

# Causes of Civil War

Political Violence CDSn4002

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# Multiple causal explanations of civil war

- Does ethnic hatred/ nationalism/national identity cause civil war?
- Do natural resources cause civil war?
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- Does climate change cause civil war?
- Does gender inequality cause civil war?

# Motive and Opportunity

- what are the circumstances that lead to the outbreak of civil wars?
- both **motive** and **opportunity** need to be considered
- explanations that emphasize **motive** argue that rebellion occurs when **grievances** are sufficiently acute that people "want" to engage in violent protest
- *ethnic or religious hatred*
- *political repression*
- *political exclusion, and*
- *economic inequality*

# Motive/Grievances

- inequality plays a central role in classical theories of conflict
- revolutions were theorized to take place when there is a gap between individual expectations and actual economic status
- the relative deprivation theory:
- various types of inequality increase the risk of violent conflicts through frustrated expectations: **HOW?**
- Gurr: ethnic grievances → ethnic mobilization -→ collective violence

# Opportunity/"Greed"

- points to the ubiquity of frustration around the world
- assert that this very fact deprives the theory of any explanatory value
- "all societies may have groups with exaggerated grievances, i.e. motive would not explain the incidence of rebellion"
- it is the context, i.e. the availability of valuable resources and other favorable circumstances that lead to the outbreak of civil wars

# Collier and Hoeffler (2004)

- an empirical assessment of the greed (opportunity) and grievance (motive) explanations
- "a model that focuses on the opportunities for rebellion performs well, whereas objective indicators of grievance add little explanatory power"
- they find three opportunity-related indicators linked to the outbreak of civil wars:
- **a. the availability of finance** (through primary commodity exports) makes rebellion feasible and perhaps even attractive (greed)

# Collier and Hoeffler (2004)

- **b. the (low) cost of rebellion:** if forgone earnings are low, the likelihood of conflict increases
- (male secondary education enrollment, per capita income, and the growth rate are used as proxies and have all statistically significant and substantial effects that reduce conflict risk)
- **c. military advantage:** a dispersed population increases the risk of conflict
- they find that most proxies for grievance are insignificant

# Collier and Hoeffler (2004)

- most proxies for grievance are insignificant in their empirical test:
- ethnic or religious hatred (measured as ethnic and religious diversity)
- political repression and political exclusion (the levels of political repression and political rights)
- economic inequality (Gini coefficient and the ratio of the top-to-bottom quintiles of income)
- the conclusion: opportunity as an explanation of conflict risk is consistent with the interpretation of rebellion as greed-motivated
- that does not mean the rebels are necessarily criminals,
- but what motivates them may be *substantially disconnected from the larger social concerns of inequality, political rights and ethnic or religious identity*



# Fearon and Laitin (2003)

- also argue that the greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity (or any particular cultural demography) by itself does not make a country more prone to civil war
- no link between the strength of ethnic or other broad political grievance and the outbreak of civil war
- ethnic antagonisms and nationalist sentiments often motivate rebels and their supporters,
- however, such broad factors are too common to distinguish the cases where civil war break out

# Fearon and Laitin (2003)

- most conflicts in the 1990s are the results of an accumulation of protracted conflicts since the 1950s
- **a structural weakness:** decolonization resulted in a large number of weak states (financially, bureaucratically and militarily) that have been at risk of civil violence throughout the whole period
- insurgency (rural guerrilla warfare) is a mode of military practice that can be used for a promotion of various political agendas
- insurgency is favored by specific conditions (**opportunities**) - state weakness, poverty, a large population and instability

# Fearon and Laitin (2003)

- these factors are better at predicting the outbreak of civil wars than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or measures of grievances such as economic inequality, lack of democracy and civil liberties, or systematic discrimination against minorities
- grievance may favor rebellion by providing local support by nonactive rebels to help in hiding the active rebels
- but all the guerillas really need is superior local knowledge
- under the right **environmental conditions**, just 500 to 2,000 active guerrillas can make for a long-lasting destructive internal war
- the average level of grievance in a group may not matter that much
- in fact, intense grievances *are produced by* civil war, and it is often a central objective of rebel strategy

# Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2011)

- disagree with the general dismissal of the role of political and economic grievances as causes of civil wars
- it is based on problematic theoretical and empirical grounds
- focus should be on horizontal (inter-group) inequalities, not on examining primarily the relationship between *individual* inequality and conflict
- such horizontal inequalities between politically relevant ethnic groups can promote ethnonationalist conflict
- case studies reach the conclusion that inter-group horizontal inequalities are responsible for violence, however it is very difficult to study them in large-N research designs

# Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2011)

