

**Forecasting Instability: Are Ethnic Wars and  
Muslim Countries Different?**

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The Task Force was founded in 1994 in response to a request from the Office of the Vice President of the United States and funded by the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Intelligence. It is an interdisciplinary research program that aims to develop statistical models that can be used as forecasting tools to assess the vulnerability of countries around the world to various forms of political change. The views expressed in this paper do not represent the official views of the U.S. Government, the U.S. intelligence community, or the CIA.

## Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scholars and policy makers envisioned a “new world order,” characterized by political stability, democratization and economic development (Fukuyama 1992). This optimistic and at times almost millenarian world view proved to be incorrect. Huntington (1997) proposed an alternative and pessimistic vision of the future in which a “clash of civilizations” would replace that of ideologies as the leading source of conflict. While there is reason to doubt Huntington’s civilizational conflict theory, it is clear that in recent decades ethnicity and religion have emerged as the major sources of deadly internal conflict. Beginning in the 1980s the demands of ethnonationalists, indigenous peoples, religious radicals, and other communal groups for independence, ascendancy, or for a greater share of state resources became the most common sources of armed conflict within countries the world over.

In this paper we present forecasting models for ethnic conflicts and for political instability in Muslim countries. We approached the explanation of ethnic warfare and instability in predominantly Muslim societies within the Political Instability (formerly State Failure) Task Force’s global research design. In its latest phase, the Task Force has developed a new global model of risk factors that preceded the onset of 117 episodes of instability involving internal war (ethnic or revolutionary) or regime failure (adverse regime change, genocide, or politicide) during the period 1955-2003, as reported in Goldstone *et al.*’s paper for this panel.<sup>1</sup> The “problems” identified by the Task Force include 74 ethnic wars globally and 54 instability events in Muslim countries.

The research strategy used is the case control method in which “problems” are matched with three times as many control cases – the controls being drawn from the larger universe of all country-years from 1955 to 2003 with no current or impending instability events. Some complex conflicts, including internal wars in Bosnia and Sudan, occur in both problem sets. The study is not designed to test rival hypotheses about the preconditions of ethnic war or the causes of instability in Muslim countries, but the results of our model-fitting exercise bear on a number of theoretical arguments, including propositions about the domestic version of the “democratic peace” thesis and the relevance of Islamist doctrine and practice for instability in Muslim societies. The research question is to identify best-fit models that are specific to ethnic war globally and to internal conflict in predominantly Muslim countries, including variables from the global model plus a number of others that are suggested by observation and theoretical arguments about the dynamics of such conflicts. In other words, we are seeking “nested” empirical explanations of ethnic wars, and of instability in Muslim countries, that treat them as distinctive sets of the larger universe of “state failures,” a.k.a. episodes of instability.

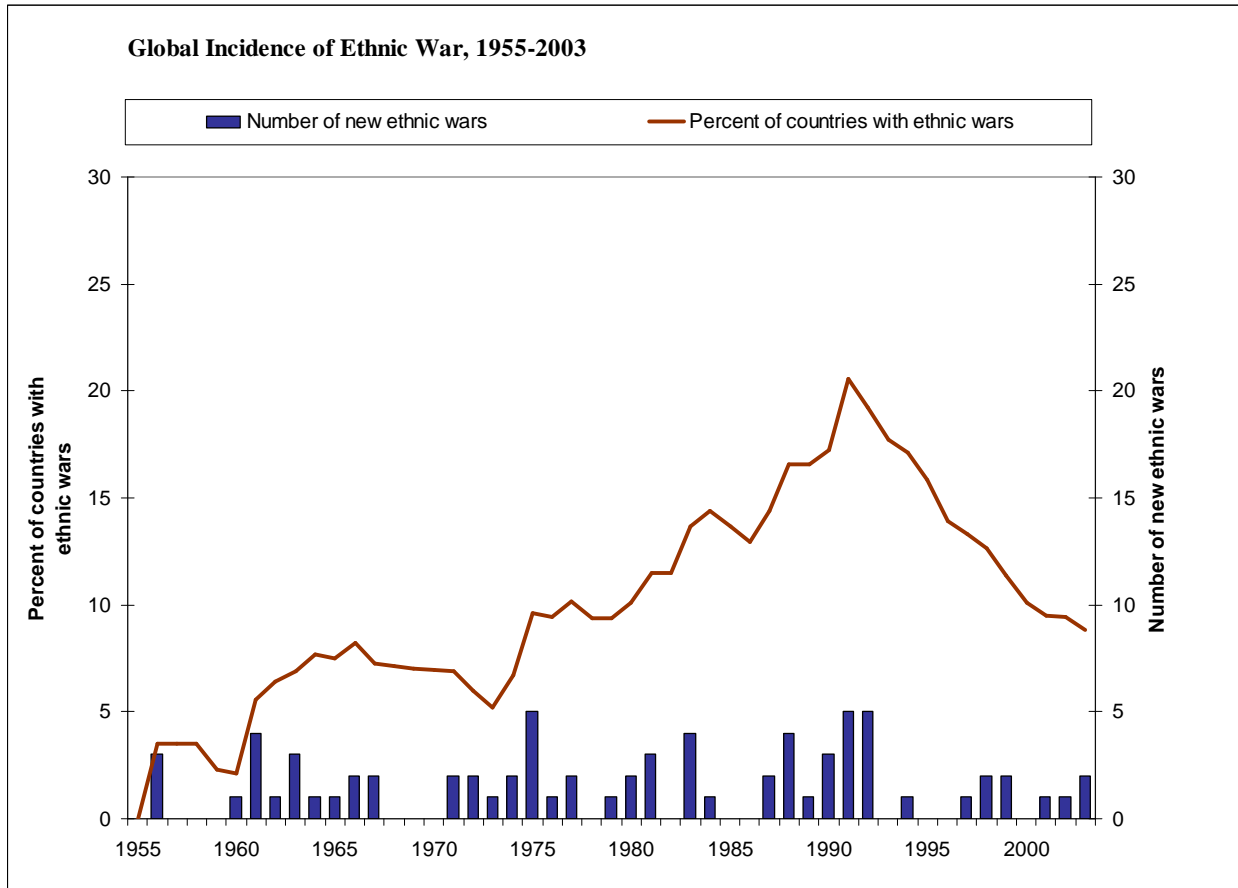
### Why a Model of Ethnic War?

