Democratization, Ethnicity, and War

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Anthony David Milewski, Jr., photographer
DEMOCRATIZATION, ETHNICITY, AND WAR

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The democratic peace theory has received considerable attention in the international relations literature during recent years. Critics have tempered the initial enthusiasm for the democratic peace theory by demonstrating that the road to democracy is often a rocky and treacherous one. This research seeks to reproduce the work of two prominent authors in the democratization literature and then expand upon their research. Here, I investigate how the ethnic composition of a democratizing state affects that state’s likelihood of being involved in an internal war rather than an external war during the process of democratization. The statistical results indicate that ethnicity does indeed influence a democratizing state’s tendency to become embroiled in civil conflict rather than external conflict. A discussion of two case studies at the conclusion of the paper further illustrates my statistical conclusions.

The democratic peace theory stands at the center of an important debate in international relations. How does a state’s regime type influence whether that state will go to war with other nations? Given fairly narrow definitions of war and democracy, the democratic peace theory maintains that democracies do not fight among themselves (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 5). Although democracies are not necessarily less likely to go to war with non-democracies, historical evidence seems to indicate that war between democratic nations is rare if not nonexistent. As a result of this phenomenon, politicians and scholars alike often maintain that the spread of democracy should be a high national security priority in order to hasten the end of violent interstate conflict.

Special Thanks

I would like to thank Professors Ray Christensen, Scott Cooper, and Darren Hawkins for their comments and advice on my research and paper.
Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder seek to temper this enthusiasm with a reminder that "countries do not become mature democracies overnight" (1995, 5). The transition to democratic government can be lengthy and is often a rocky process fraught with political upheavals and violent clashes. Indeed, during the "transitional phase of democratization, countries become more aggressive and war-prone, not less, and they do fight wars with democratic states" (5).

Mansfield and Snyder maintain that democratizing states are more bellicose than mature democracies for several reasons. First, during the process of democratization, a greater number of groups participate in the political process and compete for political power (2002, 299). Second, competing groups vie for the support of the masses by appealing to nationalist sentiments without fully submitting to democratic accountability. Elites often justify excluding their opponents from democratic processes by labeling rivals as national enemies (289, 301). Third, in democratizing nations, public "pressures for [political] participation are strong but institutions for effective participation are weak" (1995, 23). Institutions that foster peaceful and effective political participation in mature democracies are only partially developed in the early stages of democratization and therefore cannot "effectively regulate ... mass political competition" (2002, 299). Fourth, old elites, who stand to lose the most from a transition to democracy, typically have strong connections to the military (1995, 26). Fifth, aspiring political leaders often employ nationalist appeals that exaggerate accounts of foreign threats in order to solidify domestic support. As a result, hard-pressed regimes may seek to increase domestic support by launching military campaigns abroad (2002, 299; 1995, 33). Finally, rival elites may cooperate and form incoherent ruling coalitions that are both unable to send clear signals of commitment to other states and that are particularly prone to internal political logrolling (2002, 302, 304; 1995, 32).

These conditions indicate that a period of democratization will likely be a particularly volatile time in a state's political history. Mansfield and Snyder employ statistical analyses to demonstrate that, as a result of these factors, democratizing nations are especially vulnerable to external conflict.

Two points of Mansfield and Snyder's argument offer a clear explanation of why democratization causes external wars. First, elites who launch military ventures abroad in hopes of improving their standing at home provoke external enemies and plunge democratizing states into war. Second, when rival elites accommodate each other through political logrolling strategies, they create coalitions that pursue incompatible interests and inconsistent foreign policies. Clashes with other states occur when these coalitions become "overcommitted, provoking too many enemies at the same time" (1995, 32).

Other aspects of their argument, particularly that democratization increases the number of groups competing for political power and that the mechanisms of political participation in democratizing states are weak, seem to indicate that democratization could also lead to intrastate conflict. Moreover,
historical experience demonstrates that civil war often stains states’ transitions to democracy.

Although Mansfield and Snyder control for the effects of civil wars in their statistical analysis (2002), they fail to investigate the connection between democratization and internal warfare that is implied in their theoretical argument. This omission sets the stage for an interesting question: Under what conditions would a democratizing nation engage in civil warfare rather than external warfare?

