to a higher level of democracy. Argentina had many years of authoritarian rule despite a relatively high level of per capita income; the same is true for Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore. O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) argue that authoritarianism, not democracy, is a more likely concomitant of a higher level of modernization. Their argument is based on the analysis of the modernization that took place in Latin America in the 1960s and early 1970s, which had very little to offer the large majority of the population. To avoid rebellion while pursuing economic development, the ruling elites

7. This relationship has been confirmed in Ellingsen (1997), Ellingsen and Gleditsch (1997), and Hegre et al. (1999).

needed an authoritarian system. In contrast, Feng (1997), based on a study of 96 countries for the period from 1960 to 1980, found that democracy leads to economic growth. Similarly, economic growth promotes democracy, but only if the growth has found place for quite a while. Short-term economic growth, on the other hand, results in no change of the political regime.

In this sense, there are at least two competing general hypotheses about the impact of socioeconomic development on political protest. The first posits a negative relationship between economic development and political violence (Lipset 1959). In support of this, in a study of political and economic development in 65 nations from 1800 to 1960, Flanagan and Fogelman (1970, 14) found that countries at a high level of economic development are less likely to experience domestic violence. Gurr and Duval (1973) and Weede (1981) as well as Helliwell (1994) and Auvinen (1997) later drew similar conclusions. Related to this is also the finding of Przeworski and Limongi (1997) that democracy is far more stable in affluent countries than in poorer ones. The alternative hypothesis suggests that political protest, as distinct from rebellion, does not tend to level off as a polity becomes more developed economically. Because the economically most developed countries are democracies and political protest is tolerated in democracies, economic development might have a positive impact on political protest (Gurr 1979; Londregan and Poole 1990, 1996). However, because my analysis is limited to the more serious forms of political violence, I expect to find that

*Hypothesis 6:* Domestic conflict is more frequent in countries with low socioeconomic development than in countries with high socioeconomic development.

This is both because I expect the average citizen to be better off economically in highly developed countries and therefore less frustrated and also because a developed country is more likely to be democratic and thus internally peaceful.

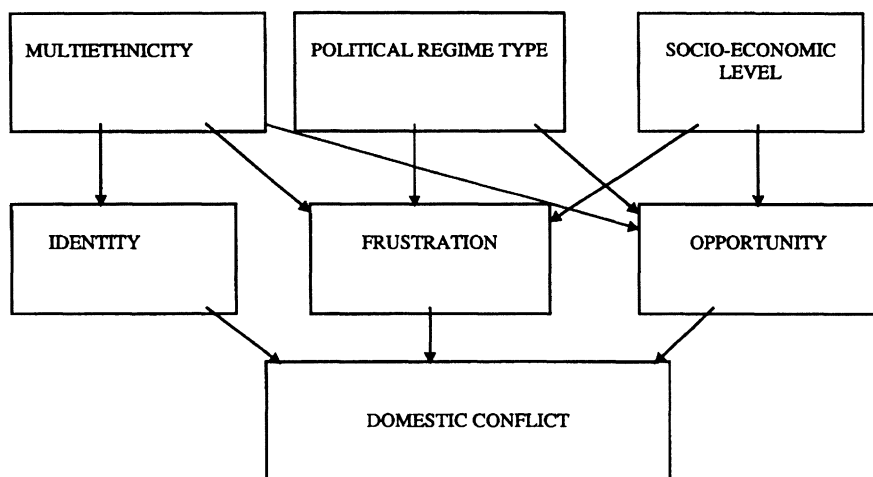
The different theories and hypotheses add up to the model specified in Figure 1. Whereas multiethnicity affects both the identity and frustration element as well as the opportunity element, the socioeconomic level and type of political regime affect the frustration and opportunity elements.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### DATA

I will test the hypotheses on two somewhat different forms of conflict: civil war and armed conflict.