In the 1990s, new ethnic wars outnumbered new revolutionary wars nearly three to one. The incidence of ethnic wars had been building since the 1980s, as shown in the accompanying graph. The crest of the wave came in 1991 when 21 percent of the 157 countries in the PITF study had ethnic wars underway. We also observe that ethnic conflict has often precipitated a

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<sup>1</sup> Previous work by the Task Force is summarized in Bates *et al.* (2000) and Goldstone *et al.* (2005).

series of subsequent crises: ethnic wars were the leading event (17) or one of the leading events (14) in 71 complex crises. Some ethnic wars set off additional ethnic conflicts; others lead to abrupt regime transitions; and still others prompt governments to respond with ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass political killings, as has happened in Rwanda in 1994 and recently in Sudan's Darfur region. Ethnic wars also have become a major source of regional insecurity as ideas, activists, arms, and refugees spill over into neighboring countries.



Many hypotheses have been advanced to explain the onset of large-scale ethnic conflict. A structural precondition for ethnic warfare is ethnic heterogeneity, but there is no consensus about which patterns of ethnic distribution are most conducive to violent conflict, and most theories emphasize situational rather than structural factors. One cluster of explanations focuses on “greed,” i.e. the predatory behavior of ethnic entrepreneurs who seek to control scarce natural resources or state power. Another set emphasizes “grievances,” that is the reaction of minority peoples to inequalities, discrimination and repression. A third set of arguments points to opportunity factors, such as rough terrain that shelters ethnic insurgents, government weaknesses that make it easy to mobilize ethnic opposition, and material support from diasporas and from sympathetic states. Finally, some interpretations emphasize the ideological effects of successful ethnic movements elsewhere and the emergence of transnational social movements advocating national or indigenous self-determination (see Gurr 2000: chap.3).

## **Ethnic War Model Results**

Our analysis identified six variables that in combination are significant risk factors for the onset of ethnic war two years hence. As Table 1 shows, these variables jointly lead to correct postdictive classification of between 80 and 88% of the 50 war onsets and controls when we chose a cut point that balanced model sensitivity and specificity.<sup>2</sup> The results obtained are generally consistent across all control sets, and predictive accuracy is somewhat higher than the 80-82% accuracy obtained for the global model reported by Goldstone et al. (2005).

State-Led Discrimination. Ethnic wars are substantially more likely to occur in countries where the state actively and systematically discriminates against one or more minority groups. The indicator used is based on annual, group-level coding of economic and political discrimination affecting some 300 ethnic and sectarian groups surveyed by the Minorities at Risk project (see Gurr 2000). This dichotomous variable has the highest odd ratio in two of the three models shown in Table 1 and is second-highest in the third.