In this project, I seek to replicate and expand upon Mansfield and Snyder’s research effort. In addition to investigating the relationship between democratization and interstate conflict, I also seek to understand what factors precipitate democratizing states’ entry into civil wars. I examine the relationship between the ethnic composition of a state’s population and the likelihood that that state will engage in civil war rather than external war during a period of democratization.

My statistical results demonstrate that the interaction between ethnic heterogeneity and democratizing regime changes is an important factor in the outbreak of civil war. Indeed, when ethnicity is included in the analysis, this interaction is a more significant predictor of civil war in democratizing nations than regime change alone. Mansfield and Snyder present strong statistical support for their explanation of why external war accompanies states’ transitions to democracy. However, their model fails to provide such a robust explanation of civil war. My analysis incorporates ethnicity into Mansfield and Snyder’s research design in a way that both enhances its predictive power and extends its explanatory reach. The results that follow, therefore, offer an interesting addition to Mansfield and Snyder’s research effort.

Two case studies at the conclusion of this paper offer a detailed description of the theoretical reasoning that undergirds my argument. They present a nuanced illustration of the factors that cause rival groups to mobilize. Tracing the historical processes involved in each case supplies a vivid account of how ethnic composition can influence a democratizing nation’s entrance into civil or external war.

Theoretical Framework, Research Expectations, and Definitions

Several scholars concur with Mansfield and Snyder’s assessment of the inherent dangers that attend the process of democratization. For example, Michael Ward and Kristian Gleditsch note that “a smooth transition from low to high levels of democratic governance is the exception, not the rule,” because democratic norms and institutions typically require time to become established enough to inhibit conflict (1998, 53). Errol Henderson also acknowledges the risks associated with democratization. He notes that “since 1945 most wars have taken place within rather than between states,” and that most of these civil wars have occurred in postcolonial areas of the world. Henderson maintains that the former colonies of the imperial powers are especially susceptible to civil
war due to their "institutional underdevelopment...as well as the failure of postindependence political leadership to effectively integrate their societies into cohesive national entities" (2002, 103). Weak political institutions in these democratizing countries do not provide effective mechanisms for the nonviolent resolution of domestic conflicts, nor do they ensure that popular constraints will make political leaders responsive to dissidents' demands. As a result, such countries are ill-prepared to prevent domestic insurgencies (105-6).

It appears that Mansfield and Snyder anticipated this theoretical link between states' transitions to democracy and internal conflict. Although they contend that institutional weaknesses, intense political competition, and power fragmentation and decentralization make democratizing states likely to engage in war with other states, their argument also offers an implicit explanation of why democratization might cause a state to engage in civil war. Mansfield and Snyder make a persuasive case that competing elites exploit the political environment in democratizing states, an environment that indeed might make a state prone to civil war, in ways that ultimately turn a country towards war with other nations. However, it is clear from the theoretical argument that the unique characteristics of democratizing politics could push a state toward civil war just as they might push it toward international war.

Several schools of thought seek to explain why states become embroiled in internal conflicts. One promising approach highlights the importance of ethnic divisions within a state's population. The extensiveness of the scholarship on ethnic conflict suggests that ethnicity often plays a significant role in violent clashes both within and between states. I will discuss the principal theoretical arguments in the ethnic conflict literature in conjunction with my case studies in a subsequent section. Here, I merely offer a brief justification for incorporating a state's ethnic composition into my analysis of when and why democratizing nations become embroiled in civil war.

I expect that democratizing states will fight internally rather than externally when significant lines of tension already exist in the national population. Internal ethnic divisions promise to be the greatest cause of civil conflict during democratization because ethnic cleavages aggravate the political difficulties that states face on the road to democracy. Ethnicity is an intrinsic part of individual identity, and as a result, group rivalries based on ethnic differences present a fundamental threat to state loyalties. In democratizing nations, competing elites resort to ethno-nationalist appeals to amass popular support and mobilize the public in politically advantageous ways. Mansfield and Snyder briefly note in their article that during democratization, divisive nationalism is particularly problematic in ethnically stratified states because it exacerbates the weakness and decentralization of democratizing political institutions (2002, 301). Ethnic rivalries often spill into violent conflict because immature democratic institutions are too weak to permit opposing groups to resolve their differences peacefully.
Thus, I expect the institutional and political weakness of democratizing regimes to be a necessary condition for internal violent conflict, and I expect ethnic cleavages to be a sufficient condition to ignite such conflict. Ethnic divisions alone do not necessarily predispose a nation to internal strife. Rather, in combination, the difficulties of democratization and ethnic fault lines put a state at significant risk for civil war.

