



The decline in armed conflict since 1992 is likely a result of the increased effectiveness of the UN in stopping wars.

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Causes of War, Causes of Peace

Since 1945 there have been three broad shifts in the pattern of armed conflict: the end of colonial warfare, the virtual disappearance of conflicts between states, and a rapid rise in fighting within states, followed by a steep fall.

These historic changes have been associated with two epochal events: the end of European colonialism and the end of the Cold War. After World War II, nearly all of Africa, much of Asia, and parts of Latin America were under colonial rule. By 1980, all but a few small colonies were independent. A major cause of warfare had disappeared. But what of fighting between states in the post-colonial era? And why the post-Cold War reduction in conflicts within states? Here, the answers are more complex.

The low level of post-1945 inter-state warfare has been a response to three major factors. The first was democratization: the steady rise in the proportion of democracies to dictatorships. Democracies hardly ever fight each other. Second, was globalization. It is now almost always cheaper to buy resources on the global market than to seize them by force. States have found less costly ways than war to achieve their goals. Third, global sentiment has shifted firmly away from war. Until World War I, warfare was seen as an inevitable part of human experience, and an accepted instrument of statecraft. In most (though not all) societies, this is no longer so. An increasingly war-averse world has declared acts of aggression illegal, and that armed force is only justified in self-defense, or with the authority of the Security Council. These rules are still sometimes broken, but they are increasingly accepted as legitimate.

The United Nations was established in 1945, but for nearly 50 years it rarely played the global security role that its founders envisaged. The 40-year peace between the major powers during the Cold War was linked to the mutual possession of weapons of mass destruction. But the Cold War also stoked proxy wars in many poor countries. By 1992, conflicts within states were at an all-time high.

When the Cold War ended, a major driver of armed conflict vanished. But the break-up of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia

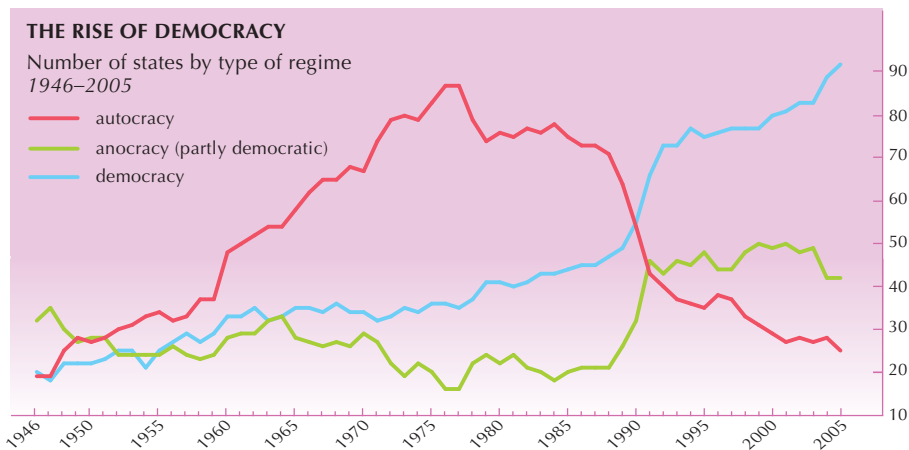
Guatemala
Paul Smith/
Panos Pictures

revealed new tensions – and brought new conflicts – to the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Indeed, twice as many conflicts started in the 1990s as in the 1980s. But the 1990s also saw an even greater increase in the number of wars coming to an end, leading to the net decline in conflict numbers.

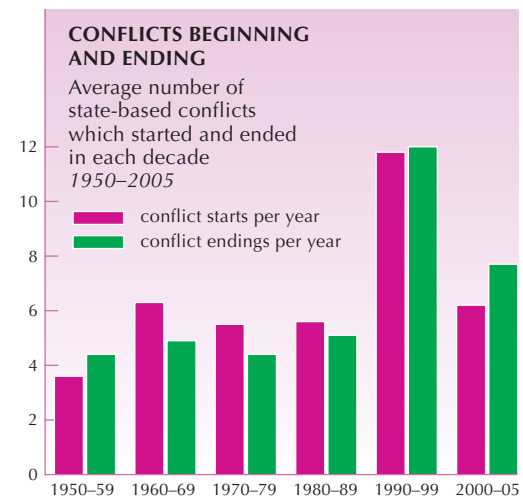
One explanation for this decline is the explosion in international activism, spearheaded by the UN, which took place in the wake of the Cold War. UN peacemaking missions (diplomacy to halt ongoing wars) rose from four in 1990 to 15 in 2002. UN peacekeeping operations (involving troops on the



Following the end of the Cold War, the number of armed conflicts declined. During the same period the number of peacekeeping operations increased.



