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## Implications of Youth Education on Intrastate Conflict: The Relevance of Postmaterialism

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# Implications of Youth Education on Intrastate Conflict: The Relevance of Postmaterialism

## Abstract

The concept of postmaterialism posits that individuals who are born in an economically and socially secure environment tend to be more open to changes in their societies and accepting of different values among individuals compared to those who are materialists (i.e., individuals who tend to value security, affluence, and strong law and order more in comparison to postmaterialists). Postmaterialism is associated with individuals who are more educated and have access to different educational opportunities, given the existence of economic stability in postmaterialist societies. Focusing on the role of postmaterialist values, I analyze the relationship between educational attainment among youths and the number of internal armed conflicts a country experiences. I find that there is a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment among youths and the number of internal armed conflicts a country experiences annually.

## Keywords

youth education, intrastate conflict, postmaterialism

## Disciplines

Comparative Politics | Education Policy | Peace and Conflict Studies

## Comments

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### **Abstract**

The concept of postmaterialism posits that individuals who are born in an economically and socially secure environment tend to be more open to changes in their societies and accepting of different values among individuals compared to those who are materialists (i.e., individuals who tend to value security, affluence, and strong law and order more in comparison to postmaterialists). Postmaterialism is associated with individuals who are more educated and have access to different educational opportunities, given the existence of economic stability in postmaterialist societies. Focusing on the role of postmaterialist values, I analyze the relationship between educational attainment among youths and the number of internal armed conflicts a country experiences. I find that there is a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment among youths and the number of internal armed conflicts a country experiences annually.

### **Introduction**

One of the underlying theories that I utilize throughout this research paper is the postmaterialist theory. This theory argues that people who can be characterized as postmaterialists are more likely to be economically secure and are more open to social changes and to outgroups. The literature review introduced later in this paper posits that because postmaterialists generally consist of people who are from younger generations and are economically/financially secure, they

likely are able to afford a variety of opportunities to enrich their educational experiences. Thus, under this conceptualization of the postmaterialist theory, I hypothesize that countries that have higher levels of education among youth are likely to be characterized by higher levels of postmaterialist values, which would then lead such countries to experience fewer cases of internal armed conflicts. I pose this argument on the basis that providing youth with various sources of education would expose them to postmaterialist values as well as increase their opportunity costs of joining (or being recruited by) rebel forces/groups to participate in internal armed conflicts; I expect these factors to lower the occurrence of internal armed conflicts in a given country.

In this research paper, I analyze and determine the relationship between educational attainment among youth and the number of internal armed conflicts. I propose the following central question: what is the relationship between educational attainment among the youth of a country and the number of internal armed conflicts that a country experiences? With this overarching research question in mind, I propose the following hypothesis: the higher the average number of years of education among a country's youth, the lower the number of annual internal armed conflicts there will be. The bivariate regression utilized in this research indicates that there is a negative and statistically significant relationship between the educational attainment among youth and the number of internal armed conflicts. I also run a multivariate regression, which includes the following control variables: (1) electoral democracy index, (2) real GDP at constant 2017 national prices, (3) economic globalization, and (4) women's political empowerment index. Even with the inclusion of these control variables in the regression, the result shows that the relationship between the educational attainment among youth and the number of internal armed conflicts stayed consistent with the result from the bivariate regression and is statistically significant.

The primary objective of this research paper is not to endorse or prove the implications of the postmaterialist theory in contemporary international affairs. Rather, this paper hopes to provide an insight into whether the spread of postmaterialist values has the capacity to impact the frequency of internal armed conflicts around the world. Political scientist Ronald Inglehart's concept of postmaterialism insists that postmaterialists tend to be more open and less hostile to outgroups. Thus, youths who have access to various educational opportunities, who may also be associated with postmaterialists, may be less likely to engage in violent internal armed conflicts, since they could become more open to outgroups and social changes through their educational experiences. There "have been literally hundreds of internal conflicts around the world—in countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe" (Toft 2021), so understanding whether educational attainment among youths can contribute to internal armed conflicts may be necessary to assist the studies that examine the motivations behind the armed conflicts.

I explore whether providing sufficient educational resources to people at a young age makes them perceive the world in a less biased manner and be exposed to different cultural and social values and ethics under the postmaterialist theory, which could potentially lead young people to abstain from engaging in internal armed conflicts and thus lead to peace within the nation. Internal armed conflicts can pose and be partly inflicted by the hostility between different political and militant groups within the nation, which can inflict a gridlock that limits the state's ability to pursue and implement different public policies, such as economic or trade policies. This gridlock could be a contributing factor to the nation's international diplomacy and economic interdependencies with other nations around the world. Thus, educational attainment among the youths can be an implicit factor in influencing the political economy at both domestic and international levels.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of Postmaterialism

The idea of postmaterialism was made prevalent in the field of political science by political scientist Ronald Inglehart. It is a term that is used to indicate the “intergenerational shift” in social and political values among people as developed democracies after World War II began to experience “unprecedentedly high level of existential security” (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443). This shift was more apparent as the younger populations began to get larger than the older populations, causing a “diminishing proportion of materialists and growing proportion of people with postmaterialist values” (Inglehart 2007, 3). In 1970, the youngest cohort of postmaterialists, who were in the age range of 18 to 25 years old at the time, “outnumbered” the cohort of materialists (Inglehart 2007, 3).