Ethnic Diversity. Ethnic wars are five to eight times as likely to occur in larger countries with medium to high ethnic diversity as they are in smaller or largely homogeneous countries. Derived from an interaction of population-size and diversity measures, this dummy variable is the second most influential risk factor in our models. Many alternative specifications of the ethnic heterogeneity variable were tried, but only this one showed a strong and consistent effect.

Regime Type. Ethnic wars are three to eleven times as likely to occur in partial democracies with factionalism as they are in any other type of political regime. This variable, though the most powerful by far in the global model, is on average only the third most powerful in the model of ethnic war. Other patterns of regime authority that place countries at risk of instability in the global model, including partial democracy without factionalism and partial autocracy, do not appear to add significantly to the risks of ethnic war.

Neighborhood Effects. Countries are more vulnerable to an outbreak of ethnic war when abutting neighbors are already embroiled in their own civil or ethnic conflicts, other things being equal. This variable, which probably taps a variety of spillover effects, has consistently strong and significant effects.

Recent Ethnic War or Genocide. Ethnic wars are three to five times more likely to erupt in countries that have experienced any ethnic war or genocide in the previous 15 years (according to the Task Force's historical list of instability events), other things being equal. This dichotomous variable taps a country's historical legacy of ethnic violence. We know from inspection of specific groups that systematic discrimination against a group (above) is often a

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<sup>2</sup> Only 50 of the 74 ethnic wars identified by the Task Force were represented as onsets in this analysis because: 1) proximate events in the same country were treated as a single episode of ethnic war, 2) countries with at least one ethnic war already ongoing were removed from the analysis until those wars ended, and 3) onsets of ethnic war occurring in the first two years of a country's existence were excluded due to the impossibility of obtaining a valid data profile from two years earlier. Regarding the latter rule, sensitivity analyses indicated that the exclusion of onsets in new countries had no significant impact on our results.

**Table 1: Ethnic War Model Results Using Three Control Sets**

Variable	Greater Risk	Lesser Risk	Odds Ratios for Set A	Odds Ratios for Set B	Odds Ratios for Set C
State-Led Discrimination	Yes	No	12.44***	8.22***	4.68***
Population Size and Ethnic Diversity (1)	Moderate to large population and moderate to high ethnic diversity	Small population or low ethnic diversity	8.17***	5.28***	4.77***
Regime Type (2)	Partial democracy with factionalism	Full democracy, Partial democracy without factionalism, Partial or full autocracy	10.88***	6.69***	2.64*
Bordering States with Major Armed Civil or Ethnic Conflict (3)	2 or more	0	4.13***	3.65***	3.48***
Any Ethnic War or Genocide in Previous 15 Years	Yes	No	2.79*	5.30**	3.61**
Youth Bulge (age 15-24/all ages)	>=median	<median	2.90*	3.55**	4.41**
<b>Model summary statistics</b>					
Onsets of ethnic war			50	50	50
Control cases			148	146	149
% of onsets classified correctly			88.0	85.6	81.9
% of control cases classified correctly			87.8	85.6	81.9
Cutpoint			0.27	0.29	0.22

\* P-value < 0.15; \*\* P < 0.10; \*\*\* P value < 0.01.

- (1) Odds ratio compares cases with moderate to large population (>4.0 million in 2002) and moderate to high ethnic diversity (Herfindahl <0.75, usually majority ethnic group < 85% of pop.) to cases with either small population or low ethnic diversity.
- (2) Regime categories are based on Polity variables measuring patterns of executive recruitment (POLEXREC) and the competitiveness of political participation (POLPACMP).  
 Full democracy: POLPACMP = 5 and POLEXREC = 8  
 Partial democracy: POLPACMP > 2 or = 0 and POLEXREC > 5 and not full democracy.  
 Partial autocracy: POLPACMP > 2 or = 0 and POLEXREC < 6; or POLPACMP < 3 and POLEXREC > 5  
 Full autocracy: POLPACMP = 1 or 2 and POLEXREC < 6.  
 Factionalism is indicated by POLPACMP = 3. Thus the high-risk category for this model is POLPACMP = 3 and POLEXREC > 5.
- (3) Odds ratio compares two bordering states in conflict vs. no bordering states in conflict. The measure in the model is continuous.

response to violent ethnic challenges. The fact that the discrimination variable contributes to the risk model independently of this historical variable gives us greater confidence that current discrimination, irrespective of past conflict, is a major risk factor for ethnic war.

Youth Bulge. Ethnic wars are three to four times more likely in countries with a large youth population, or “youth bulge” as it is commonly labeled. This variable has larger p-values than other variables in the model, and its inclusion does not increase significantly the model’s classification accuracy. Nonetheless, its effects were sufficiently consistent across these estimations, and its theoretical and policy implications sufficiently strong, that we felt its retention was justified.

