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STATES AND PEOPLES IN CONFLICT**Pillars, Forms, and Transformations in
Conflict Studies**

*Mark I. Lichbach, Peter Nils Grabosky
and Michael Stohl*

What connects the civil war in Somalia, insurgency in Syria, counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, guerrilla war in Chechnya, 9/11 terrorism in the United States, racial riots in Baltimore, religious clashes in India, antiglobalization protests in the Battle of Seattle, strikes by west-coast longshoremen, environmentalist social movements in Latin America, extremist political parties in Western Europe, drug-related criminal gangs in Mexico, military coups in Egypt, ethnic secessionism in the Ukraine, 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe, state collapse in Libya, foreign military interventions in Iraq, state repression in Venezuela, genocide in Rwanda, peace agreements in Bosnia, corruption in Russia, democratic consolidation in Poland? In this volume leading scholars from the fields of conflict studies and contentious politics study the many causes, concomitants, and consequences of actual or threatened violence involving the state. Contention within and across national boundaries are addressed.

The context for our work is that we now see a world that is globalized, interconnected and interrelated, across many different sectors and processes, but which may also be seen as divided into zones of peace, democracy, and prosperity coexisting with zones of political turmoil, internal war, and arrested economic development. Many of the boundaries, between zones of peace and zones of turmoil, are often drawn much more clearly by observers, both scholars and pundits, than the closer examinations in this volume reveal. Toward this end, we have assembled a group of scholars to evaluate the state of the art in conflict studies – particularly the important theoretical and methodological questions that will guide future research. The chapters survey theoretical and empirical research on the origins, processes, patterns, and consequences of most forms and contexts of political conflict, protest, repression, rebellion, war, and terrorism

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within and across state boundaries. The guiding research questions to which the essays respond include:

- How can we best conceptualize and understand the conflictive and cooperative interactions between rulers and the ruled?
- How do the attempts to establish stable patterns of rule by those who claim authority interact with the efforts of conflict groups to contest power?
- How and why do states, groups, and other social collectivities cooperate given conflicting interests and worldviews?
- How and why do they sometimes not accommodate one another's demands and grievances?
- How do changing global and local contexts affect the processes of conflict and cooperation?

Throughout the volume, leading scholars of conflict studies focus on their particular areas of theoretical expertise. The chapters integrate extensions of their personal research agendas with overviews of entire bodies of topically defined literature examining the pillars and forms of conflict. These chapters are therefore simultaneously original research contributions in their own right and broader assessments of the state of knowledge. Each chapter highlights the theoretical and methodological controversies of research with respect to a particular aspect or form of conflict, identifying the currently contested terrain of theory, data, and analyses to produce conclusions about the state of knowledge. Each also offers conclusions on the questions, problems, and data that need to be addressed if we are to improve conflict studies in the future. The primary focus is on research that employs systematic methods of observation and comparative, often quantitative, analysis to develop and test explanatory propositions, with due attention directed to conceptual and normative questions. With a very broad scope of theoretical and topical coverage, and careful attention to the corpus of rigorous scholarship, the volume will serve as a comprehensive handbook of systematic research on contentious politics, political violence, and instability.

In Part One, "Pillars of Conflict," our contributors examine several issues in the study of conflict, both of long-standing and recently arising. These include how discrimination produces the grievances that lead to conflict; how liberalism insulates regimes against violent dissent; how religion can be a source for mobilizing protest and rebellion; how patterns of political authority in the state are the context within which dissent occurs; how state repression both deters and accelerates protest and rebellion; how internal wars are connected to their external environment; and how climate change can play a role in dissent.

In Part Two, the focus shifts to 'Forms of Conflict,' in which our contributors examine several of the most important types of conflict: terrorism, revolutions, state failure, genocide and mass murder, transnational conflicts, and civil wars. All have been the subject of enormous literatures, which our contributors grapple with and extend.