Postmaterialists are generally composed of younger generations and tend to be more open to changes in society and values and more tolerant towards outgroups in comparison to materialists, which typically include older generations who were born amid wartime or have experienced the economic and social impacts of wars. Thus, because of their experiences of economic insecurity and devastation, materialists tend to “value security and affluence” and seek a “stable economy, a strong defense, and law and order” (Marks 1997, 53). Materialists’ values also tend to be based on their self-interests, such as “maintaining” and protecting their economic and social security (Davis 2000, 456). Postmaterialists’ values, however, include “bringing greater emphasis on freedom of expression, environmental protection, gender equality, and tolerance of gays, handicapped people, and foreigners” and emphasizing “self-actualization and the aesthetic and intellectual aspects of life” (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443; Marks 1997, 53). The concept of postmaterialism also argues that individuals who are postmaterialists tend to “emerge from economic scarcity and are

socialized into more affluent and economically secure societies”, and their values are more dependent and focused on “non-economic concerns” (Davis 2000, 456). In general, materialists tend to be “concerned” about their economic well-being, while postmaterialists tend to take their economic well-being “for granted” and focus more on “‘quality of life’ issues” (Marks 1997, 53). Europe is one of the exemplary regions where postmaterialist values and concepts are present and relevant. According to Eurobarometer, which collects surveys and public opinions from the European Union, many of the “younger and more educated respondents were more likely to be classified as being in the postmaterialist group” (Theocharis 2011, 208). Given this analogy, youth that have higher levels of education in a country should have higher association with postmaterialist values, which suggests that countries characterized by higher levels of educated youth should expect lower occurrences of internal armed conflict. However, there are some scholars who assert that such a relationship is open to debate.

The separation between postmaterialists and materialists does not imply that they are simply divided into two distinct sides—that is, one should not assume that all postmaterialists will always collectively agree on all social, economic, or political issues, and such an analogy can also be applicable for materialist cohorts. Although Inglehart made the general assumption in his concept of postmaterialism that postmaterialists are “‘likely’ to identify ideologically with the left”, he never discounted the idea that postmaterialists can also align themselves ideologically with the right (Savage 1985, 432). Inglehart’s concept of postmaterialism does not place a heavy emphasis on postmaterialists on the ideological right-wing, but he has insisted that a “sort of convergence may take place” between postmaterialists from the ideological left and right (Savage 1985, 432). Thus, postmaterialists, regardless of whether they are associated with ideological left or right,

could engage in a sense of ‘convergence’ that could ultimately inflict lower number of armed conflicts in a given country in a given year.

One factor to keep in mind when examining the concept of postmaterialism is that it may be more associated with developed economies, rather than with developing economies. On topics like environmentalism, for example, the concept behind postmaterialism “does not allow for the expression of environmental concern in the less developed world” as it is more focused on the global North (Dunlap and York 2016, 532). In addition, the causes and impacts of interstate and intrastate wars within developed nations may be different from developing nations, which may raise questions regarding the consistency of the concept of postmaterialism. Also, the concepts behind materialist and postmaterialist values have been subjected to over-generalization. Specifically, a study by Kidd and Lee (1997) critiqued an analysis of the postmaterialist thesis from another study by Brechin and Kempton (1994), arguing that materialists have been “over-generalize[d]” in a way that they have been broadly associated with low- and middle-income countries, while postmaterialists have been associated with “advanced industrial societies” (Kidd and Lee 1997, 1-2).

#### Theoretical Correlation Between Youth Educational Attainment and Internal Armed Conflict

Ronald Inglehart’s concept of postmaterialism insists that postmaterialist values have been developing within the “politics of affluent societies” that are undergoing a “rising prosperity” among the population of younger cohorts who “had grown up in under secure conditions” (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443). These impacts triggered by the younger generation and rising economic stability are part of the “birth cohort effect”, which refers to the idea of younger cohorts from “secure” societies replacing older generations, and the “period effect”, which refers to the



idea of “people respond[ing] to current conditions” of their societies (Inglehart and Norris 2017, 443). In general, individuals who are able to afford extensive education are “more likely to come from a family that could provide them [with] economic security”, which has the tendency to increase their likelihood of being “more focused on post-material values” (Ugar-Cinar et al. 2020, 780). The basis of the postmaterialist theory affirms that postmaterialists tend to be “more tolerant” and “open” to social changes, and hence, they are more “likely to actively engage in non-violent protest” rather than violent protests that inflict internal armed conflicts (Rapp and Ackermann 2016, 571). If this is the case, then one should anticipate that youths who are more educated are likely to be postmaterialists and would be less likely to support violent intrastate and interstate conflicts, since they tend to be open to outgroups and changes in their economies.