### **Some Theoretical and Policy Implications**

Our analysis indicates that the risks of ethnic warfare are substantially determined by the relative status, size, and history of a heterogeneous country’s ethnic groups. These are respectively the first, second, and fifth most important factors in the model. Ethnic war is better explained by models that take such factors into account than by generic or global models of political instability. Several theoretical lines of argument are affirmed or qualified by these results. Ethnic heterogeneity matters, but we find no evidence of the complex relationships some scholars have posited. Despite experimenting with various measures of relative group size, our results show simply that countries with relatively large and at least modestly diverse populations are more vulnerable to ethnic war, other things being equal. “Grievance” hypotheses are supported, in particular the contention that ethnic mobilization is most likely in countries where state actors subject communal groups to serious discrimination. “Traditions of conflict” explanations also are supported, though the model does not test whether the protagonists in new ethnic wars are the same as those in past conflicts.

“Greed” explanations of ethnic warfare are not directly supported by any of the model findings. In alternative specifications, not reported here, variables such as high concentrations of primary product exports were not significant. But one can interpret the “youth bulge” factor in these terms. Countries with large youth populations are poor, i.e. their large numbers are a demographic reaction to low productivity. As Robert H. Bates points out (communication to the Task Force), in poor societies more children are more useful than a well-educated few and reinforce low per capita incomes, i.e., more consumers relative to producers and therefore less output per worker. Since the marginal productivity of labor is low, there is relative advantage in gaining income through redistribution. Thus unemployed youth are especially susceptible to appeals from ethnic entrepreneurs who offer them hope of gains.

Two factors from the global analysis also contribute significantly to risks of ethnic war. Risks of internal war are substantially greater in partially democratic regimes where political participation is factionalized. Such regimes are inherently weak and provide incentives and opportunities for political entrepreneurs of all stripes, whether ethnic, revolutionary, or sectarian. Spillover effects from conflicts in neighboring countries also have strong effects in both the global and ethnic war models. At the macro-level analysis we cannot say what is “spilling over” – whether demonstration effects, material support, armed militants, or direct acts of intervention. Nevertheless, the finding supports “opportunity” explanations and is consistent with ideological and social-movement hypotheses as well.

Readers with a favorite mono-explanation for ethnic warfare – ethnic security dilemmas, manipulative ethnic leaders, relative deprivation – are likely to be dissatisfied with the eclectic, multivariate model reported here. We are not. The etiology of ethnic warfare – structures, motives, opportunities – is a complex function of many structural and situational factors, and of the capacity of ethnic leaders to make political use of them.

Finally, with regard to policy implications, two of strongest risk factors are in principle susceptible to change in the short to medium run: regime characteristics and state-led discrimination. Specifically, we find that in transitional democracies it is factionalism – not the partial nature of the democratic transition – that is associated with increased risk of ethnic war. This suggests that institutionalization of political participation and development of norms of compromise and collaboration are more important for preventing ethnic warfare than improvements in indicators of full democracy, such as the quality of elections. Our findings are consistent with the argument advanced by Donald Horowitz (1985 and later publications) that the development of political parties and a party system that cuts across communal or sectarian lines reduces factionalism and facilitates interethnic accommodation. We recognize that factionalism has other possible origins: it may result from polarization along ideological or class lines, for example. The more general principle is that transforming the basis for group mobilization must be accompanied by a diminution of the drivers of social conflict. Ethnic, religious, and class identity, and ideological commitments, may simply provide a rationale and organizing structure for political dissent.

Democratization is also associated with improvements in the status of minorities. In many instances, dating back to the 1980s, transitions to democracy have been accompanied by shifts from official discrimination to formal-legal equality for minorities (for comparative evidence see Gurr 2000: chap. 5). Civil society actors usually have promoted recognition of minority rights and policies of remediation, but there also are instances in which autocratic regimes have initiated similar steps. Changes in minority status in democratizing states are risky, of course. Changes in official policies do not necessarily translate into short-term improvements for disadvantaged groups and the lessening of political restrictions gives them greater opportunities to press their demands. If changes and dissent trigger open resistance by privileged groups, then factionalism may result and further escalation of contention to violence may occur.

Nonetheless, our evidence suggests that transitions toward democracy and improved status of minorities contribute both separately and jointly to reduction in the long-run risks of violent ethnic conflict. International engagement often is crucial for setting and keeping these changes in motion.

Other risk factors identified in the ethnic war model can only be changed over the long run, if at all. The potentially malign effects of ethnic heterogeneity can be managed by providing federalism for potential separatists and extending political rights and representation for disadvantaged minorities (see Marshall and Gurr 2005). It takes a long time for regional-wide conflict to subside, though it has done so in recent years in southern Africa and Central America. Providing employment for large numbers of youth is part of the greater dilemma of underdevelopment in the global South.