Data on civil war were obtained from the Correlates of War data set, most recently updated to 1992 (Singer and Small 1994). Information about armed conflict is provided by Wallensteen and Sollenberg (1999) for the period from 1989 to 1992 with a threshold of annual deaths set as low as 25. Their definition of armed conflict is similar



**Figure 1: A Model of Domestic Conflict**

NOTE: Ideally, some of the variables in the model should have been measured at the subnational level as intergroup differences in socioeconomic level or political rights. However, such data are not well developed yet, and the variables used in this study are measured at the national level.

to Singer and Small's (1994). They differentiate between minor and major armed conflicts, but this distinction is not used here.

Based on the theoretical discussion above, the independent variables include the size of the dominant group, the number of groups, the size of the second-largest group, ethnic affinities, political regime, and socioeconomic level.

Data on type of political regime were taken from Polity III (Jagers and Gurr 1995). This data set includes indexes of institutionalized democracy and institutionalized autocracy, each with a score from 0 to 10. Following Gleditsch and Hegre (1997) and others, I have subtracted the score on the autocracy index from the score on the democracy index, obtaining a regime variable varying from 10 (*most democratic*) to -10 (*most autocratic*). I have split this scale into three groups: democracies (6 to 10), semidemocracies (-5 to 5), and autocracies (-10 to -5).

To measure the socioeconomic level, I used data on energy consumption per capita (in 1,000 coal equivalents) from the National Capabilities data set of Singer and Small (1993) that includes the period from 1946 to 1992.<sup>8</sup> The variable has been log transformed and varies between -6 (*low socioeconomic level*) to +3 (*high socioeconomic level*). This reduces the huge variations within the variable and gives a more intuitively sound interpretation of the coefficient. The beta coefficient is then the estimated effect of an increase in socioeconomic level—that is,  $e = 2.7$  times higher—and not of an

8. The data originally included the period from 1946 to 1985 but have been updated by Gissinger (1998).

increase of 1 unit higher. This makes sense, because a certain amount of increase for a country with extremely low energy consumption per capita is substantially more dramatic than the same amount of increase for a country with an already high energy consumption per capita. In other words, the difference between a country having an energy consumption per capita of 1,000 coal equivalents and one having an energy consumption per capita of 2,000 coal equivalents is more substantial than the difference between a country having an energy consumption per capita of 9,000 coal equivalents and one having an energy consumption per capita of 10,000 coal equivalents.

I have collected the data for the period from 1945 to 1994<sup>9</sup> on the size and name of the linguistic, religious, and ethnic dominant group; the number of linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups; the size and name of the linguistic, religious, and ethnic minority group; as well as ethnic affinities. The information was obtained from three reference books: *Handbook of the Nations*, *Britannica Book of the Year*, and *Demographic Yearbook*. These data have been interpolated, and a mean of data from these three books has been used in the analysis. A reliability test with another study (Jakobsen 1996a, 1996b) produced correlations from 0.78 (the size of the linguistic dominant group) to 0.95 (the size of the religious dominant group).

My analysis includes the period from 1946 to 1992<sup>10</sup> with the country year as the unit of analysis and the incidence of domestic conflict as my dependent variable. This raises problems of autocorrelation. A country that is in domestic conflict in a given year is intrinsically more likely to be in domestic conflict the next year too. To reduce the impact of this problem, I have included a variable for whether the country was in domestic conflict last year. An alternative approach would be to perform the analysis for the outbreak of domestic conflict, that is, to code the dependent variable as positive only for the first year of the conflict, following the pattern of Gleditsch and Hegre (1997) in the analysis of interstate war. An argument against using outbreak of domestic conflict as the dependent variable is that the years at peace are dependent in exactly the same way as years of domestic conflict. That is, a country that has no domestic conflict in a given year is more likely to have peace in the next year too than a country not at peace in the first year. To fully control for this, one would have to exclude all but the first year of a domestic conflict and the first year of the subsequent peace! By including a lagged variable, I correct for both dependencies at the same time. Another alternative is to use hazard models, as in Raknerud and Hegre (1997) and Hegre et al. (1999), or to use a generalized additive model as in Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998).