A study by Abramson and Inglehart (1994) asserts that education can be a “key component of cognitive mobilization”, which is a mechanism that helps to determine “whether one has an opinion on a given subject” and “is likely to become involved in unconventional political action” (Abramson and Inglehart 813, 1994). An individual undergoing a variety of educational experiences is one of the ways in which he or she develops his or her “information level” and “cognitive skills” that contribute to his or her cognitive mobilization (Abramson and Inglehart 813, 1994). The study by Østby et al. (2018) bolsters this relationship by indicating that “increasing education levels in the population” could be beneficial in “reduc[ing] most forms of political violence” (Østby et al. 2018, 80). The postmaterialist theory primarily refers to postmaterialists as people, especially youths, who are born in an economically secure society (i.e. an affluent community), who then will be able to afford higher levels of education. Østby et al. (2018) insist that “areas with poor, uneducated people typically have less means of protection” and army and rebel leaders use such factors as an advantage to “target such destinations for recruitment” (Østby

et al. 2018, 77). Thus, this relationship helps to support the argument that education does matter in understanding the causes of internal armed conflicts, especially ones that are violent. A study by Thyne (2006) posits that educational investment, which could be utilized for increasing the educational attainments among the people (especially for youths), can “reduce grievances” as it has the ability to “create economic development and social equality” (Thyne 2006, 734). As a result, this effect ultimately contributes to “lower[ing] grievances that lead to civil war” (Thyne 2006, 734). With this study in mind, higher educational opportunities for youths should mean lower grievances among youth in a country, provided that education can help youth to adopt postmaterialist values, which, in turn, should lower the occurrences of internal armed conflicts in that country.

However, one must also acknowledge that educational attainment among youth does not always guarantee a reduction in the possibility of internal armed conflicts occurring in a given nation. This association was present in Nepal. A case study of the education system in Nepal by Pherali (2011) showed that children can develop violent behaviors at their schools at young ages, which can contribute to the onset of violent conflicts. Pherali (2011) argues that “physical punishment by teachers leads children to a ‘dislike’ of the school” and such “punishment reinforces rebellion, resistance, revenge, and resentment” (Pherali 2011, 145). Pherali (2011) also added that violence has become “customary” and “widely accepted” in the “nature of Nepali society”, with about one-third of the children in Nepal experiencing physical punishment at home during their time of educational experiences (Pherali 2011, 145). This relationship is consistent with data from another source. A 2006 joint report published by the Centre for Victims of Torture, Nepal, and the Education Journalists’ Group indicated that “82 percent of the students [who were] surveyed from 55 government and private schools in Nepal” had reported experiences of “their

teachers... beat[ing] them” (Gautam 2013). Even though this historical trend in Nepal’s education system should not be conflated with the education systems in other nations, nor be used as a sole basis for understanding the relationship between educational attainment among youths and internal armed conflicts, it provides an alternative perspective as to how youth education can be related to inflicting conflicts rather than reducing the possibility of conflicts occurring in a nation.

### Opportunity Costs of Participating in Internal Armed Conflicts Through Youth Education

If youths, under the postmaterialist theory, gain more education and become more aware of postmaterialist values, then they should have the tendency to be open to outgroups and avoid violent interactions with them, thus making them less likely to join internal armed conflicts. This relationship could then potentially increase their opportunity costs of joining rebel groups/forces to engage in such conflicts. However, the emerging literature on this topic has sparked divisiveness on whether more education among youth equates to higher opportunity costs of joining rebel groups to engage in internal armed conflicts. Therefore, it is difficult confidently to draw a conclusion as to whether such a relationship is valid.

The argument that more education among youth is correlated to increasing their opportunity costs of participating in internal armed conflicts was introduced in a study by Hoeffler (2011). Hoeffler insisted that “[m]en [are] more likely to participate [in rebellions] if they were poor and/or had low levels of education” (Hoeffler 278, 2011). Hoeffler also argued that people may engage in these rebellions by “addressing grievances”, which may include expressing the need for better public goods, such as educational opportunities, than turning that into a “loot-seeking” or a sense of ‘greed’ for private goods as those rebellions ensue (Hoeffler 276, 2011). Hoeffler’s arguments stay consistent with the idea that a lack of educational opportunities and

wealth contributes to lower education levels among the people in a nation, thus increasing their motivation to participate in internal armed conflicts. Therefore, if a country uses a policy measure to increase education among the people who are young on the basis/rule of postmaterialism, then those people should experience more educational opportunities, giving them more economic mobility to use their education to take part in jobs in the workforce that ensures their financial stability. In return, they should feel less motivated to engage in internal armed conflicts, since they may not experience a strong sense of 'grievance' or 'greed' to engage in a fight for more public or private goods. Arguments posed by Hoeffler have also been bolstered in her work with an economist named Paul Collier, in which they both argued that "raising the level of educational attainment, at particularly the secondary level, helps to pacify the society by raising the opportunity cost of young people joining rebel militia" (Agbor 2015, 164). One of the critical aspects of the arguments made by Hoeffler and Collier in their analysis is that it is hard to determine whether their arguments are applicable to all the developing and developed economies around the world since the quality of youth education can differ across the globe.

