

# Ethnicity, Cleavages and Conflict

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# Summary of lecture

- Main question: Do ethnic cleavages matter for conflict, and how?
- Main point: Ethnic cleavages matter in combination with *relative inequality* between groups
- Overview of lecture:
  - 1. Context and conventional wisdom
  - 2. Concepts
  - 3. Research questions and popular theories
  - 4. What do the empirics say?:
    - Country-level studies (the 'sceptics')
    - Group-level studies (against the 'sceptics')
    - Micro-level research
  - 5. Summary and discussion

## Context

- A very popular claim that ethnic cleavages generate internal armed conflict
  - Very popular in the 1990s (Bosnia, Rwanda etc.)
  - Robert D. Kaplan's 'The Coming Anarchy' article, 1993
  - Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations'
  - Still extremely widespread (e.g right-wing immigration sceptics in Norway)
- Main ideas:
  - a) Many conflicts are driven by 'ancient hatreds' between groups →
  - b) ethnic cleavages generate inter-group antagonisms →
  - c) ethnic heterogeneity will lead to conflict
- This lecture will show that these claims must either be:
  - Rejected, or (more likely)...
  - qualified: Ethnic cleavages matter in *combination* with political and economic context

## Concepts: Ethnic group

- What is ethnicity?
- What is an ethnic group?
- First, an ethnic group needs a common *marker*
  
- Second, a group needs a common *identity*

## Concepts: Ethnic group

- What is ethnicity?
- What is an ethnic group?
- First, an ethnic group needs a common *marker*
  - Religion (i.e Alawites in Syria)
  - Language (i.e French-Quebequouis in Canada)
  - Common origin or nationality (i.e Indians in South Africa)
- Second, a group needs a common *identity*
  - The members of the group must actively identify themselves as members
  - Shared sense of belonging to that group
  - Often also common narratives relating to history etc.
  - Ethnic groups are “imagined communities” (e.g Benedict Anderson) (BUT, not epistemically subjective! Ethnic groups *exist*)
  - External attribution is often also mentioned (others must also identify the group as a group)

## Concepts: Ethnic conflict

- What constitutes ethnic *conflict*?
- The definition most of the studies stick to:
  - 'Internal conflict between a government and an organized internal challenger (Uppsala definition!) in which the challenger is defined (and defines itself) along ethnic lines.'
- Another common definition (from the MAR project)
  - 'episodes of violent conflict between governments and national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which the challengers seek major changes in their status'

# Why ethnic conflict: ancient hatred and the security dilemma

- Why do groups fight? ('onset' of conflict)
  - 1 Ancient hatreds (Kaplan)
    - Historical rivalries,
    - Retribution and revenge
    - Almost tautological!
  - 2 Security dilemmas (Posen)
    - Since groups (where the state is weak or predatory) cannot be sure that other groups are benign, and vice versa
    - This leads to a security dilemma where groups attack each other pre-emptively (offense is the best defense)

# Why ethnic conflict: the state and relative deprivation

## 3 State institutions

- The Lijphart-Horowitz debate
- Lijphart: Majoritarian 'winner-take-all' institutions lead to ethnic conflict
- Horowitz: Lijphartian power sharing institutions 'reify' and harden ethnic cleavages, leading to more conflict
- Note: Przeworski's argument about the fundamental un-democratic nature of power sharing

## 4 Relative deprivation (Gurr)

- 'Why Men Rebel'
- Frustrations relating to *relative deprivation* generate conflict
- Relative deprivation: a discrepancy between 'the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled' and the 'goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them'.
- This is the most developed theoretical framework



## Why ethnic conflict: opportunity and feasibility

- Opposing framework: Opportunity theory ('ethnic-grievance skepticism')
- Tilly (and Skocpol): Grievances are ubiquitous – what is needed is a minimum level of resources and organization
  - Ethnic (and other) antagonisms are endemic, *opportunities* for conflict are not
  - Ethnic grievances not important
  - Focus on economic *opportunities* for conflict (e.g Collier and Hoeffler 2004) or *feasibility* (e.g Fearon and Laitin 2003)