Part One, “Pillars of Conflict,” begins with a chapter examining one of the key pillars at the base of conflict: discrimination and the grievances that arise from it. Victor Asal and Kathleen Deloughery address a long-standing debate among scholars: Is civil conflict best explained by motive, or rather by opportunities and resources for action? On the one hand, Ted Gurr and his intellectual progeny see relative deprivation grounded in discrimination as the basis for conflict, while scholars such as Tilly regard organization and resources as the primary explanatory factors. The chapter examines some of the key works in the field on both sides of the debate and some of the key methodological issues that contribute to ongoing scholarly contention. Those who challenge the empirical findings of the Gurr school claim that results are inaccurate when cases are selected on the dependent variable. However, Asal and Deloughery note that the findings reported by these critics are based on poorly specified variables that are unsatisfactory proxies for discrimination.

They argue that solutions to this apparent impasse may reside in further work on selection bias and group inclusion issues by the Minorities at Risk research group, and on a recently developed Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset, which permits a more direct operationalization of grievance. They highlight recent findings that groups are more likely to engage in conflict with the state when their representatives have been excluded from power, when they have high mobilization capacity, and when they have past experiences with conflict. They then describe recent research on terrorism, based on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Grievance terrorism is more likely in countries with large heterogeneous populations, where the proportion of the population and the proportion of groups that are excluded from government are greater. Asal and Deloughery conclude by stating that grievance, and the discrimination in which it is grounded, certainly do matter.

The next chapter, by Mark Lichbach, examines the role of liberalism in modern conflict. He asks if conflict involving religious groups is inherently grounded in religion, as suggested by “religious determinists,” or whether it should be viewed as reflecting political and economic contention, as claimed by “religious epiphenomenonologists.” The question is of more than intellectual interest, since the resolution of conflict that arises from nationalist struggles or class conflict may depend on different conditions, and may be amenable to different strategies of resolution, than that of conflict that is based “purely” on religion. Specifically, Lichbach seeks to determine whether successful liberalism (a more secular culture, religious pluralism, thriving markets, and a democratic and globalized polity) serves to reduce the relative prevalence of religious conflict. To this end, he notes that success in mobilizing collective action, by attracting militants, may hamper success in collective bargaining. Power, Lichbach observes, requires compromise, which in turn can inhibit mobilization. He constructs a database of “Unarmed Civil Society Clashes” drawn from the *World Handbook of Political Indicators IV* data. These represent conflicts between non-state groups and institutions; conflicts involving state

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institutions or armed non-state actors such as terrorist groups are excluded. He subjects the data to both pooled and mixed effects logistic regressions, and concludes that liberalism does not mitigate contentious religious politics. After controlling for liberalism, the least violent clashes occur when secular actors target each other, while the most violent clashes entail religious actors targeting secular actors. The chapter concludes with the observation that societies can accommodate both modernity and religion. However, this can occur only when religion is recognized, respected, engaged, and negotiated, a situation best achieved by empowering religious moderates.

The relationship between religion and conflict is addressed in the chapter by Jonathan Fox. In the latter decades of the twentieth century social scientists largely focused on modernization and therefore anticipated the demise of religion as a pillar of conflict. The events of 9/11 were a game-changer. Systematic evidence reveals that religious conflicts are becoming more common. Fox identifies five ways in which religion relates to conflict. Threats to religious belief systems and to the collective identities that form around them may elicit a hostile defence. The rules of behavior embraced by many religions may lead to holy war, or to a lesser but nonetheless hostile response directed at those who might challenge them. Religion may be invoked to legitimize authoritarian regimes or liberation movements. Religious institutions may serve as a basis for mobilization. And, finally, religious identity as group affiliation may facilitate participation in collective action. Fox's review of empirical studies of religion and conflict concluded that religion is not a basic cause of ethnic conflict. Rather, the basic cause is separatism, with religion being an exacerbating factor. Fox notes a number of other variables that may intervene between religion and conflict, including the economic, political, and cultural factors. Religious conflicts tend to invite international intervention, and states tend to intervene on behalf of groups with whom they share affinities. Muslims appear to be overrepresented in conflicts, mostly with other Muslims. Fox concludes his chapter by noting that the systematic study of religion and conflict remains in its infancy. The complexity of conflict requires that religion be integrated with general theories, and that tools be developed to specify when and to what extent a conflict involves religious issues. He identifies the Religion and State (RAS) database as a means to this end.