On the other hand, I expect ethnically homogenous states to be drawn into external conflict much as Mansfield and Snyder postulate. Competing groups will mobilize the masses by appealing to nationalist sentiments, and political logrolling, compromise, and military expeditions abroad will propel these nations into war with other countries. Because the internal divisions in ethnically homogenous countries do not challenge basic state loyalties in the fundamental way that ethnic rivalries do, the frictions particular to democratization are not likely to cause violent ruptures along internal lines in ethnically uniform states.

Two main hypotheses follow from the foregoing argument:

**Hypothesis 1**: If a democratizing state has an ethnically heterogeneous population, then that state will be more prone to internal conflict than external conflict during a period of democratization.

**Hypothesis 2**: If a democratizing state has an ethnically homogenous population, then that state will be more prone to external conflict than internal conflict during a period of democratization.

I rely on Mansfield and Snyder’s dataset from their article “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War” to determine regime type and regime transitions in a given year; they in turn draw their data from Jagger and Gurr’s Polity III dataset, a source widely used in the democratization literature.

Taylor and Hudson provide my measure of ethnic fractionalization in their *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators II*. They report ethnic fractionalization as an index measure calculated from ethnic and linguistic characteristics of 136 countries from approximately 1960 to 1965. This dataset lists only one value of ethnic fractionalization for each country. Consequently, it is clear that there are significant limitations to this measure of states’ ethnic fractionalization.

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1 In this project I employ the dataset that Mansfield and Snyder generated for their article “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War” that appeared in *International Organization* in spring 2002.

2 Their dataset includes an index of ethnic fractionalization (Ethfrac) that accounts for cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences between ethnic groups in 136 countries according to the following formula:

\[ F = 1 - \sum (n_i/N)(n_i-1/N-1) \]

Where \( n_i \) = number of people in the \( i^{th} \) group and \( N \) = total population.
diversity. Although I do not expect a nation’s ethnic composition to vary excessively over time, it is reasonable to anticipate some changes due to population shifts, war, acculturation, etc. In addition, it appears that Taylor and Hudson make little distinction between countries that have a few large ethnic groups and those that have a plethora of small ethnic groups. Despite these weaknesses, this appears to be the best measure available, and it ultimately yields some interesting statistical results.

**Research Design and Statistical Tests**

In this project, I seek to replicate and expand upon Mansfield and Snyder’s research effort. In addition to investigating the relationship between democratization and interstate conflict, I also seek to determine whether ethnicity affects democratizing states’ entry into civil war rather than external war. Therefore, my design differs from Mansfield and Snyder in a few important ways.

I begin by employing Mansfield and Snyder’s dataset from their recent research effort and then add seven new variables to this dataset to include ethnic fractionalization in the statistical analysis. The first variable, ethnic fractionalization, or ethfrac, is an index measure reporting one value for each of the 136 countries included in the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*. The next five variables represent interactions between ethnic fractionalization and each of Mansfield and Snyder’s regime change variables. Finally, I include a variable for all civil wars in year $t$ (in contrast to Mansfield and Snyder’s civil war control variable that reports all civil wars in year $t-1$).

Because civil war and external war are both dichotomous, I use binary logistic regression to assess the relationships between my variables. I calculate this regression analysis several different ways. First, I replicate Mansfield and Snyder’s regression using the composite index of regime type that they generated in their dataset. Next, I insert civil war as the dependent variable in Mansfield and Snyder’s regression using the composite index of regime type that they generated in their dataset. Next, I insert civil war as the dependent variable in Mansfield and Snyder’s model to assess the model’s usefulness in explaining internal...
rather than external wars (see Tables 1a and 1b). Third, I alter the civil war regression to include ethnic fractionalization and the five ethnic fractionalization interaction terms as independent variables (see Tables 2a and 2b). Finally, I run a series of robustness checks on the civil war regression that includes the ethnic fractionalization variables.

