

# Ethnic Homogeneity and Interstate Conflict

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# **Ethnic Homogeneity and Interstate Conflict**

## **I. Research Question**

How does the ethnic homogeneity of a nation influence its likelihood of being involved in interstate conflict?

## **II. Literature Review**

### **A. Intrastate Causes**

#### **1. Minority Causes**

Most conflicts begin as intrastate discrimination. Interstate conflicts begin as outside nations come to the aid of the repressed minorities.

War, Peace, and the State of the State. Holsti, K. J. *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Dangers of Our Time. Les dangers de notre temps (Oct., 1995), pp. 319-339.

#### **2. Majority Causes**

The larger the majority, the firmer grip it has on the ruling regime. The ruling regime can more effectively control flow of information to galvanize support for its foreign policy, including conflict.

A Theory of Ethnic Collective Action. Hechter, Michael, Debra Friedman, and Malka Appelbaum. *International Migration Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Summer, 1982), pp. 412-434.

### **B. Interstate Causes**

#### **1. Ethnic Superiority**

Nations that are more ethnically homogeneous generally have an increased feeling of ethnic superiority which manifests towards intrastate minorities and other nations.

Ethnic Discrimination and Interstate Violence: Testing the International Impact of Domestic Behavior. Caprioli, Mary and Peter F. Trumbore. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 2003), pp. 5-23.

## **2. Homogeneity and Interstate Conflict**

“From a cultural perspective, the most dangerous dyads are religiously dissimilar, territorially contiguous, and ethnically similar pairs of states.”

Culture or Contiguity: Ethnic Conflict, the Similarity of States, and the Onset of War, 1820-1989. Henderson, Errol A. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (Oct., 1997), pp. 649-668.

## **III. Theory**

States often use us vs. them mentalities to help unite their populations behind the government in a struggle against real or imagined, foreign or domestic threats. As a result of this tendency, more ethnically homogeneous societies' struggles will be more likely to involve other nations. This takes place in two ways. First, while ethnically diverse societies tend to have more intrastate conflicts than homogeneous societies, in the ones with a large majority the more likely more severe discrimination will be such as more cases of genocides and oppression against the minority. In addition larger majorities result in stronger political cohesion and allocation of resources to the majority that will exacerbate the discrimination further. The minorities will be likely to look to the international community for succor. Furthermore, the international community will be more likely to intervene in defense of discriminated minorities. Secondly, as homogeneity increases to the point that there is no significant sized minorities, the perceived enemies will tend to be associated with foreign threats rather than internal.

## **IV. Hypothesis**

Hypothesis 1. Nations that have a more *ethnically homogeneous population* are more likely to be engaged in *interstate conflict*.

## **V. Research Design**

Our hypothesis is that ethnically homogenous nations are more likely to be engaged in interstate conflict. In order to test this hypothesis, we have utilized a list of Ethnicities of the World, provided by Alesina, Devleeschauwer, William and Kurlat (2003) with data provided from varying official sources (i.e. CIA, Census, Encyclopedia Britannica, etc.). This list allows us to see the percentages of ethnic groups within each nation of the world. The weakness of this dataset is that each country's ethnicity is only looked at for one year, with differing years for differing countries. While a dataset that contains multiple years for countries would be ideal, we are interested in ethnicity and conflict, not any specific country. Thus, this data allows us a preliminary test for ethnic homogeneity.

After compiling a number of homogenous nations, we then tested to see if these nations really did experience higher degrees of interstate conflict by consulting the Correlates of War website (<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>). Through this website, we used The Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset which allowed us to measure for general shows of force and threats as opposed to limiting ourselves to formal declarations of war.

Since our primary goal was to find whether or not conflict was present in ethnically homogenous nations, we tested our theory using logistical regression, using our dependent variable, conflict, as a dummy variable.

## VI. Analysis

<b>Ethnic Homogeneity and Interstate Conflict</b>		
	<i>General</i>	
Component	Parameter	Sample
Space	Nation States	190
Time	Years	1
Units of Analysis	State-Years	
Sample Size		N=190
	<i>Operationalization</i>	
Concept	Variable	Source
Ethnic Homogeneity	Fractionalization	
Conflict	Militarized Intersate Disputes	Correlates of War
	<i>Methodology</i>	
Logistic Regression		
	<i>Results</i>	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Z</i>
Ethnic Homogeneity	0.0095	1.41*
Constant	0.492	-2.65

\*p<0.158

## VII. Conclusion

This study offers some evidence that countries with greater ethnic homogeneity are more likely to engage in interstate conflict. Our results, though only statistically significant at .158, do support our original hypothesis and indicate that countries with smaller percentages of ethnic minorities engage in conflict with other nations more frequently than do countries with larger

percentages of ethnicities. For every one percent increase in ethnic homogeneity of a nation, we can predict approximately one percent greater likelihood of interstate conflict.

Our statistical analysis came from comparing the data from two very complete sources. The Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset from the Correlates of War Project is an exhaustive set that measured the number of interstate conflicts that individual countries around the world have engaged in from 1816-2006. It recorded all incidents when a state threatened, displayed, or used force against another, which is useful in predicting aggressive behavior of an ethnically homogeneous state. The Fractionalization Data Set gave us the percentages of ethnicities of countries around the world. The data set included ethnicities for each country in different years, ranging from 1979-2001. We do realize that this may have caused a problem from a validity standpoint: some of the countries may have had a different ethnic makeup in the year that their data was collected from a country that was measured in a different year. For example, the ethnic data collected from many of the African countries were from 1983. Over the last 25 years, many of those African countries have gone through changes that have affected their ethnic makeup, and a significant number of conflicts have occurred. This is something that would require further analysis for our study. Our study could be improved by measuring the ethnic makeup of a nation at the time of the conflict.

The analysis of the data does show that we can predict that a country will engage in more interstate conflict if it has a higher degree of homogeneity, but this is not necessarily a causal relationship. The correlation of the data seems to be a good predictor; there could be many other causes, such as location or proximity to countries with other ethnic minorities, the type of government of the state, or the socio-economic status of the population of the state.

While we cannot say for certain that greater ethnic homogeneity in a nation can always predict more frequent engagement in inter-state conflicts, the evidence found in our study does show a correlation between the two, and thus, warrants further study.