In 1975, only 26% of states were democracies. By 2005, the figure was 58%. Democracy is characterized here by constraints on the exercise of executive power, free elections and guaranteed civil liberties.



From the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, more armed conflicts started than stopped each decade. Since then, more have ended than have begun.

ground) rose from 10 in 1990 to 17 in 2005, and have fundamentally changed in character. While the missions of the Cold War era rarely involved more than monitoring ceasefire lines, most of today's peace operations aim to rebuild national institutions and prevent the resumption of violence.

This upsurge of UN activity, backed by initiatives from regional organizations and NGOs, has often been poorly planned and implemented. But the fact that as international activism increased in the 1990s, conflicts declined, suggests – but does not prove – that the former caused the latter.

There is also an important association between armed conflict and poverty. The poor are, of course, not inherently more violent than the rich. But higher per capita income tends to mean a stronger state, which means more resources to crush rebellions or to address the grievances that drive them.

The end of the Cold War was associated with another important change. Since the beginning of the 1990s, more conflicts have ended in negotiated settlements, fewer in victories, in large part because peacemaking efforts are increasingly successful. Unfortunately, nearly 30 percent of negotiated settlements break down in under five years. This is why the UN and other international organizations are now putting so much effort into “post-conflict peacebuilding” – policies designed to prevent wars from starting up again.

Will the present downward trends in armed conflict continue? The answer depends on how successful the international community is in stopping existing wars, and in ensuring that peace agreements are durable.

INCOME AND ARMED CONFLICT

World Bank income categories based on Gross National Income per capita 2005



War and Poverty

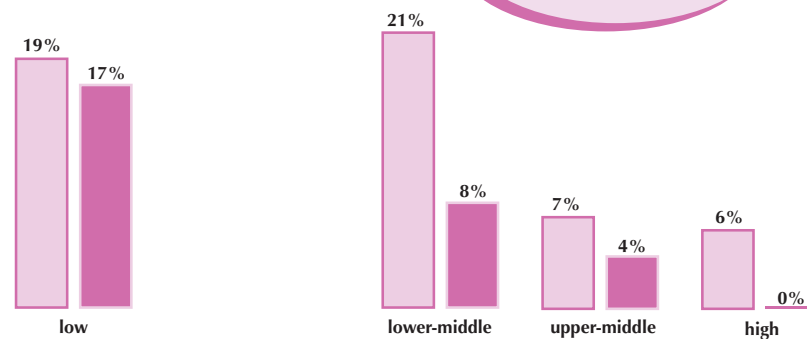
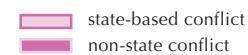
Conflicts are more prevalent in low-income countries.

90% of armed conflicts in 2005 took place in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

There is a close association between war and poverty for several reasons. First, armed conflicts create or exacerbate poverty – war has aptly been described as “development in reverse.” Second, poor countries, unlike rich ones, lack the resources that can spark armed uprisings. Third, poor countries tend to have weak security forces and so find it difficult to deter rebellions and to crush those that cannot be deterred.

INCOME-BANDS AND ARMED CONFLICTS

Percentage of states in each income-band with armed conflict 2005



The lower the income, the higher the number of armed conflicts.