Results and Analysis

Although I employ a slightly less-sophisticated regression than Mansfield and Snyder, I replicate their model for external wars with remarkably little deviation. This is much as I would expect as I use their dataset and definitions. As Mansfield and Snyder contend, these results strongly support their argument about the dangers of democratization and external war.

In the second regression (Tables 1a and 1b), however, their model performs less-brilliantly as a predictor of civil war. The results of this regression are considerably weaker than Mansfield and Snyder’s analysis of external war. Moreover, complete democratic transition replaces incomplete democratic transition as the statistically significant regime change variable. Therefore, these results are a noteworthy departure from Mansfield and Snyder’s findings.

Table 1a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil wars in time t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Civil wars in time t</td>
<td>8805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Percentage</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The cut value is .500

\* Incomplete democratic transition, the interaction between incomplete democratic transition and domestic concentration of authority in central government, major power status, and concentration of capabilities are statistically significant in my work just as they are in Mansfield and Snyder’s.

\* The Nagelkerke R square value decreases from 0.125 to 0.045 when civil war replaces external war as the dependent variable.
Table 1b

Logistic Regression for Civil War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPDTRS</td>
<td>2.889</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>18.698</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>17.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCDTRS</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPATRS</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>1.047</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>1.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCATRS</td>
<td>-4.780</td>
<td>16.259</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMCON</td>
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<td>.032</td>
<td>15.275</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDTRSDC</td>
<td>-.460</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>8.079</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCDTRDC</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1.139</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>1.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATRSDC</td>
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<td>.162</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCAP</td>
<td>6.926</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>46.637</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1018.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCATRDC</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>3.211</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>1.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.900</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>146.354</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Following Mansfield and Snyder, this model is calculated after including a natural spline function with three knots. For Bold values p ≤ .01.

It is interesting that Mansfield and Snyder focus on the direction of a regime change rather than its scope to explain why democratizing nations enter external wars. It would be interesting to investigate why complete democratic transitions replace incomplete democratic transitions when civil war replaces external war as the dependent variable. This is an aspect of their argument that Mansfield and Snyder do not develop, suggesting an area for further research.

Table 2a

Classification Table for Civil War (Including Ethnic Fractionalization Variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Civil wars in time t</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Civil wars in time t</td>
<td>7795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. The cut value is .500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 SIGMA
Despite the significant limitations of my ethnic fractionalization variables, they still lead to some interesting results when I include them in my analysis. Table 2b demonstrates that the ethnic composition of a democratizing nation’s population is an important factor in the outbreak of civil war. When ethnic fractionalization is included in the regression, each of Mansfield and Snyder’s regime change variables becomes insignificant. The interaction between ethnic fractionalization and complete democratic transition, and, to a lesser degree, the interaction between ethnic fractionalization and incomplete democratic transition turn out to be better predictors of civil war than democratizing regime changes alone. Moreover, these results persist when subjected to several robustness checks.

These findings provide substantial support for my contention that the interaction between ethnic fractionalization and democratization pushes states toward civil war. Importantly, ethnic fractionalization by itself is not a significant predictor of civil war. As I expect, these results show that ethnic...

Notes: Following Mansfield and Snyder, this model is calculated after including a natural spline function with three knots. For **Bold** values p ≤ .01, for *italicized* values p ≤ .10.

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**Table 2b**

Logistic Regression for Civil War (Including Ethnic Fractionalization Variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.996</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>2.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCDSLTS</td>
<td>-.778</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>.604</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.437</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPSATRS</td>
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<td>1.292</td>
<td>1.467</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCATRS</td>
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<td>19.624</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMCON</td>
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<td>.033</td>
<td>11.890</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDTRSDC</td>
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<td>.191</td>
<td>1.816</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCDDTRDC</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>1.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATRSDC</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.536</td>
<td>1.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCATRDC</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>3.758</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>1.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCAP</td>
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<td>1.076</td>
<td>17.914</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>94.963</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXCD</td>
<td>3.205</td>
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<td>9.503</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>24.654</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXINCD</td>
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<td>.864</td>
<td>2.942</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>4.400</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXCA</td>
<td>2.432</td>
<td>.929</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>11.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXINCA</td>
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<td>22.924</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHFRAC</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>1.236</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>1.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.491</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>100.779</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primarily as a result of the weaknesses of Taylor and Hudson’s measure.