A study by Urdal (2004) is one of the research studies that seemed to counter the arguments made by Hoeffler and Collier. The study argues that even though education may be beneficial in "increas[ing] the value of a person's labor", it also raises that person's "expectation of a relatively high income" (Urdal 2004, 4). The study extended this argument by insisting that if a youth has higher expectations of income after obtaining higher levels of education, there can be a possibility of "educated youth experienc[ing] a greater gap between expectations and actual outcome if they face unemployment" (Urdal 2004, 4). In the case of Kenya, for example, "high expectations among educated urban youth" have inflicted "frustration and anti-state grievance" as the unemployment in the nation at the end of the 1980s began to "hit" them (Urdal 2004, 4). Moreover, when focusing

on the education system alone, if there is a “rapid expansion in access to higher education” in a country, it could result in a large number of highly educated youths that the “labor market is unable to absorb”, thus negatively affecting income prospects for graduates and perhaps pressuring those youth into internal armed conflicts (Apolte and Gerling 2018, 85). The study by Urdal (2004) also insisted that for youth with higher levels of education, it may be “more rational” for them to “take part in rebellion” in comparison to the “uneducated youth” (Urdal 2004, 4). However, the foregoing objection by Urdal does not imply that the study by Hoeffler (2011) should not be taken into account. Urdal’s argument that higher education among youth motivates them to have higher expectations about their employment and wealth can be tied to the idea and the definition of ‘greed’ posed by Hoeffler’s study, given that employment and wealth (e.g., finding jobs and earning income) may be more associated with private goods than public goods. In other words, Urdal’s argument that the educated youth can engage in internal armed conflicts if their country’s labor market is not able to absorb every one of them may be related to Hoeffler’s idea of ‘greed’, since it is the private entities (which is associated with private goods) that hire and provide them with income, not the education itself (which is associated with public goods). Therefore, Hoeffler’s argument on the idea that ‘greed’ contributes to the onset of internal armed conflicts is not inherently incorrect, but it is difficult to conclude with certainty that education is the sole factor that contributes to reducing the occurrence of internal armed conflicts in a country.

#### Integration of Postmaterialist Values/Perspectives in the Youth Education System

Inglehart contended that educational opportunities help youth to get exposed to postmaterialist values and principles. Specifically, Inglehart argued that “better educated people are postmaterialists because they are taught those values by their teachers” (Butovsky 2002, 474).

This may then become a contributing factor to developing the willingness among the youth to be more open-minded to diverse ideas on different topics, which may deter them from participating in a conflict or a hostility with the outgroups. The study by Inglehart et al. (2015) also posed that “recognition of... broader opportunities”, like improved opportunities for education, “increase people’s opportunities for self-realization” and that changes “people’s valuation of life”—that is, sentiments like “pro-choice and other emancipatory orientations” increase as educational opportunities in a country improve, “dwindl[ing]” the willingness of people to engage in conflicts (Inglehart et al. 2015, 419).

However, Inglehart’s argument was not necessarily applicable to all countries around the world. Inglehart’s argument envisions youth to be open to different social values and changes for the sake of promoting postmaterialism, but not every country operates its education system in that way. A study by Lim et al. (2021) insisted that in Malaysia and “other Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia”, citizens tend to “possess family and religion as preferable important values and view politics less favorably”, and such an effect was visible in their education system (Lim et al. 2021, 11). In other words, these citizens have specific areas of issues or topics that they value more than other topics, like politics. This could limit the areas of issues or topics that they could explore, which in return could minimize the efforts to promote postmaterialist values that could discourage them from participating in conflicts. A study by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) also provides an argument that objects to Inglehart’s argument on education and postmaterialism, but from a different angle than the one that the study by Lim et al. (2021) utilized. Bush and Saltarelli insist that education can become a “weapon in cultural repression”, rather than a tool that allows youths to explore different ideologies and postmaterialist values (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, 10). They argue that in the case of southern Sudan, where “missionary schools... were taken over by the state”

after their independence, “[s]chools became totally Arabized”, even though “Southern intelligentsia opposed to such Arabization” (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, 10). Because of such a shift in the education system, those “Southern intelligentsia” was forced to flee to nations like Uganda and Zaire where they could set up “counter movements” (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, 10). This evidence is antithetical to Inglehart’s argument of postmaterialism, as the case of southern Sudan illustrates that the education system in the nation has oppressed people and inflicted polarization, rather than constructing a sense of inclusivity that respects both ingroups and outgroups in southern Sudan. This sense of “social exclusion, violence, and indoctrination” can push schools to be utilized as “powerful weapons to produce rather than reduce violence” (Novelli and Lopez Cardozo 2008, 479). Moreover, in the case of the contemporary state of Indonesia, the study by Kurniawan (2018) posed that teachers in the nation tend to be more focused on the “technical” side of their students’ education as part of the “bureaucratic demands” and might be “ignoring the important aspect of... intercultural value[s]” and “alternative ideologies” that are related to postmaterialist values (Kurniawan 2018, 24). Given this phenomenon, even if education is available and easily accessible to the youths in a country, that may not necessarily mean that the education system itself will be responsible for teaching the values of postmaterialism to the youths.