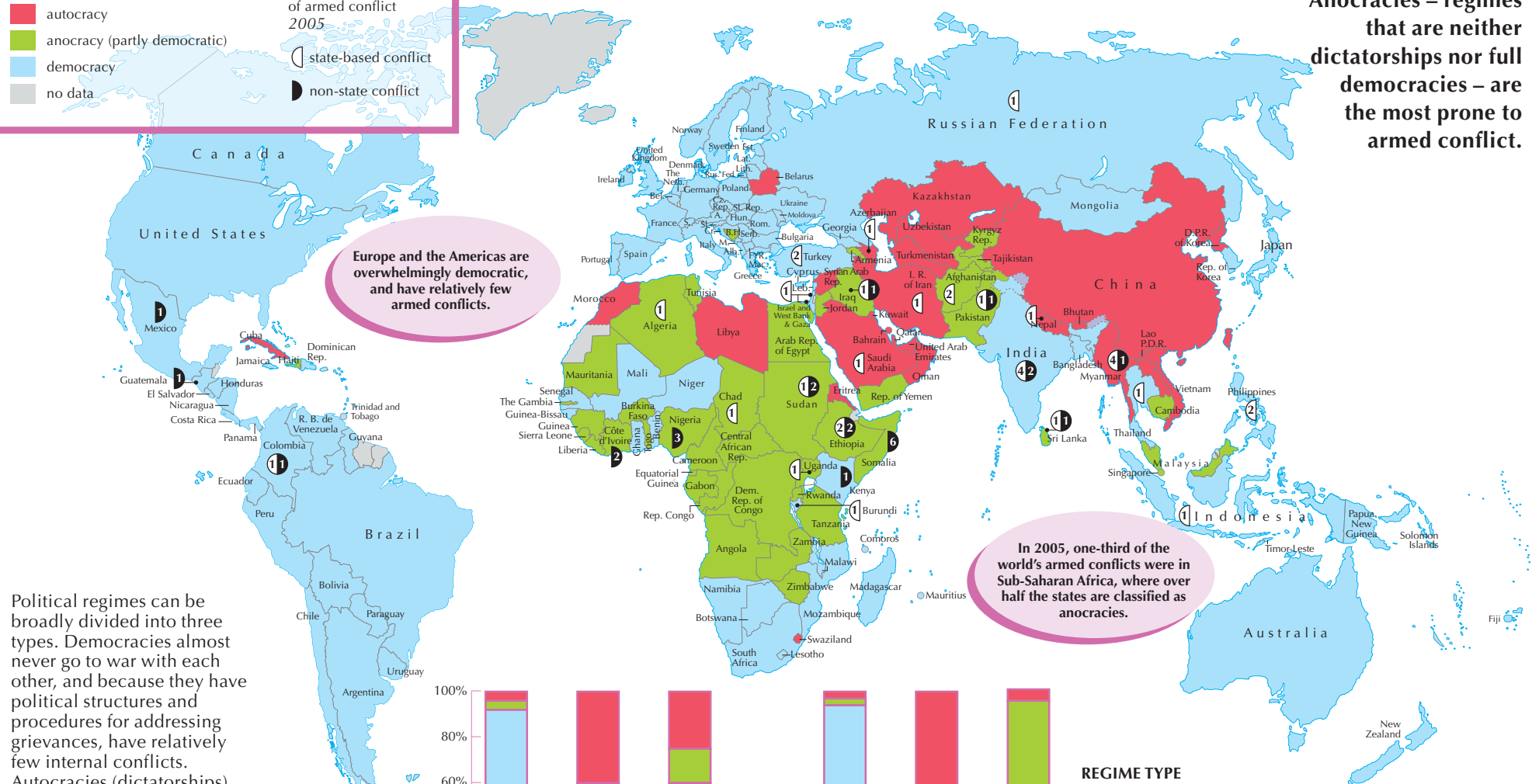
Recent studies reveal that as incomes rise, the risk of armed conflict falls quite dramatically.

REGIME TYPE AND ARMED CONFLICT

Type of regime
2005



Number and type of armed conflict
2005



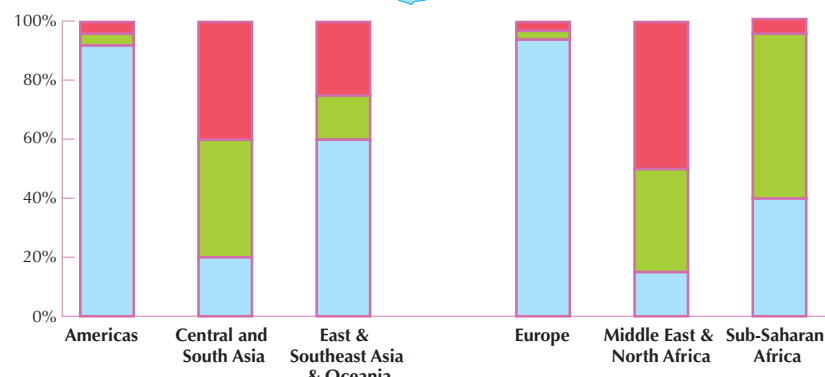
Europe and the Americas are overwhelmingly democratic, and have relatively few armed conflicts.

In 2005, one-third of the world's armed conflicts were in Sub-Saharan Africa, where over half the states are classified as anocracies.

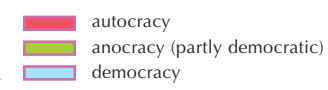
Political regimes can be broadly divided into three types. Democracies almost never go to war with each other, and because they have political structures and procedures for addressing grievances, have relatively few internal conflicts. Autocracies (dictatorships) tend to suppress ruthlessly any dissent or insurrection, and so they too also have relatively few armed conflicts. The third category, anocracies, which are neither fully democratic nor wholly authoritarian, experience most armed conflicts.

Conflict and Regime Type

Anocracies – regimes that are neither dictatorships nor full democracies – are the most prone to armed conflict.



REGIME TYPE BY REGION
Percentage of states with each type of regime 2005



Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East & North Africa, and Central & South Asia all have a high proportion of anocracies. In 2005, 45 of the world's 59 armed conflicts were in these three regions.