My results are robust (1) when ethnic fractionalization (ethfrac) is excluded from the analysis, (2) when major power status and ethnic fractionalization are included, and (3) when ethnic fractionalization is excluded and major power status is included.
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heterogeneity exacerbates the institutional and political difficulties that democratizing countries face and make it more likely that these nations will experience internal war.

How Ethnicity Leads a Democratizing State to Civil War

Statistical analyses often paint only a rough sketch of the actual mechanisms that shape political outcomes. Accordingly, I turn my attention to a theoretical discussion of the causes of intrastate ethnic conflict. The ethnic conflict literature typically employs arguments from two principal perspectives, the "primordialist" approach and the "mobilizationist" approach, to explain violent inter-group conflict.

The primordialist perspective views ethnicity as a stable 'given' that does not depend on time or social context (Mousseau 2001, 548-9). As one scholar summarized, "Primordialists explain strong ethnic attachments with psychological or biological factors that . . . have primary significance in the formation of a sense of belonging, in-group identity, and solidarity among the members of an ethnic group" (549). According to this standpoint, 'primordial qualities,' such as "attachments to kin, territory, and religion," define group members' identity and self-esteem (McKay 1982, 396). Because man is "a leopard who cannot change his ethnic spots," ethnic conflict results from inevitable clashes over intrinsic group differences (398).

The primordialist perspective accounts well for the emotional strength of centuries-old ethnic attachments. However, its exaggerated focus on the intrinsic, unalterable qualities of ethnicity renders primordialism weak in explanatory power. The primordialist perception of static ethnic identities does not reflect the dynamic influences, such as political or economic context, that shape group loyalties nor does it explain why or when group loyalties change (McKay 1982, 397-399). Moreover, although primordialist arguments might explain why ethnically heterogeneous nations become entangled in civil wars during a period of democratization, they do not clearly explain how ethnicity leads to this internal strife.

On the other hand, mobilizationists offer a more compelling analysis of ethnically-motivated conflict. According to this perspective, ethnicity is often a tool for group mobilization during times of political transition (Cordell 1999, 5) because people with shared descent, cultural characteristics, and history are likely to "define their interests in ethnocultural terms [, making it] easier . . . for leaders to mobilize them for collective action" (Gurr 2000, 66). Conflict results when leaders mobilize competing groups along ethnic lines in order to secure access to material, social, and political resources by force (McKay 1982, 399).

David Lake and Donald Rothchild present a persuasive mobilizationist argument that cites collective fears and insecurity as the cause of ethnic conflict (1996). In the context of a weak state, such as during democratization, faction leaders mobilize the populace along ethnic lines because "ethnic identities are almost always the most effective organizing principle . . . [and as a result,] politics
usually take the form of a struggle to secure group interests” (Carroll and Carroll 2000, 121). During the unpredictable period of democratization, states are unable to arbitrate between ethnic rivals or to offer these groups credible assurances of protection. Collective fears that their physical or cultural survival is threatened cause ethnic groups to cooperate less and compete more rigorously. Ethnic violence erupts when rival factions face three strategic dilemmas: information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma (Lake and Rothchild 1996, 43-4).

**Case Selection**

If Lake and Rothchild’s argument is correct, we should see competing ethnics in democratizing states struggle with information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma. Collective fears for group survival should induce ethnic rivals to cooperate less and ultimately engage in violent conflict. Russia’s difficulties in Chechnya present a vivid application of Lake and Rothchild’s argument. This case clearly depicts the internal struggles common to ethnically diverse countries as they move toward democratic government. On the other hand, Japan under the ‘Taisho Democracy’ is a good example of an ethnically homogenous state that engaged in external warfare during its period of democratization. Here, Mansfield and Snyder’s theoretical argument provides the best explanation of why Japan’s early liberalization concluded in a violent incursion into Manchuria. An examination of these two cases casts greater light on the different facets of my theoretical argument and carefully details how democratization and ethnic heterogeneity can lead to civil war.