## Why a Muslim Countries Model?

Some scholars and many Muslims have argued that, because they do not accept the dualistic distinction between sacred and profane modes of social behavior, Islamic societies and politics differ fundamentally from those of non-Muslim cultures. Among Muslims there is intense debate concerning the compatibility of Islam and democracy and of the role of *jihad*.<sup>3</sup> The Muslim countries model was developed to identify risk factors associated with the onset of political instability in countries where Muslims comprise at least 40% of the total population. The 48 countries that meet this criterion are listed below.

Predominantly Muslim Countries			
Afghanistan	Eritrea**	Lebanon*	Senegal
Albania	Ethiopia**	Libya	Sierra Leone**
Algeria	Gambia, The	Mali	Somalia
Azerbaijan	Guinea	Malaysia*	Sudan
Bahrain	Guinea-Bissau**	Mauritania	Syria
Bangladesh	Indonesia	Morocco	Tajikistan
Bosnia & Herzegovina*	Iran	Niger	Tunisia
Burkina Faso**	Iraq	Nigeria**	Turkey
Chad*	Jordan	Oman	Turkmenistan
Comoros	Kazakhstan*	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Côte d'Ivoire**	Kuwait	Qatar	Uzbekistan
Egypt	Kyrgyzstan	Saudi Arabia	Yemen

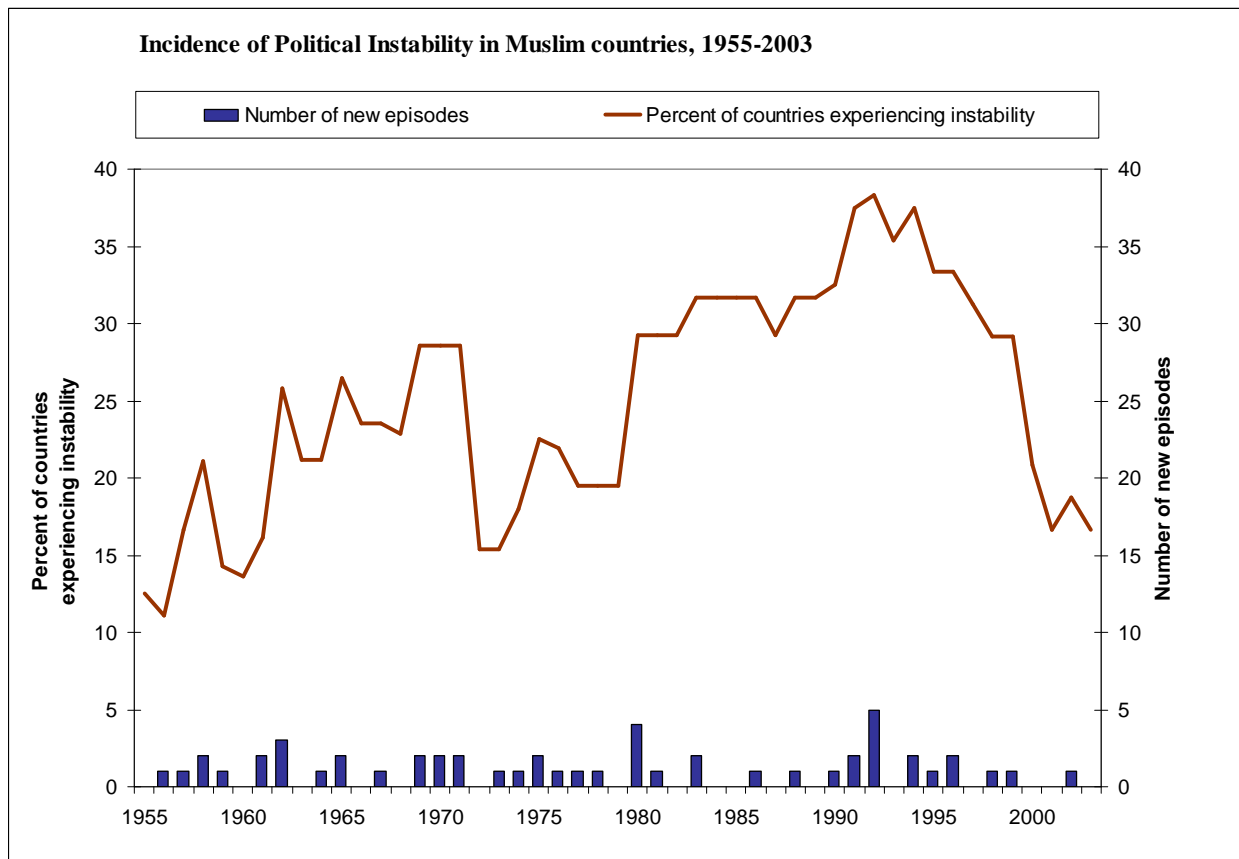
\* Country population greater than 50% Muslim in 2000, less than 50% in some prior years.  
 \*\* Country population 40-50% Muslim in 2000.