The state and political authority constitute the next pillar of conflict to be examined. Keith Jagers' chapter reviews three state-centric theoretical perspectives on conflict: The *State autonomy* perspective reflects the extent to which state institutions are liberalized so as to regulate and manage domestic inequities. Essentially, this concerns the relationship between democracy and conflict. *State capacity* refers to the state's ability to organize and control people, materials, and territories – in other words, its infrastructural power. *Political opportunity* pertains to how the state provides avenues for grievance articulation and conflict resolution – what might be called regime openness. Together, the three perspectives address *why*, *how*, and *when* people rebel. Jagers' review concludes

that the state autonomy perspective has the least explanatory power. He notes the fragility of new democracies, and their vulnerability to social instability. This recalls Lichbach's reference to "thin democracies" in this volume, and also resonates with the observations of Grabosky in his chapter that rates of conventional crime tend to increase immediately after the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. In contrast, Jagers finds stronger support for the state capacity and political opportunity approaches. Economic development tends to inhibit conflict, as does the capacity of the state to raise taxes independent of economic development. Perhaps surprisingly, the size of a state's military apparatus is lacking in explanatory power. Jagger notes that state capacity theory suffers somewhat from problems of variable specification and operationalization. With regard to political opportunity, Jagers observes that semi-democratic regimes are at greater risk of violent political conflict. The overall relationship is curvilinear, described by an inverted Gleditsch and Ruggeri (2010) U-shape. Jagers concludes by inviting research that integrates the three theoretical perspectives.

The relationship between internal and external conflict, a pillar of conflict with a long social science history, is the focus of a chapter by Harvey Starr and Marc Simon. They – as does Wallenstein (chapter 14) – note that in recent years the most common form of conflict is that which occurs *within* states. Their discussion begins by outlining a number of similarities between external and internal conflict. It then moves to the authors' observations on how linkages between the two are formed. Finally, they consider how the study of conflict crosses these boundaries. Parties to conflict need to be aware of both the local and the wider implications of their intended courses of action. Dealing with a conflict at one level has implications for conflict at another level. At stake is their own legitimacy, at home and in the eyes of the international community. From this flows their capacity to mobilize support for their cause. The current term for this phenomenon is "two-level game." The authors describe their two-level simulation project, which explores how basic strategies (deterrence or co-optation of threats) and structural variables (system size, threat distributions, and alliance structures) affect the outcome of the two-level security problem. They conclude that bipolar systems were more stable, which seems entirely consistent with developments over the previous half-century. Hegemonic regimes fare best when they adopt a deterrence posture for external relations and a co-optation strategy domestically. In contrast, failing states are best able to avoid collapse by appealing to international allies for legitimacy or resources. Starr and Simon conclude with the caution that no single methodology can provide a definitive solution to the two-level game, and that conflict linkages will remain a fruitful area of research.

Environmental pillars of conflict have long been considered by conflict researchers. Climate change has been referred to as the great moral issue of our time, and as a serious threat to the national security of nations large and small. Theisen, Gleditsch, and Buhaug provide an overview of the scant literature on the subject, a literature that is certain to grow. Their chapter focuses on domestic

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conflict as it may be affected by short-term environmental change, including precipitation, rising sea levels, rising temperatures, and natural disasters (other than geological, which do not result from climate change). The authors conclude that the effects of climate change on violence are not direct, but rather mediated by factors such as food prices, economic development, and human population movements. In addition, they observe that the impact of climate change may be mitigated by the resilience of affected societies. They cite some support for the climate change–scarcity–conflict model. Findings relating to communal violence are inconclusive. Developing a better understanding of these links is a priority for researchers, as is attention to the differential impact or disaggregated effects of major climatic events. In addition, the authors see a need to differentiate between “new” conflicts, as opposed to those pre-existing conflicts that are prolonged by climate change. Given the absence thus far of conclusive findings, Theisen *et al.* note that overstating the effect of climate change on conflict may impair the credibility of climate change research in general. There are, after all, a number of other very compelling reasons to control global warming.