**Japan: Democratization and External War**

Most political historians agree that the period following World War I and preceding the 1930s was a remarkable time in Japanese history. It was a time of considerable economic reform and institutional liberalization. The Taisho Democracy marked Japan’s early experience with democratic values and mass politics. However, Japan’s progress toward mature democracy was interrupted by the multiple shocks of the depression and growing military activism. By the mid-1930s, Japan's fledgling democracy had entirely collapsed, and the imperialistic, military rule that would haunt the Pacific during World War II solidified its power. These brief years of Japanese democratization clearly illustrate how an ethnically homogenous nation’s experiment with democracy ended in external warfare.

The roots of Japanese liberalism reach back to Japan’s nineteenth-century revolution. As a central feature of that revolution, the Meiji oligarchs created a constitutional order in 1890 and promoted the industrialization and capitalization of Japan’s economy (Gordon 1991, 14-5). Their emperor-centered constitutional order, which lasted from 1890 to 1945, set the stage for new institutions and new types of political activity. The industrial growth Japan experienced during WWI also initiated important changes in Japan's political and social composition. Japan's industrial expansion “led to a concentration of
the population in urban areas, creating not only a large number of factory workers, but also [a] new middle class: civil servants, white collar workers, [and] professional people” (Silberman and Harootunian 1974, 219). This population concentration contributed to the creation of an urban mass society. In addition, relatively high levels of education and a quickly developing system of communication media heralded the dawn of an era of mass politics (229).

Most of the leaders and participants in the democratic movement that flowered around the turn of the century were “men of means and education . . . landlords, capitalists, and an emerging class of urban professionals, in particular journalists and lawyers” (Gordon 1991, 16). In contrast to the former ruling structure of a narrow class of bureaucrats and military officers, the imperial democracy eventually incorporated a much broader elite, granting the middle class expanded influence under the new system (126). The formation of the Seiyukai party in 1918 marked an important transition in the democratic movement. This event signaled the end of imperial democracy as a movement and the beginning of the Taisho Democracy as a structure of rule (14).

Although “universal manhood suffrage was adopted in 1925” (Gordon 1991, 2), in reality relatively few Japanese citizens could participate in the political process. During Japan’s period of democratization, methods for effective political participation were remarkably weak. Political party membership was extremely limited and the parties themselves enjoyed only circumscribed authority (Silberman and Harootunian 1974, 229). The urban masses were excluded from political participation altogether, and with no peaceful alternative, the poor often resorted to revolt and rioting as a way to influence policy makers. Such was the case in the 1918 “Rice Riots,” when the masses responded violently to an increase in the price of rice (230).

The democratic reforms of early twentieth-century Japan were certainly felt across the Japanese political spectrum, but one organization was left largely untouched by the pressures of democratization: Japan’s military. The armed forces had a great deal of independence from the new democratic structures and could appeal directly to the emperor without so much as consulting the rest of the administration (Silberman and Harootunian 1974, 225). Early military ventures onto the Asian mainland drew criticism from democratic liberals, despite pressure from military elites (221). Japan’s armed intervention in Siberia from 1919 to 1922 and its incursion into the Shantung Peninsula from 1927 to 1928 foreshadowed the virulent militarism that would emerge only a few years later.

During the 1930s, military officers and elements of the extreme right sought to topple the imperial democracy through repeated coups d’état. Although each coup attempt failed, the military did succeed in intimidating the established institutions. The largest of the coup attempts “occurred on February 25, 1936, when young extremist officers, commanding some 1,400 soldiers, assassinated several cabinet ministers, occupied the governmental quarter of
Tokyo, and demanded a military government presided over by the emperor” (Silberman and Harootunian 1974, 233). The military’s repeated coup attempts sufficiently frightened civil and bureaucratic leaders into adjusting government policy to more fully accommodate the military’s demands. As a result, policy making generally shifted in the direction the military desired: toward a military garrison state (233). With greater political influence, the military found it no hard task to subsequently mobilize public sentiment in favor of its fifteen-year campaign into Manchuria. The Japanese public was “easily manipulated” by being offered the exciting illusion of participating in a great imperial power (231). The external conflicts that followed, especially WWII, destroyed Japan’s emerging democratic institutions and the painstaking work of previous decades.

