Ethnicity as a cause of armed conflicts

Mgr. Zinaida Bechna, Ph.D.

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Structure

- Explaining ethnic conflict:

    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

Conflict mapping
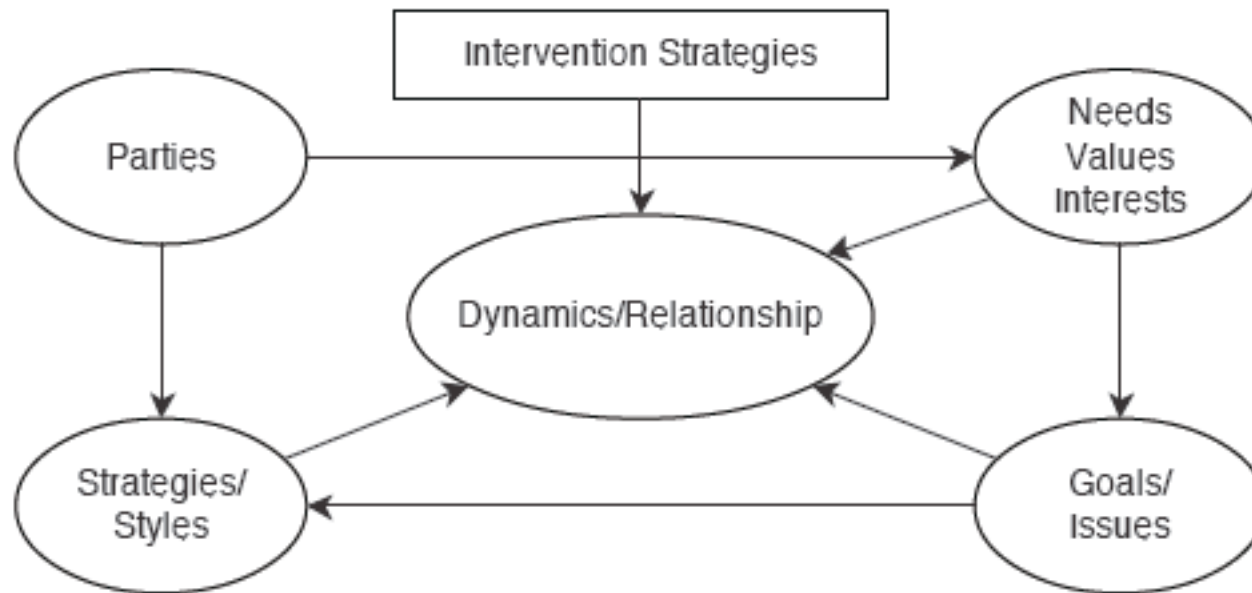
Underlying and Proximate Causes

▶ **Main question: Do ethnic cleavages matter for a conflict, and how?**

▶ Main point: Ethnic cleavages matter in combination with relative inequality between groups.

Underlying causes

▪ *Necessary* but *not sufficient* conditions for conflict.

▪ Four types of factor:
    i.   structural;
    ii. political;
    iii. economic and social;
    iv. cultural and perceptual.

▪ Can contribute to mobilisation of ethnic groups and impact on development of the conflict.

(See Wolff 2006, chpt. 3)

Underlying and Proximate Causes (2)

Proximate causes

- Factors increasing likelihood of conflict where there are underlying conditions.

- Internal and external factors at mass and elite level.
    - Internal elite-level: 'bad leaders'.
    - External elite-level: 'bad neighbours'.
    - Internal mass-level: 'serious domestic problems.'
    - External mass-level: 'bad neighbourhoods'.

- Many situations of ethnic tension share similar underlying causes but **not all lead to civil war** because not all share significant proximate causes (Wolff 2006, chpt. 3).

Context

A very popular claim that ethnic cleavages generate internal armed conict

▸ 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)

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)...

▸ qualied: 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**

▶   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 group

▸ What constitutes ethnic conflict?

▸ The definition most of the studies stick to:

▸ `**Internal conflict between a government and an organized interna 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

▶ 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)

Ancient hatreds

▶ Ethnic appeals may lead to violent escalation only if a group fears that its existence threatened: **myths justifying ethnic hostility.**

▶ What matters is the ability to evoke vertical escalation "**our group is in danger**" – ethnic fear.

▶ The next condition, is **political opportunity**. This consist of two elements,

↖ first, there must be sufficient political space (weakening or state breakdown, or support from external power)

↖ second, a territorial base (for successful mobilization, ethnic groups are either territorially concentrated in some region or they have a territorial base in neighboring country).