The Task Force identified 54 cases of political instability in Muslim countries between 1955 and 2003. The accompanying figure, below, shows two periods of rise and decline in the incidence of instability in these countries, with one peak in the late 1960s and another in the early 1990s. From 1966 to 1989, the average number of new episodes per year in the Muslim world was 0.88, compared with averages of 1.63 from 1955 to 1965 and 1.78 in 1990-98. The rash of new events in the early 1990s pushed the proportion of Muslim countries with ongoing state failures over 40 percent: Political instability was a bigger problem for Muslim countries in the mid 1990s than it ever had been. A total of 14 new episodes of political instability occurred in Muslim countries in the 1990s, nine in sub-Saharan Africa and four in former communist states. Marshall finds that the Muslim factor was closely linked to instability in Africa: 70 percent of predominantly Muslim countries in Africa south of the Sahara experienced instability in the years after state formation whereas only one-third of non-Muslim African countries did (Marshall and Gurr 2005: chap. 7). In the late 1990s, there was a sharp global decline in both the incidence and prevalence of instability in Muslim countries, as seven episodes of instability ended and only one new episode began (Côte d'Ivoire 2002). At year-end 2003, only 16 percent of Muslim countries were experiencing political instability.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Jihad* is often translated “holy war,” but this is incorrect. It is properly translated as “struggle in the cause of God.” It can, but need not, include armed struggle, and then only in a defensive war.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent updates to the Task Force’s problem set—made since this analysis was completed—suggest that this downward trend may now have been reversed, however. A 2000-2001 revolutionary war has been added for Guinea, and new cases have been noted in Iran (adverse regime change in 2004), Saudi Arabia (revolutionary war since 2003), and Yemen (revolutionary war since 2004). We are also paying close attention to rising/continuing





Adverse regime change—a category that encompasses abrupt declines in the degree of democracy, revolutionary changes in political elites, and collapses of central state authority—has been the most common type of political instability in Muslim countries, occurring 46 times since 1955. The prevalence of this type of event indicates that the fragility of central governments has been a leading cause of political crisis in the Muslim world in the past several decades. Revolutionary and ethnic wars have also been significant sources of instability, however, occurring 25 and 35 times, respectively, during that same period. Fifteen of the 36 incidents of genocide or politicide identified by the Task Force also occurred in predominantly Muslim countries.<sup>5</sup>

Statistics not tabled here show that Muslim countries were in crisis for roughly one of every four years between 1955 and 2003. This prevalence is substantially higher than the approximately one in seven years for the non-Muslim world. The gap was widest for genocides

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violence in Guinea-Bissau (adverse regime change in 2003, general instability), Turkey (Kurds in 2004), Pakistan (various), and Bangladesh (opposition and Islamists). What is more, instability in five non-Muslim countries involves substantial Muslim minorities: India (Kashmir), Israel (Palestinians), Philippines (Moro), Russia (Chechens), and Thailand (Malay-Muslims). Serious communal violence that has been going on in central Nigeria between Muslim and Christian groups is not included because the state is not directly involved.

<sup>5</sup> The counts of specific types of events sum to more than 54 because most episodes of instability are complex, i.e., they involve multiple events. For example, for purposes of our analysis, the multiple ethnic wars, genocides, and adverse regime changes that have beset Sudan since 1983 comprise a single episode of political instability.

and politicides, events that were underway in twice as many years in Muslim countries as in non-Muslim countries. Gaps were smaller but substantial with respect to adverse regime changes and ethnic wars. These data show that Muslim countries have experienced more political instability than non-Muslim countries for half a century. The main qualification is that economically advanced, consolidated democracies-virtually all of them non-Muslim-rarely experience incidents of instability.

### **Model Results for Muslim Countries**

The Muslim-countries model summarized in Table 2 correctly classified between 84 and 89 percent of the historical onsets of instability and control cases, depending on the control set used.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, our analysis highlighted a number of variables as risk factors for political instability in the Muslim world.

Regime Type. As shown in our global and ethnic-war models, the character of a country's political institutions exerts a powerful influence on the risk of political instability. We find that full autocracy is, by far, the most stable form of government in Muslim countries. All other types of political regime are vastly more likely than full autocracies to suffer an onset of instability, other things being equal.