Findings from Jakobsen (1996a, 1996b) indicate that the tremendous increase in newly independent states after the end of the cold war may increase the number of domestic conflicts. To take account of this, I have included a variable measuring the stability of the political regime. A country was coded as stable in a given year if the political regime had been within the same category (democracy, autocracy, or semidemocracy) the past 10 years.

9. Similar data have been collected by the Correlates of War Project (Singer 1996) under the name Cultural Correlates of War (CCOW). I had planned to try to replicate my findings with this data set, but due to serious anomalies (resulting in ethnic groups adding up to more than 100%), I found it difficult to use.

10. The reason for limiting the analysis to the period from 1946 to 1992 is basically due to limits in the data availability.

## METHOD

A first analysis using bivariate and trivariate table analysis has been published elsewhere (Ellingsen 1997). Here, I will rely on regression analysis.<sup>11</sup> With a dichotomous dependent variable (such as domestic conflict), many of the assumptions of the linear regression model would be violated—the most serious consequence being that the linear regression model may yield predicted probabilities outside the 0-1 interval (see Aldrich and Nelson 1984). To avoid this problem, use a logistic regression model.

## ANALYSIS

The coefficients and standard errors of the various variables are shown in Table 1. Although the coefficients cannot be interpreted directly, they give a clear indication whether the effects are negative or positive—that is, whether the variables increase or decrease the risk of incidence of domestic conflict relative to the reference category. Information about exactly how much the variables increase or decrease the risk of incidence of domestic conflict can be obtained by calculating the odds ratios.<sup>12</sup>

Table 1 confirms that if the country experienced domestic conflict last year, the risk of experiencing domestic conflict the next year is substantially higher. In fact, a country that experienced domestic conflict last year is 128 times more likely to experience domestic conflict also this year than a country that did not experience domestic conflict last year. Moreover, an unstable country has a 1.5 times higher risk of incidence of domestic conflict than a stable country.

When it comes to societies in which the largest ethnic, religious, or linguistic group is less than 80% of the total population, the risk of incidence of domestic conflict is 1.3 times higher than that of societies in which the largest group equals or is higher than 80% (the reference category). This is in line with Hypothesis 1.

A similar pattern is found for the variable measuring number of ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups. Here, the reference category is countries with few groups (1-2), and, as the table indicates, both countries with several groups (3-4) and countries with many groups (5 or more)<sup>13</sup> have a higher risk for domestic conflict. In fact, countries with several groups have more than twice as high a risk (an odds ratio of 2.1) of incidence of domestic conflict than countries with few groups. It also seems as if countries with several groups have a higher risk of civil conflict than countries with many groups, in line with Hypothesis 2. The same pattern is found for the variables measuring the size of the second-largest ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. Countries with a medium-sized (5%-20%) second-largest have approximately twice as high a risk of domestic conflict than countries with a small (less than 5%) second-largest ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. When it comes to countries with a large (more than 20%) second-largest ethnic, religious, or linguistic group, the results are not significant at the .05

11. The results obtained in the table analysis were fully consistent with the ones obtained here.

12. The formula is  $\exp(\beta n)$ .

13. The coefficient for countries with many groups is not significant, however, and should be interpreted with caution.

TABLE 1  
Logit Estimates and Odds Ratios for Two Indicators of Domestic Conflict