Ancient hatreds

▶ Ethnic conflict involves three dynamics:

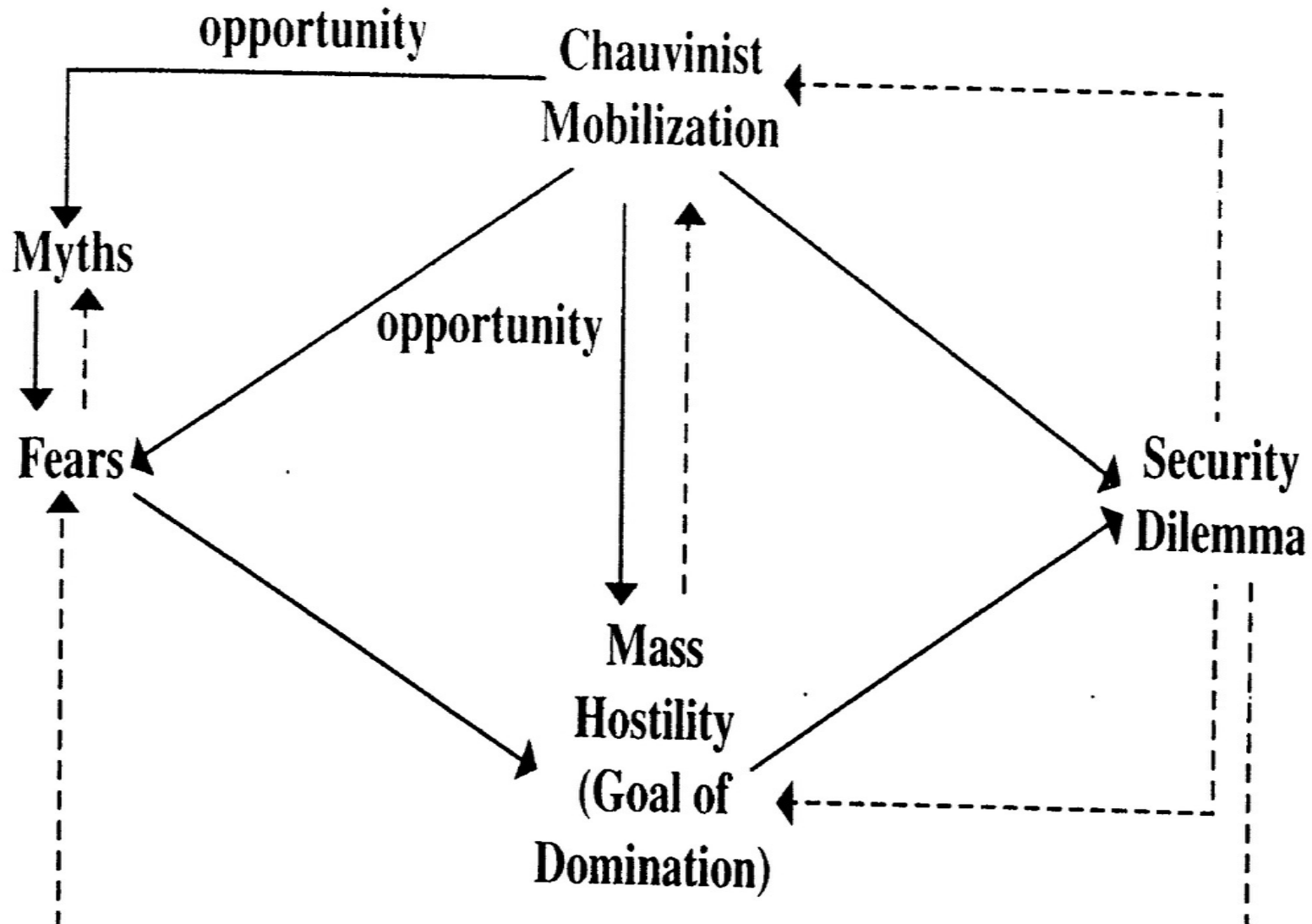- mass hostility,

chauvinist political mobilization

↖a security dilemma.

The combination and interaction of those aspects creates the spiral of escalation, if the preconditions mentioned above are present.

Ancient hatreds

▶ Causal chain of ethnic conflict is following: Three preconditions are necessary

1. Ethnic group's interpretation of its history justifies hostility towards others and emphasizes the need to gain special status.