Even though Inglehart’s argument that youth can be exposed to postmaterialist values through education can be contested, that does not mean that support for his argument is nonexistent. The study by Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem (2010) provided that people who enjoy “higher income levels are more accustomed to living in healthy environments” and “have beliefs that support environmental protection”, given that such characteristics are “attributed to the higher educational levels that wealthier people typically achieve” (Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem 2010, 134). This can be correlated to Inglehart’s argument, as postmaterialists generally tend to be

financially secure and can afford various educational opportunities. The study also argues that these people, as they obtain their educational experiences, get “exposed to a broad variety of beliefs and ideas”, which encourages them to have a “liberal-minded perspective on life” and “more pro-environmental attitudes” (Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem 2010, 134). Overall, Inglehart’s argument on the concept of postmaterialism may be somewhat debatable, as it may be more relevant to people from younger generations who are born in wealthy societies, rather than low-income/economically poor societies. Moreover, Inglehart’s idea that youth can be exposed to postmaterialist values as part of their education is still relevant but may not be the case for every nation in the world.

### **Explanation and Hypothesis**

I test the following hypothesis: the higher the average years of education among a country’s youth, the lower the number of annual internal armed conflicts there will be in that country. I argue that youth with higher levels of education will acquire more postmaterialist values, exposing them to different outgroups and social changes as they gain the opportunity to explore different cultures and ideologies through those educational opportunities. I also argue that education can also become a tool for increasing youths’ opportunity costs of participating in internal armed conflicts. Overall, these conditions/mechanisms should discourage violent internal armed conflicts with the outgroups and social changes that are inflicted within a given society/community.

Other variables in addition to the variable that accounts for educational attainment among youth will be considered to determine whether there are other factors that are correlated with the onset of internal armed conflicts in a given country. Thus, in the next section of the paper, I identify four different control variables that may help to determine whether there are any other underlying



factors within the relationship between educational attainment among a country's youth and the occurrences of internal armed conflicts that should be considered and their implications to the overarching hypothesis. These four variables are the following: (1) electoral democracy index, (2) real GDP at constant 2017 national prices, (3) economic globalization, and (4) women's political empowerment index. These variables will be utilized for the quantitative analyses.

### **Research Design, Data, and Methods**

I conduct a quantitative analysis using the 2022 Standard Time-Series Dataset from the Quality of Government Institute (QoG) at the University of Gothenburg. This dataset consists of approximately 2,100 different variables that provide data on the countries around the world from the years 1946 to 2021. The country-year is the unit of analysis. A total of 211 countries are included in this dataset, which consists of the 194 "current members of the United Nations (UN) as well as previous members" and 17 "historical" countries that "did not exist in 2014", such as Tibet and the USSR (QoG 2022). The variables in the dataset are the factors that measure 19 different "thematic categories", such as the quality of the government, conflict, environment, gender equality, health, political system, and labor market in the individual countries (QoG 2022). I have extracted the central explanatory variables, control variables, and a dependent variable from this data set to conduct quantitative analysis for my study. An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression has been deployed using statistical software Stata to conduct the analysis.

#### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable that I employ is *internal armed conflicts*, which is labeled as 'ucdp\_type3' in the QoG dataset. This variable measures the number of internal armed conflicts

each year, from 1946 to 2020, for a given country. Internal armed conflicts are measured as conflicts between a state and one or more internal opposition groups in a given country without any involvement from other states around the world. There was a total of 1,321 internal armed conflicts from 1946 to 2020 for 36 nations included in this variable. However, there are cases within the variable where a country did not experience an internal armed conflict in a given year, but they were not labeled with any values, instead of being labeled with zeroes. So, for this dataset, I replaced the total of 13,847 cells that did not have any values in this variable with zeroes. This data for this variable was collected by the Upsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

#### Central Explanatory Variable

The central explanatory variable that I employ in this study is the *educational attainment among the male population who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years*, which is labeled 'gea\_ea1524m' in the QoG dataset. This variable includes average years of education among the male population who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years from a given country in each year from 1970 to 2015. There are total of 187 nations that are included in this variable. However, this variable only accounts for the male population in the age group of 15 to 24 years, so I also use the *educational attainment among the female population who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years*, as a measure in a robustness test. Like the variable for the male population, the variable for the female population also accounts for average years of education among the female population who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years. I chose these variables as a way of measuring educational attainment among the youth over the years in a given country, as the United Nations, which is a supranational institution, defines youth as "those persons between the ages of 15 to 24 years",

although there is “no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group” (United Nations). Both variables are collected by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