## Three 'waves' of research

- 1 The skeptics:
  - Seminal studies (on armed conflict) are Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin (2003)
  - Country-level studies, looking at civil conflict
  - Using Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (ELF) as a measure of country-level ethnic heterogeneity
  - General finding: Ethnic heterogeneity does not increase risk of civil war
- 2 The horizontal-inequality wave:
  - Østby (2008), and Cederman and colleagues
  - Finds that *substantive* inequalities (political and economic) between groups lead to more conflict
  - Most research here is at the group level, using the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset
- 3 Micro-research
  - For example the contributions of Lyall on the syllabus
  - Less interested in *whether* ethnic grievances matter, and more in *how* they matter

## Empirical Research: The skeptics

**Figure:** A prominent representative of “grievance-skepticism”: Professor Paul Collier



## Empirical research: The skeptics

- The skeptics
  - Use the ELF, which measures the: 'probability that two randomly drawn individuals in a country are from different ethnolinguistic groups' (Fearon and Laitin, 2003, p.78)
  - FL and CH find no statistically significant effects of ELF on civil war
  - But, CH find an effect of 'Ethnic dominance' (i.e one group being in a majority)
  - Some studies using alternative fractionalization measures are less skeptical (e.g Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005)
  - The 'take home point' in the wake of FL and CH is that ethnic cleavages matter less than what is commonly believed

# Empirical Research: The skeptics

Figure: New York Times coverage of Fearon and Laitin

The New York Times Magazine

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## What Really Causes Civil War?



Sierra Leone, 2003. Patrolling the border with Liberia, trying to ward off rebel attacks.  
By GARY J. BASS  
Published August 13, 2006

The commonplace assumption that a more homogeneous society is a more peaceful society certainly sounds reasonable. Surely monoethnic Japan should have an easier time maintaining domestic order than Indonesia; or Slovenia than Macedonia. After all, in a country with numerous ethnic or religious groups, politicians are easily tempted to organize factions along group lines — which can lead to rising tensions and even civil war or the collapse of the state. In 1938, Benito Mussolini warned, “If Czechoslovakia finds herself today in what might be called a

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# Empirical research: The horizontal inequality wave

- The horizontal inequality wave
  - Argues against looking at ELF at the country-level
  - Not enough to count number of ethnic groups!
  - We should look at substantive (economic and political) *inequalities* between groups
  - The book on the syllabus sums up a large body of this research
  - Note: two crucial recent papers:
    - Cederman, Wimmer and Min 2010: 'Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?'
    - Cederman, Weidmann, Gleditsch 2011: 'Horizontal Inequalities and Ethno-Nationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison'

## Empirical research: The horizontal inequality wave

- Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?
- Core question: Does political exclusion/inclusion increase the risk of ethnic conflict
  - Introduces the EPR dataset
  - Codes all 'politically relevant' ethnic groups in the world, 1946-2005.
  - Rely on theories of relative deprivation
  - The 'polity model':
    - A government versus several contenders
    - Excluded versus included groups

# Empirical research: Why do Ethnic groups Rebel?

Figure: Cederman, Wimmer and Min's Polity model

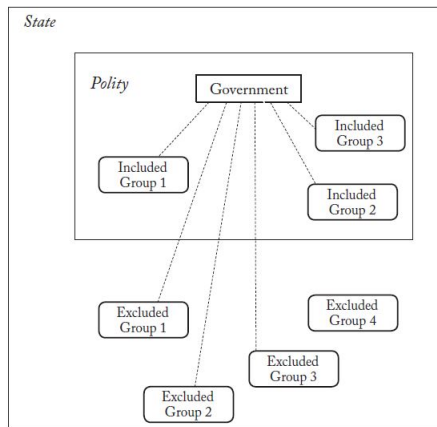


FIGURE 1

THE POLITY MODEL WITH INCLUDED AND EXCLUDED ETHNIC GROUPS



# Empirical research: Why do Ethnic groups Rebel

- Independent variables:
  - Political exclusion (not being included in government, or regional autonomy)
  - Political 'downgrading'
- Dependent variable:
  - Ethnic Armed Conflict onset: UCDP internal conflicts, where challenger "pursued ethnonationalist aim"