2. Fear of group extinction is strong at the time violence breaks out.

3. Ethnic group has a territorial base and the opportunity to mobilize.

Elite-Led Process

Ancient hatreds

Mechanisms:

▸ Extreme hostility has a popular mass support. The probability of conflict increases with the ethnic group's **relative demographic size.**

▸ The ethnic group glorifies its **history** through a one sided interpretation of its own victories and blames losses on traitors or weak leaders. Nourishing calls for revenge contributed to creating organizational structures and culture of violence.

▸ **Elites uses ethnic appeals,** promoting fear and mass hostility and mobilization for conflict.

▸ A **security dilemma** arises, in which the hostile ax by the leadership on one side leads to the radicalization of the leadership on the other.

Ancient hatreds

▸ Ethnic symbolism – combines ancient hatreds, manipulative elites and rivalry.

▸ Without perceived conflicts of interest, people have no reason to mobilize.

▸ Without emotional commitment based on hostile feelings, they lack sufficient imputes to do so.

▸ Without leadership, they typically lack the organization to act.

Ethnic Security Dilemma

- Security dilemmas as result of 'fear-producing environments':

    i. government breakdown;
    ii. geographical isolation or vulnerability of a minority within a larger group;
    iii. shifts in political power balance between groups;
    iv. changes in access to or control over economic resources;
    v. forced or voluntary demobilisation of partisan armies;
    vi. changes in external patronage or balance of power between rival patrons.

Ethnic Security Dilemma (2)

- Increased security of one group seen as coming at expense of insecurity of another; incentive for group to use force pre-emptively.

- How elites and masses **respond** to the ethnic security dilemma determines the outcome.

- Physical security, political security, economic and social security, cultural security, and environmental security.

- For leaders to mobilise followers to violence there must be 'credible evidence' of other groups' hostile intentions.

(Wolff (2006, chpt. 3), gives an overview of the ethnic security dilemma; Barry Posen (1993) was the first to introduce this. See Lake and Rothchild (1996) for wider strategic dilemmas argument.)

▸ 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

▸ � 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

Opportunity theory

▸ 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 Hoeer 2004) or feasibility (e.g Fearon and Laitin 2003)

The Economic Debate: Greed vs. Grievance

- Recent body of work developed argument about ethnic and other civil conflicts being the result of economic 'greed'.

- Largely developed by economists working for bodies like the World Bank.

- Most well known are Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (1998 and 2000), arguing that ethnic conflict happens if the incentive for rebellion is sufficiently large relative to its costs and that contemporary civil wars are largely motivated by economic greed rather than by political grievances.

Three „waves" of research

1. The skeptics:

‣ Seminal studies (on armed conflict) are Collier and Hoeer (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:

‣ Ostby (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

‣ Less interested in whether ethnic grievances matter, and more in how they matter

A prominent representative of grievance-skepticism": Professor Paul Collier
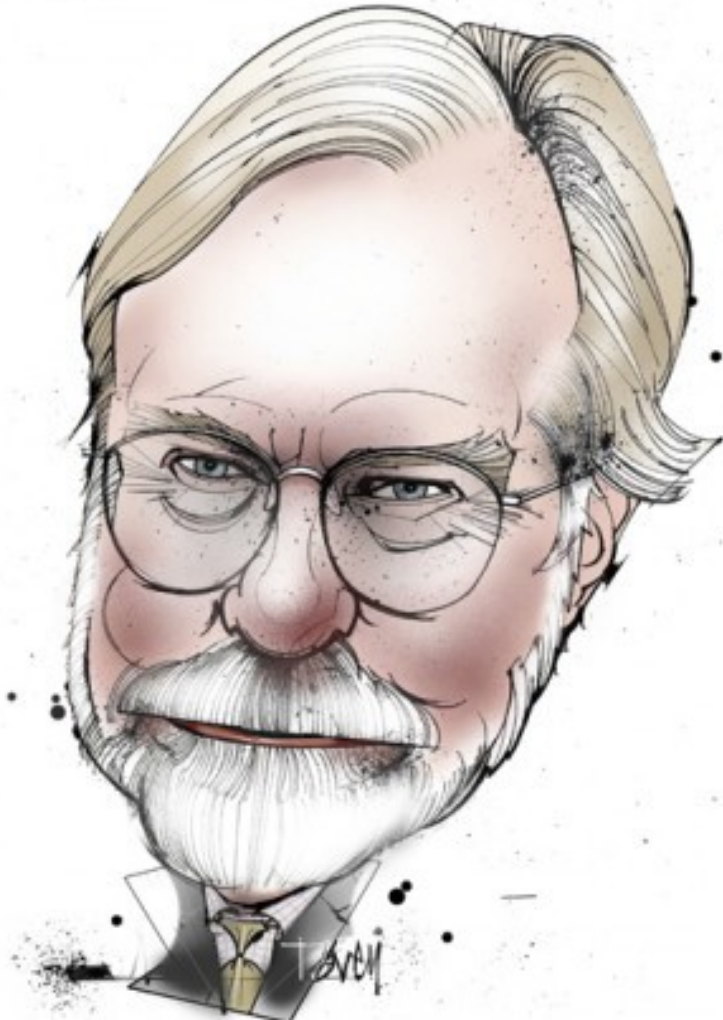
Empirical Research: The skeptics

