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QUESTION

To what extent has democracy hindered the influence of government to ensure peace in Nigeria?

Democracy seems to catalyze the best and worst in our societies. Democratic transitions, such as when a country first introduces elections, [typically generate](http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1185&context=facpub) instability and can trigger violence. But we also know that the more democratic a country is, the [less likely it is to engage in conflict](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343313512852). This means that, while introducing democracy can generate short-term state fragility, the long-term benefits seem to outweigh the risks. All in all, democracy pays off.

As the world changes, however, so does the democracy-peace equation. According to a recent United Nations University [report](https://cpr.unu.edu/civil-war-trends-and-the-changing-nature-of-armed-conflict.html), in the past decade wars between states across the world have been decreasing. Yet wars within states are on the rise. Alas, these wars are also becoming deadlier, with a sixfold increase in battle deaths since 2011. Violence is also far likelier to return: 60 percent of conflicts in the early 2000s reemerged within five years. In short, internal conflicts are now more frequent, deadlier and more recurrent.

In emerging democracies, [weak institutions and political and economic exclusion](https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4389) stand out as important drivers of conflict. They fuel violent extremists and organized criminals, both of which present increasing challenges to conflict prevention. Violent extremists are particularly problematic because, even though they pursue political agendas, their radical tilt allows little space to negotiate realistic solutions.

Organized criminal networks, for their part, pursue financial agendas rather than political ones, making them immune to the kind of political avenues normally used to deal with traditional armed actors. Most worrisome, crime groups [thrive](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2013.787729?scroll=top&needAccess=true) in contexts of state fragility. Their talent for corruption, which they use to [buy elections](http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/protecting-politics-deterring-influence-organized-crime-elections) and [infiltrate political parties](http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/protecting-politics-deterring-influence-organized-crime-political-parties), further hollows out government institutions.

Today’s internal conflicts also complicate the story. Syria is a case in point. While the government and rebel groups are the ones officially fighting the war, the world’s great powers are also deeply involved. These international interests limit the reach that strengthening internal democratic institutions and processes can have to resolve the conflict.

The idea that democratic states have not fought and are not likely to fight interstate wars against each other runs counter to the realist and neorealist theoretical traditions that have dominated the field of international politics. Since the mid-1970s, the generation of new data and the development of superior analytical techniques have enabled evaluators of the idea to generate impressive empirical evidence in favor of the democratic peace proposition, which is reinforced by substantial theoretical elaboration. Some critics argue that common interests during the Cold War have been primarily responsible for peace among democracies, but both statistical evidence and intuitive arguments cast doubt on that contention. It has also been argued that transitions to democracy can make states war-prone, but that criticism too has been responded to persuasively. The diverse empirical evidence and developing theoretical bases that support the democratic peace proposition warrant confidence in its validity.