#### Control Variables/Other Independent Variables

I also include control variables in this study to determine if they have any noticeable impacts on the analysis of my hypothesis. The first control variable that I include in this study is the *electoral democracy index*, which is labeled ‘vdem\_polyarchy’ in the QoG dataset. This variable measures the electoral democracy across the 173 nations in the world from 1946 to 2020. This variable considers the extent to which the given country has achieved electoral democracy. Electoral democracy refers to a type of democracy that “seeks to embody the core value of making rulers responsible to citizens”, such as allowing “political and civil society organizations... [in a given nation to] operate freely” (QoG 2022). Each case in this variable is measured on a scale from 0 (low electoral democracy) to 1 (high electoral democracy), according to Varieties of Democracy, which is the original source of the data for this variable (Varieties of Democracy 2022). Democracy, at the macroscopic level, is perceived as “a system for peaceful resolution of conflicts”, given that “conflicting claims by rival social groups are solved by majority votes or consensual agreements” (Hegre 2014, 162). Thus, I argue that if youths that have high educational attainment are more likely to be postmaterialists, the electoral democracy within their country may also be a contributing factor to the changes in the occurrences of internal armed conflicts, since they may be more willing to compromise with the others if they are more open to outgroups. In other words, since postmaterialist theory insists that postmaterialists, which refers to people that are born in affluent societies and able to afford high levels of education, tend to be more open to outgroups, democracy should theoretically be an important factor in resolving conflict through a consensus of votes and compromises. Thus, democracy could help to open a path for a nonviolent means of

resolving a conflict in a given country. In general, democracy has been “believed to fulfill the human right to political participation” (Thoms and Ron 2007, 698). However, on the other hand, democratization “may increase conflict risk” as democratic regime or a regime that is in a progress of becoming democratic “cannot easily use repression” since “state’s enforcement apparatus becomes weaker as its activities become more transparent”, posing a challenge towards the state when they deal with or work to “root out” the oppositions (Thoms and Ron 2007, 703).

I also include a second control variable that measures the *real GDP of a given country at constant 2017 national prices (in 2017 U.S. dollars)*, labeled ‘pwt\_rgdg’ in the dataset. This variable is collected by Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer and it provides the data for the years 1950 to 2019 for 171 nations. Because this variable had a relatively high dispersion/wide range of numbers, I take the natural logarithm to condense its range. A study by Collier and Hoeffler (2002) insists that in regions like Africa, for example, lower per capita income and slower growth of GDP “directly and substantially increase the risk of conflict” (Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 22). With this relationship, I argue that the risk of conflict could potentially decrease with higher levels of GDP, which is contrary to the relationship posited by Collier and Hoeffler. I seek to determine whether higher or lower levels of GDP affects my core hypothesis. I argue that higher levels of GDP, which should facilitate consumption by the people in a country’s economy, could have a relationship with internal armed conflicts.

Another variable that I seek to address in my analysis is the level of *economic globalization* of a country, which was originally sourced from the KOF Swiss Economic Institute and is labeled ‘dr\_eg’ in the QoG dataset. This is measured on a scale of 1 (least economically globalized) to 100 (most economically globalized). This variable takes trade flows and financial flows from the years 1970 to 2018 within a given country into account. A study by Blanton and Apodaca (2007) argued

that economic “globalization increases the prospective opportunity costs of violent conflict” (Blanton and Apodaca 2007, 599). If this is the case, then the more economically globalized a country is, the chances of internal armed conflicts occurring should be lower than the countries that are less economically globalized. Therefore, I seek to understand whether such a variable can inflict a spurious relationship between youth educational attainment and the occurrences of internal armed conflicts.

The last variable I employ is the *women political empowerment index*, which is labeled as ‘vdem\_gender’ in the QoG dataset. This variable measures how politically empowered women are in a given country. The data for the variable has been collected by the Varieties of Democracy. This variable includes data from 173 nations from the years 1946 to 2020, and it is measured on a scale of 0 (low political empowerment for women) to 1 (high political empowerment for women). The general assumption that is made by the policymakers emphasizes that “women’s empowerment is key to peace”; I put that to the test with the other variables to determine whether it has any impact on my results (Dahlum and Oslo 2020, 879).

### Research Methodology

In this research, I first conduct a bivariate regression analysis for the central explanatory variable, which is the educational attainment among youths in a given country, and the dependent variable, which is the number of internal armed conflicts in a given country. This will provide a first test of my hypothesis before taking any control variables to account. Next, I conduct a multivariate/multiple regression analysis, including the control/independent to determine if they pose any effects on the relationship between the educational attainment among youths and the number of internal armed conflicts in a given country. Also, I conducted each of the bivariate and

multivariate regressions twice, as the variable that shows educational attainment among youth is broken into 2 variables that separate male and female populations. Due to the nature of some of the variables measuring different ranges of years, the years covered by my regression analyses are 1970 to 2015.