▶ The skeptics

▶ Use the ELF (ethnolinguistic fractionalization), 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 signicant 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**

New York Times coverage of Fearon and Laitin

IDEA LAB

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 'delicate situation,' it is because she was not just Czechoslovakia, but Czech-Germano-Polono-Magyaro-Rutheno-Rumano-Slovakia."

Today, as Iraq spirals toward outright warfare between Sunnis and Shiites, it risks joining a lengthening list of countries that have seemingly inevitably been ripped apart by bitter sectarian hatreds: Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan and not least Lebanon, which experienced civil wars in 1860 and 1958 and from 1975 to 1990 and may face yet another one.

But what if this whole premise is wrong? Odd as it may seem, there is a growing body of work that suggests that multiethnic countries are actually no more prone to civil war than other countries. In a sweeping 2003 study, the Stanford civil war experts James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin came to a startling finding: "it appears not to be true that a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity — or indeed any particular cultural demography — by itself makes a country more prone to civil war."

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

- 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'

Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War
Lars-Erik Cederman
Kristian Skrede Gleditsch
Halvard Buhaug

CAMBRIDGE
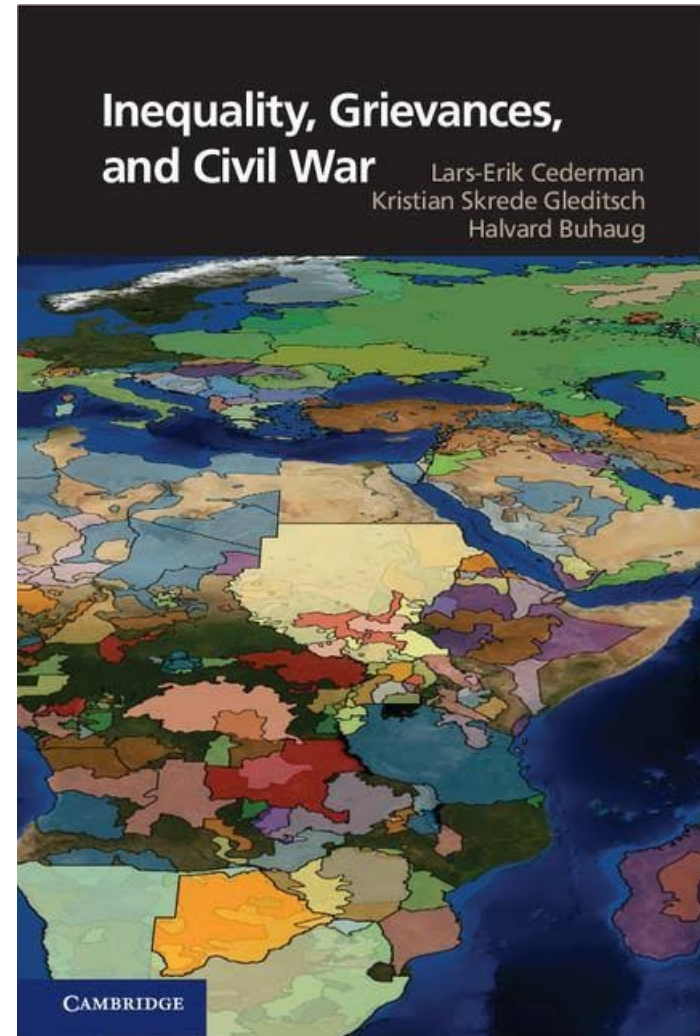
Empirical research: The horizontal inequality wave

▸ Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?