Independent Variable	Reference Category	Incidence of Civil War, 1946-1992			Incidence of Armed Conflict, 1989-1992		
		Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Constant		-8.03*	3.95		-5.96*	2.52	
Domestic conflict last year	No conflict last year	4.85*	0.32	128.0	3.64*	0.77	38.0
Energy consumption per capita	—	-0.47*	0.10	85.0	-0.38*	0.14	33.0
Semidemocracy	Democracy	1.02*	0.37	2.8	1.28*	0.57	3.6
Autocracy	Democracy	0.41*	0.19	1.5	0.54*	0.16	1.7
Political instability	Stability	0.37*	0.13	1.5	0.55*	0.17	1.7
The dominant group less than 80%	Dominant group ≥ 80%	0.24*	0.11	1.3	0.45*	0.15	1.6
Several groups	Few groups	0.76*	0.33	2.1	1.19*	0.40	3.3
Many groups	Few groups	0.34*	0.16	1.4	0.63*	0.31	1.9
Medium-sized second-largest ethnic group	Small ethnic group	0.71*	0.24	2.0	1.11*	0.49	3.0
Large second-largest ethnic group	Small ethnic group	0.20	1.00	1.2	0.48	0.35	1.6
Medium-sized second-largest religious group	Small religious group	0.41*	0.10	1.5	0.64*	0.19	1.9
Large second-largest religious group	Small religious group	0.15	0.49	1.2	0.31	0.37	1.4
Medium-sized second-largest linguistic group	Small linguistic group	0.59*	0.18	1.8	0.66*	0.32	1.9
Large second-largest linguistic group	Small linguistic group	0.16	0.85	1.2	0.42	0.38	1.5
Ethnic affinities	No ethnic affinities	-0.34	0.70	0.7	-0.51	0.43	0.6

NOTE: Civil war 1946 to 1992:  $-2 \log$  likelihood = 797.852; model chi-square improvement = 457.423;  $*p < .05$ ;  $N = 1,766$ . Armed conflict 1989 to 1992:  $-2 \log$  likelihood = 67.142; model chi-square improvement = 36.829;  $*p < .05$ ;  $N = 199$ . The columns of odds ratios refer to the relative risk of the two indicators of domestic conflict obtained by adding one risk factor into the model relative to the risk of any of the two types of conflict when the risk factor is not present. For energy consumption per capita, the odds ratios refer to the risk of incidence of domestic conflict for countries with a low energy consumption ( $-3$ ) relative to that for one of countries with a high energy consumption ( $+3$ ). Several models were tested. The one presented here had the lowest log likelihood and therefore provides the best fit. No significant interactions were found. The fact that some of the cultural variables correlate with each other raises the issue of multicollinearity. A correlation matrix between the various cultural variables is thus presented below. As the matrix shows, some of the correlations are quite high. Nevertheless, adding or leaving one or several of them out of the model did not change the overall trends (neither the explanatory strength of the variables nor their standard error) presented here. The matrix is as follows: Correlation Between the Cultural Variables; Size of dominant group—number of groups = 0.45; Size of dominant group—size of ethnic minority = 0.51; Size of dominant group—size of religious minority = 0.58; Size of dominant group—size of linguistic minority = 0.63; Size of dominant group—ethnic affinities = 0.36; Number of groups—size of ethnic minority = 0.56; Number of groups—size of religious minority = 0.52; Number of groups—size of linguistic minority = 0.47; Number of groups—ethnic affinities = 0.29; Size of ethnic minority—size of religious minority = 0.65; Size of ethnic minority—size of linguistic minority = 0.69; Size of ethnic minority—ethnic affinities = 0.36; Size of religious minority—size of linguistic minority = 0.71; Size of religious minority—ethnic affinities = 0.21; Size of linguistic minority—ethnic affinities = 0.26

level. Thus, conclusions are hard to make, but it seems as if countries with a medium-sized ethnic, religious, or linguistic group also have a higher risk of incidence of domestic conflict than countries with a large (more than 20%) second-largest ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. Moreover, countries with a large second group still have a higher risk of domestic conflict than countries with a small second ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. In other words, it seems as if the relationship between the size of the largest minority and the incidence of domestic conflict takes the form of an inverted-U curve. This is not perfectly in line with Hypothesis 3.

The variable measuring type of political regime also has positive coefficients. The reference category is democracy. Both autocracies and semidemocracies have a higher probability of domestic conflict than democracies, but domestic conflict is especially prevalent in semidemocracies. Whereas the risk of incidence of domestic conflict is 1.5 times higher in autocracies (relative to the risk of domestic conflicts in democracies), it is 3 times higher in semidemocracies. This supports the argument by Muller and Weede (1990) that democratic regimes have other ways of resolving conflicts and autocracies suppress violent opposition, whereas in-between regimes are more prone to domestic conflict<sup>14</sup> (Hypothesis 5).