At first blush these findings seem to support the contention that liberalizing or democratizing regimes in the Muslim world are unusually susceptible to instability. In fact, democracies and partial autocracies have failed at about the same rate in predominantly Muslim countries as they have elsewhere around the globe. The size and volatility of the odds ratios associated with regime type in our Muslim model is, at least in part, an artifact of the smaller sample sizes involved. Full democracies might be as stable in the Muslim world as they are elsewhere, but the historical rarity of such regimes makes reliable statistical analysis of their stability impossible.

Bordering States with Any Type of Armed Conflict. Our analysis indicates that Muslim countries are more vulnerable to instability when more bordering states are engaged in any type of armed conflict, internal or international. While this result echoes our global and ethnic-war models, only among Muslim countries do we find that the involvement of neighboring states in international conflict contributes to the risk of instability.

Infant Mortality. Using a country's infant mortality rate as a proxy for economic development, we find that relatively poor Muslim countries are three to four times as likely to experience instability as their wealthier counterparts. Once again, this finding parallels the results we obtain from our global analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> As in our ethnic-war and other models, onsets of instability occurring in the first two years of a country's existence were excluded from the analysis because of the impossibility of obtaining a reliable data profile two years prior to the onset.

**Table 2: Muslim Countries Model Results Using Three Control Sets**

Variable	Greater Risk	Lesser Risk	Odds Ratios for Set A	Odds Ratios for Set B	Odds Ratios for Set C
Regime Type (1)	Partial or full democracy	Full autocracy	41.82***	159.30***	45.40***
	Partial autocracy		23.34***	265.70***	66.90***
Bordering States with Internal Wars (2)	2 or more	0	6.52***	18.55***	12.50***
Infant Mortality (3)	Higher	Lower	4.44***	3.51***	4.19***
Minority Rule	Yes	No	2.88**	3.10**	2.47**
Leader's Tenure (4)	Longer	Shorter	1.77**	1.96**	2.21**
<b>Model summary statistics</b>					
Onsets of instability			44	44	44
Number of controls			132	132	132
% of instability onsets correctly classified			86.4	88.6	84.1
% of control cases correctly classified			86.4	88.6	84.1
Cutpoint			0.30	0.26	0.24

\*\* P value greater than .01 and equal to or less than .10 \*\*\* P value equal to or less than .01

Odds ratios for regime type are relative to full autocracy (Polity codes POLPACMP<3 and POLEXREC<6).

Codes: Full democracy POLPACMP=5 and POLEXREC=8

Partial democracy with factionalism POLPACMP=3 and POLEXREC>5

Partial democracy without factionalism POLPACMP=0, 4, or 5; POLEXREC>5; and not full democracy

Partial autocracy POLPACMP>=3 and POLEXREC<6; or POLPACMP=1 or 2 and POLEXREC>=6

Odds ratio compares a country with two bordering states in conflict vs. one with no bordering states in conflict. The measure in the model is continuous.

Odds ratio compares countries at the 75<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentiles. The measure in the model is continuous.

Odds ratio compares a country whose chief executive has been in office 15 years to one in which the chief executive has been in office only three years. The measure in the model is continuous.

**Minority Rule.** Muslim countries ruled by ethnic or religious minorities are two to three times as likely to suffer an outbreak of instability as those under majority rule or where elite ethnicity is not politically salient. This particular variable does not appear in our global model, but it is highly correlated with state-led discrimination and factionalism, both of which appear as risk factors in our global and ethnic-war models.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq is an example of a Muslim country where an Arab Sunni minority ruled ethnic Kurds (also Sunni) and an ethnically Arab, though Shia majority. Recent reports from Iraq indicate rising levels of sectarian violence perpetrated by Shia in reprisal for misrule and oppression during Hussein's Baathist/Sunni regime. The lingering effects of repression do not

bode well for the future. Syria is a prospective example. It has a majority Sunni population but is ruled by Alawites who both Sunnis and Shias consider to be heretics. It is possible that when the Alawite regime is replaced, its privileged minority will suffer serious persecution.

Leader's Years in Office. The longer a chief executive's tenure, the more vulnerable a Muslim country is to an outbreak of instability, other things being equal. The significance of this variable, which was not robustly linked to instability in our global analysis, may be related to the prevalence of autocratic regimes in the Muslim world. Particularly in regimes lacking a fixed rule of succession, the aging of an autocratic ruler often sparks political intrigue and violent contention for power. Indonesia is an example. Even before the economic crisis of 1997 that brought down the Suharto regime, numerous political factions were building complex political coalitions in hope of influencing the succession process. The result was a series of three short-lived and ineffective governments.