Grabosky’s chapter explores long-term trends in crime and violence, a topic addressed initially by historians and social theorists such as Norbert Elias (1939). Since the 1970s it has become the focus of inquiry by a diverse range of scholars, including criminologists, psychologists, political scientists, and even archaeologists. The chapter identifies research that has found significant effects of international conflict and civil war on rates of “conventional” criminal violence or “street crime.” The decline in human violence that has been observed for over three millennia, albeit punctuated by episodic temporary increases, has been attributed to what might be termed a “civilizing process,” reflecting a growing capacity for impulse control. Consistent with Lichbach’s observations in this volume, long-term trends and temporary departures there from can also be explained by the trajectories of stable and effective government, and to the legitimacy that tends to accompany them. Cross-sectional variation in crime has also been explained in part by variations in legitimacy. An interesting and transitory exception has been apparent in transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule, where, in settings as diverse as South Africa, Taiwan, and the former Soviet Union, the immediate aftermath of regime change was marked by increases in crime, which Lichbach would see as a reflection of Hobbes. Other cross-sectional studies have identified poverty and economic inequality to be predictors of crime, results that are consistent with the legitimacy hypothesis. Overall, findings at the aggregate level of analysis fit well with solid criminological evidence at the individual level.

Part Two, “Forms of Conflict,” begins with the study of terrorism. Scott Englund and Michael Stohl summarize and explore the more significant research to date on terrorism. They note that, for an issue as prominent as terrorism, the quantum of rigorous scientific research on the topic has been astonishingly small. By way of illustration, a meta-analysis of research on counter-terrorism strategies, conducted under the auspices of the Campbell Collaboration, identified over

20,000 studies but found only seven to be of sufficient methodological rigor for inclusion (Lum, Kennedy and Sherley 2006). The chapter provides an overview of available sources of data on terrorism and notes the lament of Sageman (2014) that research opportunities are constrained by the fact that significant amounts of potentially useful data are held by government agencies and are not accessible to researchers. Englund and Stohl base their essay on three themes originally articulated by Gurr: situation, structure, and disposition. By *situation*, they refer to the relationships and relative strengths of political opponents in a conflict. They note that weak states are at risk of being both the sources and the targets of transnational terrorist attacks. So too are democracies, by virtue of their openness. *Structure* represents the root causes of a conflict: in other words, “the economic and political structures that establish and constrain regime and citizen.” Englund and Stohl report that high unemployment, economic inequality, and social exclusion among heterogeneous groups increase the risk of terrorism. *Disposition* refers to individual perceptions regarding the acceptability of terrorism as a political strategy. The search for explanations based on abnormal psychology has proven to be fruitless. Rather, perceived persecution of one’s in-group, moral outrage at a major injustice, resonance with personal experiences, and mobilization by an active network are the factors that dispose one to terrorism. The chapter concludes with a caution against continued reliance on untested knowledge claims and a plea for the careful collection and analysis of data.

Colin Beck’s chapter on the study of revolutions reviews four generations of scholarship. The first comprised historians of revolution. The second explored aggregate social psychology, focusing on phenomena of mobilization. The third generation, in the tradition of Skocpol (1979), gave emphasis to the state and highlighted structural rather than psychological processes. More recently, scholars of revolution have begun to attend to internal economic strains on states as they are affected by international and transnational relationships. Beck’s synthesis of current knowledge predicts that revolutions are more likely to succeed when strained states, governed by inflexible regimes faced with broad alliances of opponents, fail to repress initial insurgent challenges. Looking to the future, Beck invites attention to non-violent regime change, such as that which characterized the demise of the former Soviet Union and (relatively speaking) the end of the Apartheid era in South Africa. Strategies of non-violence are more conducive to legitimacy, at both domestic and international levels. His observations resonate with those of Lichbach’s chapter in this volume, which speak to the instrumental value of non-violent social movements. Beck also notes the opportunities to investigate micro-mobilization, based on systematic surveys and interviews of participants in recent revolutions. Such methods allow demographic, attitudinal, and cultural insights that may have eluded previous scholars of revolution. Among the other issues identified by Beck as potentially fruitful for further inquiry are revolutionary aftermaths. When may a revolution be deemed to have ended, and with what effect, in both short and long terms? Beck’s invitation to “recapture the long

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tail of revolution” is exciting, if somewhat daunting. One is reminded of the response attributed to Chinese premier Zhou En-lai in 1972 when asked about the significance of the French Revolution: “It’s too early to say.”