The negative coefficient for energy consumption per capita shows that the probability of domestic conflict decreases with an increase in energy consumption per capita. In fact, the risk of incidence of domestic conflict in a country with a low socioeconomic level is 85 times higher than that of a country with a high socioeconomic level. This is in line with my expectation (Hypothesis 6).

The variable measuring ethnic affinities<sup>15</sup> also turned out to be negative. This was not anticipated. Ethnic affinities to other countries do not seem to have any effect on the likelihood of domestic conflict and might, in fact, even have a negative effect. A possible explanation for this deviant finding is that ethnic affinities matter only in internationalized conflicts (which is the focus of Carment's work) and not in domestic conflicts. In other words, ethnic affinity may cause kindred countries to become participants in a conflict, but such affinities do not necessarily cause internal conflict within these themselves.<sup>16</sup> In either case, this coefficient is not significant, and a definite conclusion is difficult without further investigation.

Finally, all the coefficients point in the same direction whether the dependent variable is civil war or armed conflict, with a lower threshold in the post-cold war period. Most of the coefficients for post-cold war armed conflict are higher than for civil war. In particular, this is true for the cultural variables. Whether this is caused by these con-

14. Because type of political regime and level of political rights are strongly correlated (Jagers and Gurr 1995), I have here reported only the results for one of them. However, this finding is confirmed also in one of my coauthored works (Ellingsen and Gleditsch 1997), using not only Polity III but also Freedom House data. There seems to be an inverted-U curve relationship between domestic conflict and type of political regime as well as between domestic conflict and level of political and civil rights.

15. The variable ethnic affinities was coded as 1 (yes) if one of the ethnic groups (majority or minority) within a country also existed (as a majority or a minority) within another country. Otherwise, it was coded as 0 (no) (reference category).

16. Similar conclusions are made by Horowitz (1985, 210), claiming that external ethnic affinities are more likely to be perceived by out-group members than by in-group members.

TABLE 2  
Summary of the Hypotheses

	<i>Supported</i>	<i>Not Supported</i>
Hypothesis 1: Countries in which the size of the dominant group is less than 80% of total population are more prone to domestic conflict than countries in which the dominant group equals or is higher than 80% of total population.	X	
Hypothesis 2: The relationship between number of groups and domestic conflict takes the form of an inverted-U curve.	X	
Hypothesis 3: The larger the size of the minority, the higher risk of domestic conflict.		X
Hypothesis 4: A country in which the ethnic group has ethnic affinities to other countries has a greater risk of domestic conflict than a country in which the ethnic group does not have ethnic affinities.		X
Hypothesis 5: Democracies are less prone to domestic conflict than both autocracies and semidemocracies. Nevertheless, autocracies are less prone to domestic conflict than semidemocracies.	X	
Hypothesis 6: The lower the socioeconomic level, the higher risk of domestic conflict.	X	

NOTE: Table 1 revealed nearly an inverted-U curve relationship between the size of the largest minority and domestic conflict.

flicts being smaller or by these data covering only the post-cold war period is not obvious. A separate analysis in an earlier article (Ellingsen 1997) indicates that both of these factors are at work. Thus, my model in general and the cultural factors specifically seem to be more decisive in explaining domestic conflicts in the post-cold war period and, in particular, smaller conflicts. Regardless of the period or the size of the domestic conflicts, most of my hypotheses were supported (see Table 2).

## CONCLUSION

Since well before the end of the cold war, domestic conflict has increasingly become recognized as one of the most serious threats to peace and stability. Although the number of international wars has remained low throughout the period after World War II, the number of domestic conflicts has increased, reaching a peak in 1992 (Gleditsch 1996; Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1999). The vast majority of these conflicts have important implications for regional stability—not only in terms of possible diffusion and escalation of the conflict but also in terms of refugee problems, economic problems, and military problems (Brown 1996). To understand the causes and dynamics of such conflicts remains an urgent task.