- advanced AND backward ethnic groups are more likely to experience involvement in conflicts than groups with wealth closer to the national average (controlling for access to political power)
- moreover, political and economic inequalities contribute to civil war
- conflict-inducing inequality cannot be reduced to household-level measures of income distribution,
- ethnic and secessionist wars should/could be driven more by group-based inequality than by interpersonal inequality

# Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2011)

- examples of horizontal inequalities:
- political inequalities: blocked or limited access to central decision-making authority within the state
- economic inequalities: distribution of wealth among households
- social inequalities: groups uneven social access to (e.g.) education
- cultural inequalities: inequalities with respect to cultural policies and symbols, including national holidays and religious rights

# Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2011)

- the mechanism that links horizontal inequalities to civil war:
- 1. objective political or economic asymmetries can be transformed into grievances through a process of group comparison driven by collective emotions
- 2. such grievances trigger violent collective action through a process of group mobilization
- resentment based on intergroup comparisons involving horizontal inequalities often provokes ethnic mobilization
- the authors focus on political and economic inequalities
- **the frustration driving ethnonationalist mobilization and violence cannot be separated** from economic factors

# Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2011)

- their study is based on a strong assumption of the importance/existence of collective ethnic groups as reified social phenomena
- however, whole ethnic groups cannot participate in war conflicts
- a difficult theoretical decision about ethnic belonging of warring groups must be made:
- sharing name and goals of the ethnic group by "its" rebel units AND
- a participation of a significant share of the ethnic population in the conflict



# Beyond Greed and Grievances

- claims about identity and action in civil wars may be self-serving and information may be instrumentally manipulated by various actors
- the two competing interpretive frames, greed and grievance, rest on different and competing ontologies (Kalyvas, 2003):
- **greed (opportunity)**: breakdown of authority and subsequent anarchy encourage the privatization of violence, bringing all sorts of motivations in what is a war of all against all
- **grievance**: an ontology of civil wars based on abstract group loyalties and beliefs

# Beyond Greed and Grievances

- Kalyvas points to the interaction between political and private identities and actions
- civil wars are not binary conflicts but complex and ambiguous processes that foster a mix of identities and actions
- there usually is a disjunction between identities and actions at the central or elite level, on the one hand, and the local or mass level, on the other
- 1. actions "on the ground" often seem more related to local or private issues than to the war's driving (or "master") cleavage
- individual and local actors take advantage of the war to settle local or private conflicts often bearing little or no relation to the causes of the war or the goals of the belligerents

# Alliance of central and local forces

- Kalyvas introduces a *microfoundation* linking the top and the bottom: **“alliance”**
- it allows for multiple rather than unitary actors, agency located in both center and periphery rather than only in either one, and a variety of preferences and identities as opposed to a common and overarching one
- a great deal of action in civil war is simultaneously decentralized and linked to the wider conflict
- this includes violence which can be both political and private at the same time

# Does climate change cause civil war?

- a new research agenda (two decades)
- the link between climate and conflict is contested
- several causal explanations have been suggested, emphasizing indirect links, for example: **climate change** →
- → affects agriculture and food prices → *depressed agricultural production* can lower the opportunity costs of rebellion, and higher food prices might serve as a source of grievance for consumers
- → depress economic growth → lowering the opportunity costs of rebellion and → undermining state capacity to suppress violence and provide services

# Does climate change cause civil war?

- **climate change** → **natural disasters** may lead to conflict through the effects on economic growth
- or where failed disaster response leads to grievances by affected populations
- furthermore, the human costs on populations and the diversion of military capacity for response are security threats in their own right

# Does gender inequality cause civil war?

- Prior research has found **robust support** for a relationship between gender inequality and civil war.
- (incidence:) Countries with higher levels of gender inequality are more likely to become involved in civil conflict, and
- (severity:) violence is likely to be even more severe there, and lower in countries where women have a higher status
- Dimensions of **gender inequality**: access to political power, access to material resources, and the value given to individuals depending on their sex

# HOW does gender inequality cause civil war?

- A. gender inequality may be associated with an increased risk for intrastate armed conflict:
- A1: a masculinized political culture may lower the threshold for violence
- dominant norms of gender inequality may be seen as one form of intolerance, where some groups consider it legitimate to oppress and dominate over other groups (women, minorities, political opposition)
- A2: a society characterized by gender inequality end up with a large male surplus
- there is a high “supply” of men who are easy to mobilize for political violence

# HOW does gender inequality cause civil war?

- B. **gender equality** may contribute to resolving a conflict without violence
- more equal states may be dominated by **norms** more prone to **nonviolent forms** of handling grievances (respect and resolution of conflict without violence)
- higher levels of investment in women and their higher access to more resources result in higher ability to create and maintain **networks** across societies
- these capacities can be used to forward peace and create other means to resolve conflict