# Empirical Research: Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?

Figure: Findings in Cederman and colleagues

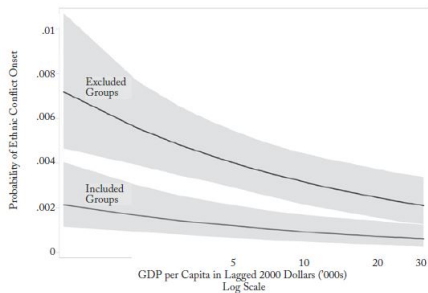


FIGURE 2  
THE EFFECT OF GDP PER CAPITA ON ETHNIC GROUPS'  
CONFLICT PROPENSITY<sup>a</sup>

# Empirical Research: Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?

Figure: Findings in Cederman and colleagues

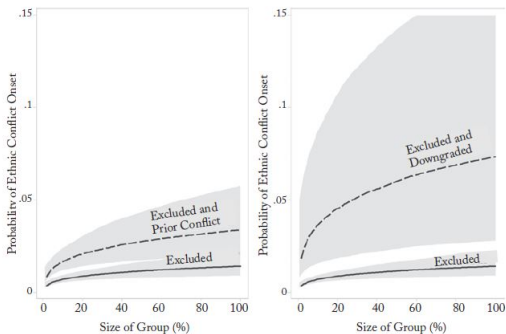


FIGURE 3  
THE EFFECT OF EXCLUDED ETHNIC GROUPS' SIZE ON THEIR  
CONFLICT PROPENSITY\*

## From countries to groups

- Cederman and colleagues show that politically excluded groups are more prone to conflict
- And that groups who lose power are also more likely to rebel
- Discussion:
  - The 'politically relevant ethnic group' criterion
  - The dependent 'ethnic conflict' variable
  - Coding 'power status'
  - The endogeneity of inclusion/exclusion (this is affected by conflict-potential!)

## From countries to groups

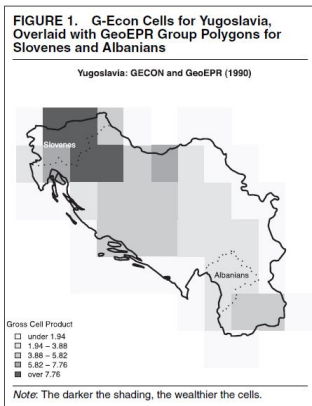
- Core question: Does economic inequality between groups lead to conflict?
- They look at horizontal inequality (overlapping cleavages in Rokkan's terminology)
- Test a 'grievance' argument: Relative inequality between groups lead to conflict

# From countries to groups

- How do they measure group-level wealth?
  - Use GIS
  - Combine information about *where* groups reside, with geographical estimates of local economic activity
- Dependent variable: Ethnic Armed conflict between a group and the state
- Independent variables:
  - The ration between the GDPpc of the given group from the average GDPpc in the country
  - One variable measuring this ratio when it is lower than the average
  - Another capturing this variable when it is higher

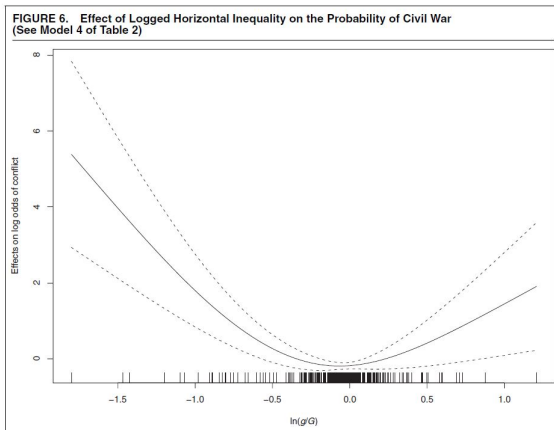
# From countries to groups

**Figure:** Combining Spatial Wealth Estimates with The Location of Ethnic Groups



# From countries to groups

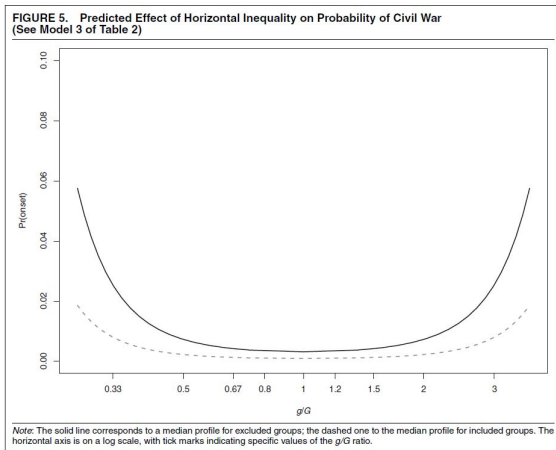
Figure: What Cederman et.al Find: Horizontal inequality