The question of state failure has attracted considerable interest from both policy-makers and academicians since the end of the Cold War. In their chapter, Monty Marshall and Benjamin Cole review some of the conceptual and methodological issues that have accompanied this growing attention. They note that terms associated with state failure are often used loosely and interchangeably. Moreover, cause, correlation, and consequence are often confounded. The chapter addresses some of the criticisms that have been directed at the state failure research agenda. With some irony, they note that the very idea of a failed state is “West-centric” and that the West, overtly or covertly, has played a significant role in contributing to state fragility and failure in the first place. Failed states have concerned policy-makers because of their supposed vulnerability to exploitation as safe havens by transnational criminals and terrorist groups. However, the authors observe that states with limited infrastructure and low connectivity may be less at risk of such exploitation than are states that are weak, but still functioning. The State Failure Task Force was established by the US government in 1994 to study the correlates of state failure. One sees the influence of government in the relatively low profile this project has taken in the scholarly literature, and in the change of label to “Political Instability Task Force.” Marshall and Cole observe that general forecasting models of state weakness or failure are often less useful to policy-makers, relying as they do on proxy variables such as infant mortality rather than theoretically justified causal factors. The chapter concludes by noting the growing complexity of domestic political systems and of the world system more generally. The authors suggest that, given the dramatic increase in institutions of civil society, and in the greater salience of NGOs generally, complex social systems analysis can facilitate even greater insight regarding the fragility of states.

The practice of genocide has a gruesome historical pedigree, but the term did not exist until the waning months of World War II, when the Holocaust of European Jews became publicized. Armenians were quick to remind the world of their nation’s fate at the hands of Turkey during World War I, and, beginning in the 1980s, comparative genocide studies attracted increasing scholarly attention. Barbara Harff’s chapter begins with an essay on conceptual and terminological clarification. Genocide is systematic and intentional action, designed to destroy a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group. It can be perpetrated by non-state actors as well as by governments. The practice of genocide did not end with the Holocaust, and Harff herself has identified nearly fifty examples occurring since World War II. The scientific study of genocide has continued apace, and Harff’s chapter goes on to summarize recent research on the explanation and prediction of genocide. She observes that genocide has tended to occur in an atmosphere of exclusionary ideologies and in situations where states are habituated to the use of violence in response to challenges to state security.

Consistent with Black's (2011) general theory of social conflict, Harff also observes that genocides have tended to occur *inter alia* in the aftermath of state upheaval, including in circumstances of state failure, abrupt regime change, and defeat in international war. Harff identifies additional risk factors, including ethnic and religious cleavages, low economic development, and the lack of interdependent relations with other states. Lichbach, in his chapter, refers to such circumstances as "zones of political turmoil." Harff concludes with some observations on the development of early warning indicators, consistent with the work of Gurr and colleagues on minorities at risk. The chapter ends with a very timely, and equally ominous, observation about the prospects for Syria.