Japan’s rocky experience with democratization provides an excellent example of how conflict is likely to result during the difficult period of regime change. The Japanese experience parallels my expectation for a democratizing state with an ethnically homogenous population in several ways. First, the constitutional order imposed by the Meiji oligarchs widened the political spectrum and new groups emerged as political players. Second, emerging democratic institutions, especially political parties, could not accommodate all demands for political participation. Urban masses were largely excluded from the political process. Third, the ruling class that the new democratic system supplanted had strong ties to the military. Indeed, the old elites were Japanese generals and admirals, all former samurai warriors (Gordon 1991, 126). Fourth, appeals to the masses were centered on imperialistic ideals and Japanese nationalism. Elites exploited popular support for honoring the nation and the emperor and for pursuing hegemony in Asia (52). External war was the specific result of compromises between the primary rival factions in the Japanese government: the emerging democratic bureaucracy and the military elite. The democratic bureaucracy sought to accommodate military demands and avert future coups d’état by moving policy decisions in a direction that the military favored. These conciliatory actions merely facilitated the military’s imperialistic ventures abroad and eventually thrust Japan into external war in Manchuria.

**Chechnya: Russia’s Democratization and Internal War**

The bloody conflict in Chechnya vividly illustrates the internal violence that often accompanies an ethnically diverse state’s transition to democracy. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia’s physical and political composition has changed dramatically. Today Russia encompasses only a fraction of the territory once united under the USSR. Ethnic nationalists in Chechnya would reduce this territory still further. These disaffected Chechens seek self-determination and the freedom to create an independent Chechen state. The Russian government vigorously opposes such secessionist demands and has matched every Chechen action with a brutal military response of its own.
Ethnically, the Chechens are a non-Slavic people that have lived in Chechnya for thousands of years. They have a unique language that is distinct from the surrounding Slavic and Turkish dialects. Chechen social structure is distinctly clan-oriented and this kinship-based society is reinforced by a "very deep sense of economic community, and an instinctive will to fight 'infidels' inspired by Islamic culture" (Arquilla and Karasik 1999, 209-10). In sum, Chechen culture, traditions, and religions share little with Russian society (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1995, 9).

According to 1989 USSR Census data, Chechnya had quite a diverse ethnic population under Soviet rule. About 58 percent of the populace was Chechen, 23 percent was Russian, and 19 percent represented other minorities (Aklaev 1999, 228, 126). The collapse of communism unleashed ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus region, and on October 27, 1990, Chechnya unilaterally declared its independence. Two years later, Chechnya refused to be a cosigner when the Russian Federation was formed on March 31, 1992 (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1995, 10). Since that time, Russia has treated Chechnya as an autonomous republic, albeit a rebellious one, not an independent nation and therefore refuses to extend independent status. The Russian perception that most angers Chechens is that Russia constitutes "first and foremost ethnic Russians, and . . . the territory of ethnic autonomies inside the Russian Federation [can] be claimed as Russian, but their inhabitants [are not] considered Russian citizens" (Tishkov 1997, 428).

The first Chechen war erupted in 1994 and dragged on for two violent years. By some estimates, more than three hundred thousand individuals, mostly civilians, lost their lives in the conflict (Banerjee 1999, A10). In August 1996, Chechen forces launched a surprise offensive on the Russian troops holding Grozny, the capital city. Russian tanks and heavy artillery, ill-suited for an urban battlefield, were soon overwhelmed by small bands of Chechen guerrillas. The war came to a halt when President Yeltsin sent Alexander Lebed to negotiate a cease-fire agreement with the Chechens in October 1996 (Arquilla and Karasik 1999, 211-3).