## Results and Analysis

**Table 1: Educational Attainment Among Youth (Male) and Internal Armed Conflicts, 1970-2015**

Educational Attainment (15-24 years, Male).	-0.032*** (0.003)
Constant	0.476*** (0.023)
Observations	7,740
R-squared	0.016

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Table 2: Educational Attainment Among Youth (Female) and Internal Armed Conflicts, 1970-2015**

Educational Attainment (15-24 years, Female).	-0.030*** (0.002)
Constant	0.451*** (0.019)
Observations	7,740
R-squared	0.020

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.

Tables 1 and 2 present the bivariate regression results for the relationship between educational attainment among youth and the number of internal armed conflicts. The results were relatively similar for both male and female populations. Table 1, which focuses on the educational attainment among male youth, illustrates that, on average, for every one-unit

increase in the educational attainment among the male youth who are in an age group of 15 to 24 years in a given country, there is a decrease of 0.032 units in the number of internal armed conflicts in that country. This bivariate relationship was statistically significant, as the p-value for the relationship was below 0.001. A similar result has been presented in Table 2, which measures the exact same relationship as it did in Table 1, but with the female population. Table 2 shows that on average, for every one-unit increase in the educational attainment among the female youth who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years in a given country, there is a decrease of 0.030 units in the number of internal armed conflicts in that country. This relationship was also statistically significant, similar to what was concluded in Table 1, as the p-value for the relationship was below 0.001. These results are congruent with the studies from Østby et al. (2018) and Thyne (2006), in which they argued that increasing education within a population could be beneficial in reducing political violence by reducing the grievances among the people that contribute to the onset of internal armed conflicts. Moreover, regression results presented in Table 1 and Table 2 were also consistent with Inglehart's argument of better-educated people being correlated to postmaterialists and his idea of higher education among the people contributing to a build-up of 'emancipatory orientations' that help to diminish the willingness of such people to engage in conflicts. Specifically, this argument was presented in the study by Inglehart et al. (2015), and Table 1 and Table 2 indicate a sense of confidence that validates his argument.

**Table 3: Educational Attainment Among Youth (Male) and Internal Armed Conflicts, 1970-2015 (with Control Variables)**

<b>Educational Attainment (15-24 years, Male).</b>	-0.017** (0.006)
<b>Electoral Democracy Index</b>	0.198** (0.060)
<b>Real GDP at Constant 2017 National Prices (in mil. 2017US\$) <small>natural log</small></b>	0.092*** (0.006)
<b>Economic Globalization</b>	-0.007*** (0.001)
<b>Women Political Empowerment Index</b>	-0.686*** (0.083)
<b>Constant</b>	0.066 (0.062)
Observations	6,631
R-squared	0.093

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Table 4: Educational Attainment Among Youth (Female) and Internal Armed Conflicts, 1970-2015 (with Control Variables)**

<b>Educational Attainment (15-24 years, Female).</b>	-0.016** (0.005)
<b>Electoral Democracy Index</b>	0.200** (0.059)
<b>Real GDP at Constant 2017 National Prices (in mil. 2017US\$) <small>natural log</small></b>	0.091*** (0.005)
<b>Economic Globalization</b>	-0.007*** (0.001)
<b>Women Political Empowerment Index</b>	-0.672*** (0.083)
<b>Constant</b>	0.039 (0.064)
Observations	6,631
R-squared	0.093

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.



For the multivariate regressions that were conducted with the control variables, Tables 3 and 4 show that the results were not significantly different from the bivariate regression results from Table 1 and Table 2. Table 3 illustrates the relationship between educational attainment among the male youth and internal armed conflicts while using the electoral democracy index, real GDP, economic globalization, and women's political empowerment index as control variables. From this, we see that for every one-unit increase in educational attainment among male youth who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years in a country, the number of internal armed conflicts in that country decreases by 0.017 units. This relationship was statistically significant, as the p-values for each variable were below 0.05. However, Table 3 also indicates that there were other variables that seemed to have a greater impact on the occurrences of internal armed conflict. For example, in Table 3, the women's political empowerment index had a coefficient of -0.686—that is, on average, for every one-unit increase in the women's political empowerment index, the occurrences of internal armed conflicts decrease by 0.686, when electoral democracy index, real GDP, economic globalization, and educational attainment among the male population who were in the age group of 15 to 24 years were held as control variables.

Table 4 illustrates multiple regression for the same variables that are included in Table 3, but it utilizes the educational attainment among the female youth instead. Table 3 also shows that on average, for every one-unit increase in educational attainment among the female youth, the occurrences of internal armed conflicts decrease by 0.016 units, when electoral democracy index, real GDP, economic globalization, and educational attainment were held as control variables. Similar to what was found in Table 3, the variable that includes the women's political empowerment index in Table 4 had higher coefficient than the variable that accounts for educational attainment among female youth who are in the age group of 15 to 24 years. In Table

4, the regression result illustrated that on average, when electoral democracy index, real GDP, economic globalization, and educational attainment among the male population who were in the age group of 15 to 24 years were held as control variables, the occurrences of internal armed conflict decrease by 0.672 units for every one-unit increase in women's political empowerment index.