# From countries to groups

Figure: What Cederman et.al Find: Inequality and exclusion



# From countries to groups

- Cederman and colleagues find that groups that are poorer or richer than country average are more prone to rebel
- Discussion:
  - This shows strong support for 'grievance explanations'
  - Potential measurement problems?
  - Causal mechanisms

## Empirical research: Micro-studies

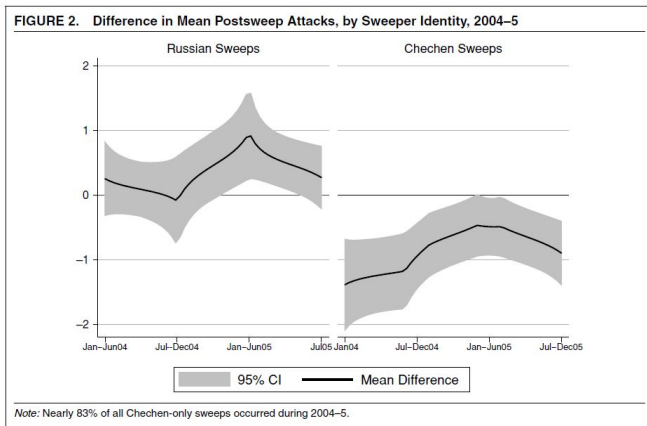
- In addition to country- or group-level studies, there has also been a surge of micro-studies
- These look at mechanisms, and ask *how* ethnicity matters, not just whether it matters at the macro level
- Research questions in micro-literature:
  - Where does ethnic violence occur?
  - Mobilization/coordination within ethnic groups
  - Ethnic collaboration/defection
- Two examples:
  - Lyall 2010, "Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War.'
  - See also: Weidmann 2011, 'Violence 'from above' or 'from below'? The Role of Ethnicity in Bosnia's Civil War.'

## Empirical research: Micro-studies, Lyall 2010

- Lyall, 2010
- Core question: Are ethnic insurgents more effectively fought by members of the same ethnic group
- Case: The Russian war in Chechnya, 2000-2005
- Points:
  - Finds that Pro-Russian chechens are better at conducting 'sweep' operations in insurgent villages in Chechnya (2000-5).
  - Argues that members of same ethnic groups have information advantage when it comes to identifying insurgents

# Empirical research: Micro-studies, Lyall 2010

Figure: Findings from Lyall, 2010



## Empirical research: Micro-studies, Lyall 2010

- Why should co-ethnics be more effective counterinsurgents?
- Lyall suggests a number of mechanisms:
  - ① Because Chechens are more likely to cooperate with co-ethnics?
    - Unlikely, since these are seen as traitors
  - ② Chechen tactics more effective?
    - Chechen units for example use kidnapping more often
    - But, problematic since these tactics have no effect in the data
  - ③ Being of the same ethnicity as the insurgents reduces uncertainty
    - Co-ethnics can access existing social networks more easily, to obtain information
    - Co-ethnics can find who they are looking for more easily
  - ④ 'To catch a thief' mechanism: Prior rebel experience
    - Pro-Russian Chechens more likely to have previously been insurgents
    - They know the insurgents better
    - A comparison of defector versus non-defector units speaks against this mechanism

## Summary: Where are we now?

- Summary: What do we know about ethnic cleavages and conflict?
  - Ethnic heterogeneity might not matter much *in itself*
  - Ethnic cleavages matter in combination with horizontal inequalities
  - Groups that are somehow aggrieved are more likely to rebel
  - This supports the “grievance explanation” for conflict
  - Denny and Walter present arguments for why cleavages that are *ethnic* are so potent
  - The emerging micro-literature can tell us more about mechanisms

## What next?

- We know more about *correlations*, less about *causality*
- Huge endogeneity problems, almost never dealt with
- Ethnic groups are treated as ‘black boxes’
- Ethnicity treated as ‘static’
- More work needed to establish mechanisms
- We know little about what drives horizontal inequality