The Treaty on Peace and Principles of Relations, signed May 12, 1997, held great symbolic meaning for Chechnya. Apart from the treaty's grandiose claims to peace and an end to ancient rivalries, Chechens saw the cease-fire agreement as an implicit recognition of Chechnya's independent statehood (Tishkov 1997, 431). For Russia, however, the treaty merely reaffirmed the Federation's "respect for its negotiating partners, confirming their rights, status, and privileges within the limits of a larger state structure" (431). The text of the treaty, only four short sentences, could be interpreted to conform to the agenda and prejudices of either side.

A central aspect of the cease-fire agreement was that both parties agreed to "forever repudiate the use and the threat to use military force to resolve whatever disputes may arise" (Tishkov 1997, 432). This provision was quickly
forgotten, however, when violence again broke out in October of 1999. On October 4, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Russian troops had crossed into Chechnya, expanding airstrikes on Grozny to the threat of a full-scale land assault. This decisive military action came as a response to Chechen incursions into Dagestan and accusations that Chechen rebels were responsible for a string of terrorist bombings killing more than three hundred people in Moscow and other Russian cities (Whalen 1999, A30).

Russia's protracted civil war produced as many as three hundred thousand refugees and obliterated the Chechen capital of Grozny, once home to four hundred thousand people (Wines 2000, sec.4 p.1; Anonymous 2000, A26). This bloody conflict illustrates the dangers of ethnic violence during a state's transition to democratic rule in several important ways. Primarily, it is evident that both the Russians and the Chechens were motivated by collective fears about the future. Chechnya wanted to safeguard its ethnic identity and secure its nation's interests through self-determination and political independence. Russia, on the other hand, was concerned about losing influence and access to resources. Specifically, the Russians feared that granting Chechen independence would initiate a destabilizing cascade of secessionist demands throughout the Russian Federation (Arquilla and Karasik 1999, 209). The effects of these collective fears have been compounded by three strategic dilemmas. First, both sides have had significant incentives to misrepresent information about their capabilities and their intentions. Indeed, both parties have engaged extensively in information warfare. For example, during the 1994–1996 conflict, Chechen rebels used radio-jamming systems to interrupt Russian mass media broadcasts and sent fake radio transmissions intended to be intercepted by Russian intelligence officers (Arquilla and Karasik 1999, 217). Second, the Russians and Chechens failed to credibly commit to a cooperative solution to the conflict. In October 1999, the warring factions demonstrated they were all too willing to ignore the 1997 ceasefire agreement and their sweeping commitments to peace. Finally, information failures and problems with credible commitment pushed the competing factions into the security dilemma (Lake and Rothchild 1996, 52). Incentives for cooperation were not sufficient to overcome collective fears, and as a result, each side was motivated to cheat on cooperative agreements and use preemptive force. For example, Russia's brutal 'liberation' of Grozny in February 2000 was a preemptive move against future demands for Chechen independence.

This violent internal struggle has exacted a high price in human suffering. Competing ethnic identities and the problems of credible commitment and information failure fueled this protracted struggle. Clearly democratization is not an entirely rosy proposition. Indeed, Russia's transition to democratic rule has been anything but smooth.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, this research would benefit from further investigation of quantitative measures and cases within this problem area. In particular, it would be very
interesting to see how a more precise measure of states' ethnic composition would influence the present research. I anticipate that a more valid measure of ethnic heterogeneity would strengthen my statistical results, further justifying my research expectations. It is telling of the importance of the relationship between ethnic fractionalization, democratization, and civil war, however, that despite the weaknesses of this project, my analysis still generates statistically significant results.

Even at this point, the implications of this discussion are plain, and I echo the caution initially offered by Mansfield and Snyder. Although increasing the number of democratic nations across the world may indeed be in our long-term interests, national leaders must be aware that the transition to democracy is laced with significant hazards. Policy makers should couple their pro-democracy agenda with consistent "efforts to mold strong, centralized institutions that can withstand the intense demands...[of] high-energy mass politics... If mass politics arrives before the institutions that are needed to regulate it, hollow or failed democracy is likely to result" (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 334). Popular crusades for democratization, therefore, should be tempered with caution and with an understanding that this type of political change has the potential to provoke interstate aggressions as well as to push nations into civil war.

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