In addition to bivariate regression results in Table 1 and Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 presented changes in the coefficients for educational attainment among female and male youth when control variables were considered as part of the multivariate regression analysis. The coefficients for educational attainments among female and male youth both increased in Table 3 and Table 4, in comparison to the coefficients for said variables in Table 1 and Table 2. The coefficient for educational attainment among male youth increased from -0.032 in Table 1 to -0.017 in Table 2, while the coefficient for educational attainment among female youth increased from -0.030 in Table 2 to -0.016 in Table 4. For the most part, the numerical changes were similar for both genders. These changes help to visualize that the additions of control variables to the regression were in fact influencing the coefficients for educational attainment for both female youth and male youth. In other words, the addition of control variables contributed to slightly weakening the relationship between educational attainment among a country's youth and the number of internal armed conflicts in that country.

The results that were found in the regressions suggest that although policy changes in education for youth may be beneficial in developing postmaterialist sentiments among the younger generation that may contribute to reducing the onsets of internal armed conflicts, there are also other factors to take into account as well. More specifically, the multiple regression results in Table 3 and Table 4 indicate that there were other variables besides the central explanatory variable that

had noticeable correlations/relationships with the onsets of internal armed conflicts. For example, simultaneously emphasizing policy changes on increasing educational opportunities for the youth and political empowerment for women may be critical in discouraging the youth from engaging in armed conflicts. These efforts may also come with opening opportunities for youth to engage in policymaking and electing their leaders through electoral democracy, as the electoral democracy index was a statistically significant variable in the regression results shown in both Table 3 and Table 4. However, expanding educational opportunities for the youth still remains as a critical variable, as societies can utilize “some variety of education in the form of socialization” (Apergis 59, 2018). These societies then can have members that “share common interests” and maintain a sense of “freedom” that helps them to “interact with other societies” (Apergis 59, 2018). Thus, promoting education “can be important for democracy development” (Apergis 59, 2018). Therefore, this perspective supports and is related to the postmaterialist theory, given that the theory posits that people who have higher education tend to be postmaterialists who tend to be open to outgroups and social changes. Thus, in correlation to the study by Apergis (2018) and the postmaterialist theory, education could potentially be a contributing factor that promotes democratic societies that allow for consensus on diverse viewpoints and voices on different issues, which in turn, can be beneficial in limiting the onsets of internal armed conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

In this research, I explored the relationship between educational attainment among a country’s youth and the occurrences of internal armed conflicts. With this objective in mind, I hypothesized the following: the higher the average years of education among a country’s youth (i.e., educational attainment among the youth), the lower the number of annual internal armed

conflicts there will be. This hypothesis was undergirded by the postmaterialist theory, which posits that postmaterialists are people who are born in affluent societies and more open to social changes and outgroups, in comparison to materialists. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, youth who are able to obtain higher levels of education in a given country should be postmaterialists. As these youth in a country develop postmaterialist values by gaining more education, the number of internal armed conflicts should decrease, as they tend to be more receptive to outgroups than materialists.

With this reasoning in mind, I conducted bivariate and multivariate regressions to test the hypothesis. In both bivariate and multivariate regressions, even with the inclusion of the control variables, there was a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment among both female and male youths and the occurrences of internal armed conflicts—that is, the results from the regressions indicate that an increase in education attainment among the youth was correlated with a decrease in the occurrences of annual internal armed conflicts. However, one should keep in mind that such a correlation does not imply causation. Although the results from the regressions do not explicitly prove that Inglehart's concept of postmaterialism as a basis of understanding how youths in a country that have higher levels of education may be correlated to reductions in the occurrences of internal armed conflicts, it still provides potential ideas for underlying factors that may help to better understand such a correlation.

One area that needs further research effort is determining whether educational attainment among the youth in developing countries significantly differs from developed countries, perhaps by conducting separate studies on the global North and the global South and analyzing its implications on internal armed conflicts that a given country faces on a given year. In order to conduct such a study, there may be a need to collect separate data for the countries in the global

North and the global South on such a relationship. Another area that may need further study is how relevant the postmaterialist theory is in developing countries in comparison to the developed countries, given that the concept of postmaterialism that was deployed in this research is utilized at a macroscopic/an aggregate level, rather than applying it separately to developing and developed nations around the world. Moreover, the QoG dataset that was used for this research had a limited amount of data for the variable that specifically relates to postmaterialism, so it had to be excluded from the quantitative analyses. Thus, expanding data collection on postmaterialism around the globe may help to better understand the relevance of postmaterialist theory in both developed and developing economies.

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