### **Some Theoretical and Policy Implications**

As with the global model and a model for sub-Saharan Africa not reviewed here, regime type had the strongest influence on political instability in the Muslim world. Partial autocracies and all types of democracy faced odds of instability far greater than full autocracies. As with sub-Saharan Africa, this finding probably reflects the fragility of new or incomplete democracies, rather than some cultural incompatibility with democracy as such. Also, as with the global, ethnic-war, and sub-Saharan Africa models, a greater risk of state failure was associated with the occurrence of major conflicts in bordering states and patterns of communal domination and subjugation. Indicators of low quality of life (usually infant mortality, but youth bulge in the ethnic war model) also add appreciably to the risks of instability, irrespective of patterns of regime authority and spillover effects from regional conflicts.

The Task Force also investigated the effects of a set of specifically "Islamic" variables. Three are particularly contentious in Muslim societies: (1) the degree of allegiance to *sharia*, or traditional Islamic law, particularly family law or codes of personal status; (2) the presence of Islamist ideologies and organizations; and (3) the presence of sectarian groups most Muslims consider to be heretical. Our analysis found no net association between any of these variables and risks of political instability, once the above factors were taken into account. Taken together, these findings suggest a broader conclusion regarding the role of religion in state failure in the Muslim world. Although religion clearly is very salient to politics in most Muslim countries, the key drivers of political instability in the Muslim world are, in most respects, the same as those in the rest of the world.

### **Conclusions**

This paper describes the Task Force's most recent research on the risk factors associated with vulnerability to ethnic war globally and vulnerability to all types of instability in predominantly Muslim countries. We conclude with four summary observations that link those findings to other elements of the Task Force's work and broader debates in the scholarly and policy communities.

First, our research shows that the risks of ethnic war are best assessed by examining the nature of interethnic relations. This conclusion may seem intuitive to many readers, but it contradicts recent research emphasizing opportunity rather than motive as the critical consideration. Our analysis shows that systematic discrimination against communal minorities is a very powerful risk factor, as indicated by its influence not only in our model of ethnic war, but in our global analysis as well (Goldstone et al. 2005). The factionalism spotlighted by our global and ethnic-war models often involves political polarization along ethnic lines, suggesting that the organization of political participation around ethnic or religious identity may have pernicious effects, even when it is not accompanied by state-led discrimination. This finding is further reinforced by the power of a “minority rule” indicator in our Muslim-countries model. At the same time, variables describing the quality of communal relations are not sufficient to explain ethnic war. We find that poverty and “bad neighborhood” effects are also significant precursors of violent ethnic conflict.

Second, our research indicates that vulnerability to political instability in predominantly Muslim states is largely shaped by the same factors that predict instability globally and in other world regions: hybrid regimes (partial democracies and partial autocracies), “bad neighborhood” effects, and economic underdevelopment. “Islamic” variables, on the other hand, make no direct contributions to explaining instability in these countries, not even the presence of Islamist movements or of “heretical” groups. This is perhaps the most surprising finding of the research presented here.

Third, the potentially destabilizing effects of democratic transitions are highlighted in both the ethnic war and Muslim instability models, as they are in global analyses (see other papers on this panel). Partial democracies—especially those characterized by factionalism—are more susceptible to instability than any other regime type, and partially liberalized autocracies are usually more vulnerable as well. The findings of the ethnic-war model suggest an important qualification of this pattern, however: in transitional democracies, it seems to be factionalism in particular—not the partial nature of the democratic transition more generally—that indicates an increased risk of large-scale conflict. Institutionalization of political participation that cuts across communal lines combined with policies aimed at easing discrimination against minorities should substantially reduce ethnic war risks.

Finally, we can ask whether our results shed any light on the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible. Democratic transitions in Islamic societies usually fail. There have been at least 27 experiments with liberalization in predominantly Muslim countries and about one fifth of them have at some time since 1955 reached +8 on the Polity project’s 10-point democracy scale. They are Bangladesh, Gambia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan, and Turkey. As of 2004, however, only Indonesia and Senegal were full democracies. We also know from our analyses that Muslim societies are particularly vulnerable to large-scale conflict as well as to adverse regime change, and that Muslim countries experience instability, including failed democratic transitions, for the same general reasons as other countries. What is unclear is why the preconditions for failure are so pervasive in Muslim countries. We are led to conclude that, wherever the risk factors of underdevelopment and “bad neighborhoods” persist, attempts to democratize autocratic regimes in the Muslim world will increase short-term risks of political instability, as they have elsewhere.

## Works Cited

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