Globalization – the rapid movement across state boundaries of people, ideas, commerce, and much else – has brought about dramatic change in social movements concerning indigenous rights. Struggles that were previously confined to remote localities, limited to action and reaction between indigenous peoples and their governments, and barely visible (if at all) to the outside world, are now the subject of worldwide coverage in mass and social media, amplification by large and influential NGOs, and consideration in international governmental fora. The international system consists of networks that enhance, and those that threaten, the interests of indigenous peoples. To explore how these struggles impact indigenous peoples, and how the struggles of those people affect international and civil conflict, Pamela Martin and Franke Wilmer compare two Latin American countries. In Bolivia, the poorest country on the continent, 60 percent of the population is indigenous. Ecuador, slightly better off economically, has a slightly smaller proportion of indigenous citizens (45 percent). Both countries seek to protect indigenous rights and to honor the preference of some indigenous groups to be left alone. Problems arise, however, when these interests are threatened by pressures to develop natural resources. Tension thus exists in both countries between the fulfillment of spiritual and of material needs. Martin and Wilmer explore interesting circumstances arising in the new world system, where international human rights ideas and norms contribute to domestic political change and domestic mobilization affects international norms. Resistance to neoliberalism is not without risk, although Bolivia's nationalization of some natural resources and redistribution of wealth has proven popular with the electorate. The country's GDP has trebled during the tenure of its first indigenous president, Evo Morales, who has been elected on three occasions. The complexity of contending networks of indigenous interests and their neoliberal adversaries, globally and locally, is substantial. Whether the processes that have seen Latin American democracy born of conflict are reversible remains to be seen.

In the final form of conflict addressed in the volume, Peter Wallensteen reviews recent trends in the study of war and identifies potentially fruitful areas for research. He observes that the end of the Cold War produced a paradigm shift in conflict studies. No longer was local armed conflict viewed through the lens of great power confrontation. Rather than moves on a Cold War chessboard, such

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conflicts have come to be perceived as humanitarian issues. Research began to focus on the underlying importance of economics, identity, geography, and access to weaponry. Inter-state conflicts are now much less frequent, and are currently one-tenth as common as civil wars, which have become much more numerous. In seeking to explain the decline in inter-state war, Wallenstein observes a greater sensitivity to public sentiment on the part of leaders, both democratic and authoritarian. The spread of democracy and improvements in social welfare and in the status of women may be indicative, although the salience of these factors may be less in Asia than in Europe and North America. Accompanying these trends are varied and intensified efforts at preventing, containing, and resolving these conflicts. The ability of the international community to respond to conflicts, although still limited, has improved significantly. Wallenstein asks, as does Lichbach's chapter in this collection, whether such interventions may in some cases actually prolong conflict. Looking to the future, Wallenstein notes the rise in data resources and research programs relating to conflict, including the Correlates of War, Minorities at Risk, and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, among others. He also notes the growing interest in comparative interpersonal violence, discussed in Grabosky's contribution to this volume. His concluding observations encourage attention to the influence of external debt, and financial crises more generally, on conflict. Spatial analyses may also open up new fields of research on the location and spread of conflicts, as well as tactical aspects of peacekeeping.

The concluding chapter features a look to the future of conflict research by one of the most prominent conflict researchers of the past four decades, Ted Robert Gurr. The chapter charts a course for conflict studies into the future. Gurr suggests that quantitative empirical research and comparative case studies will remain rewarding strategies, as they are eminently complementary: findings in one genre may be tested in another. An appropriate division of labor will enhance both generalizability and understanding. Among the potentially fruitful programs of research that he identifies are comparative case studies of militant Islamic groups such as Islamic State, Taliban, Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram. Among the issues that these studies might address are ideology, sustainability, and processes of mobilization. Gurr's reference to new technologies of mobilization is certainly apposite; he cites journalist Abdel Bari Atwan's very recent book on the Islamic State subtitled *The Digital Caliphate*. This observation converges with Lichbach's discussion of the expansion of dissent, attributable in significant part to the widespread availability of digital technology.

Gurr points to another interesting research direction: the role of violent jihadist groups as institutions of governance. "Chaotically ungoverned regions" are naturally attractive to groups such as Islamic State. Despite the terror employed to establish control over such locations and their populations, they may provide a modicum of stability, exercising a degree of social control, conflict resolution, and providing basic regulatory services. Lichbach might observe that the weak pretensions of democracy

that characterize contemporary Afghanistan deliver less protection from fraud, crime, and corruption than do the Taliban in areas under their control.

Gurr concludes by observing that conflict scholarship will continue to evolve. New research questions, as yet unforeseen, will emerge. So too will methodologies and data sets. One notes that, a generation ago, scholars did not ponder the effects of climate change, or of digital technology, on political conflict.

One final note before proceeding: The combined bibliography for this book is quite extensive and thus has been posted as an online eResource on the book's web page.

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