Neither nationalism nor ethnic conflict disappeared entirely during the cold war, but they were, to a large extent, repressed by the bipolarity of the East-West confrontation and reinforced by superpower involvement and nuclear deterrence. Thus, to account for the pattern of domestic conflict during the cold war years, system variables

such as links to the major powers (and, of course, remaining colonial links) must be included. In the post-cold war period, factors such as regime type and ethnic fragmentation have gained new salience. In this sense, Mearsheimer (1990) is right in likening the end of the cold war to taking the lid off a pressure cooker—the pot will boil over. He is less likely to be correct in his overall pessimism, particularly as far as Europe is concerned. The recent decline in domestic conflict may indicate that the resurgence of old conflicts is of limited duration—as, indeed, is the phenomenon of a pot boiling over.

Multiethnicity (measured in any of four ways) has a quite strong and significant impact on domestic conflict. Except for the variables ethnic affinity and the size of the largest linguistic, religious, and ethnic minority, all the correlations were in the expected direction. The latter three variables revealed an inverted-U-shaped relationship to domestic conflict. Although this was not precisely what I anticipated, it still indicates that the size of the largest minority certainly affects the probability of domestic conflict. When looking at domestic conflicts in the post-cold war period and in particular for smaller conflicts, the impact of multiethnicity is even higher.

In theory, this problem could be tackled by reconstructing the state system so that territorial boundaries correspond with historical and ethnic boundaries. This is not a very realistic option, however. Nor would the results be very benign if the reconstruction were to lead to “ethnic cleansing” by force, as in Ethiopia, Moldova, or Bosnia.

A second and more realistic alternative is to improve the political and economic structures within multiethnic countries. As my analysis has shown, the type of political regime and the level of socioeconomic development seem to play a somewhat more important role than multiethnicity in determining domestic conflict, large or small. A democratic regime, and particularly an affluent democracy, is far less likely to experience domestic conflict than any other type of political regime. Thus, promoting democracy and economic growth may provide a long-term answer to the problem of ethnic conflict.

Developing a formula of global economic development is beyond the scope of this article. However, the international community should pay particular attention to the economic sources of conflict in troubled societies. Economic discrimination, income inequality, and scarce and unequal access to various resources are all factors that make people more receptive to ethnic and nationalistic appeals (Hauge and Ellingsen 1998).

When promoting democracy, the international community must keep in mind that autocratic regimes do not become democratic overnight. Transition from one type of political regime to another is a long, complicated, and often turbulent process (Jakobsen 1996a, 1996b). We face what O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) call “transitions from certain autocracies towards an uncertain ‘something else’ ” (p. 3). This “something else” may be characterized as semidemocracy. That these intermediate regimes are most prone to domestic conflict is alarming. Because many of them also are multiethnic and relatively poor, their circumstances may become quite explosive.

Furthermore, to recognize and strengthen minority protection within the existing state system, to allow minority groups equivalent political and economic rights, and to give them the right to cultural self-expression without fear of political or economic

repression goes beyond democracy in the simple sense of majority rule. Thus, whether the wave of democratization will lead to increased intrastate violence or to a more peaceful world depends not only on whether it leads to an increase in true democracy but also on what kind of democracy is being promoted (Ellingsen and Schjølset 1999).

Finally, power sharing by itself is not enough. It must also be in the political or ethnonational leaders' interest to share power. Thus, the international community must offer incentives to politicians to moderate their policies and give assurances to ethnic groups that they need not fear for their security. In the cases in which this strategy fails, conflicts and ultimately separation (as in the case of former Yugoslavia) seem hard to avoid. In these cases, however, the international community should be careful about choosing sides. External interventions should be considered as a last resort and only in cases in which they are well planned. Otherwise, we will end up as in Somalia—or, more recently, as in Kosovo.

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