▸ Core question: Does political exclusion/inclusion increase the risk of ethnic conflict

▸ Introduces the EPR (Ethnic Power Relations 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

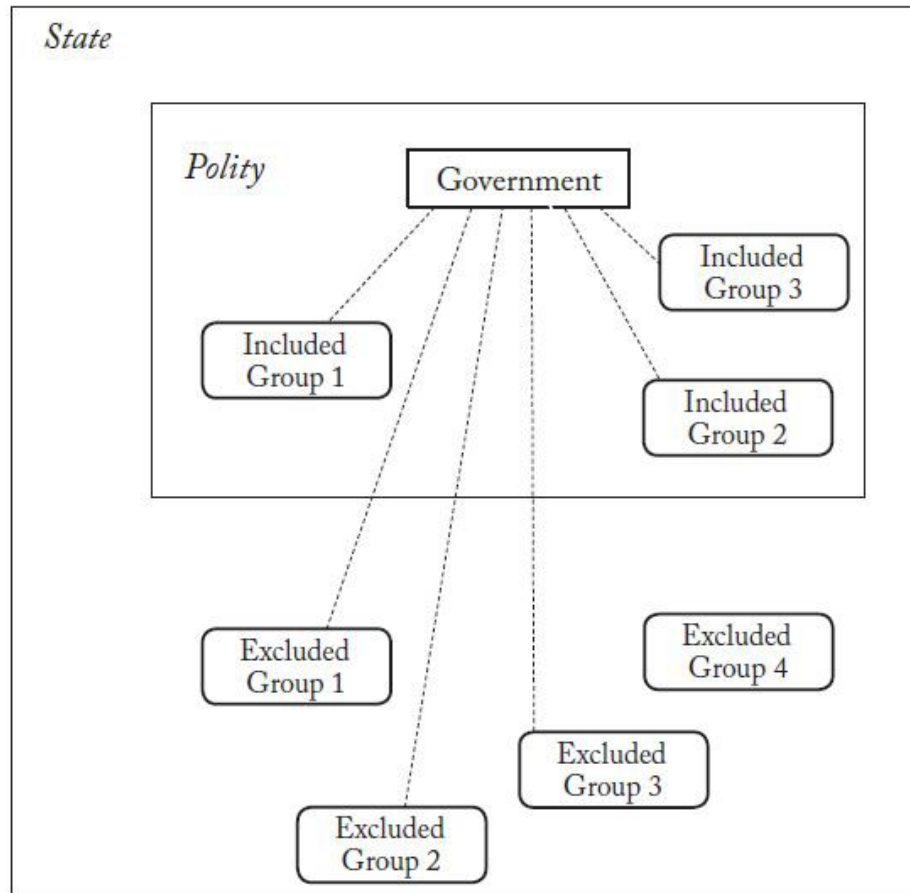# Empirical research: Why do Ethnic groups Rebel?

FIGURE 1
THE POLITY MODEL WITH INCLUDED AND EXCLUDED ETHNIC GROUPS

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"

Why do ethnic group rebel

▸ 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 nocflict-potential!)

Why do ethnic group rebel

▶ 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

▸ 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

▶ 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 Eective 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 actively fought by members of the same ethnic group

▶ Case: The Russian war in Checnya, 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

▸ 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 identify 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

Ethnic Conflict & the End of the Cold War (2)

- Presumption that ethnic conflicts sprang up after the Cold War because the 'lid' on 'ancient rivalries' was taken off (Brown 1993).

- 'Pressure-cooker' theory of ethnic conflict has primordialist underpinnings.

- Many reject this explanation (see Brown 1993; Harff and Gurr 2004; Bowen 1996).

Ethnic Conflict & the End of the Cold War (2)

☐ End of the Cold War and collapse of communism *were* significant but this is simplistic as a complete explanation. Three objections:

  i. ignores numerous violent ethnic conflicts that went on *during* the Cold War (see Eriksson, Wallensteen and Sollenberg 2003);
  ii. doesn't explain why conflicts broke out in some places but not in others;
  iii. doesn't explain why intensity of violence is stronger in some ethnic conflicts than in others.

☐ The notion of underlying and proximate causes of ethnic conflict is useful to enable comparisons between different conflicts and account for why conflict breaks out in some places but not in others. But is it too broad-sweeping?

☐ The ethnic security dilemma (and wider strategic dilemmas) idea is useful in explaining why conflict breaks out in some instances, and in illuminating mechanics of this regarding the relevance of leaders. But it can potentially have challenging implications for attempting to *resolve* ethnic conflicts.

☐ The notion of group worth and legitimacy illuminates very important socio-psychological (rather than material) elements of ethnic conflict relating to group anxieties and humiliations as well as demographic and territorial issues, and leading to a 'politics of group entitlement'.

☐ The **'greed' vs. grievance debate** about primary causes of ethnic conflict (and other civil wars) is ongoing and contentious.

☐ Drawing a simplistic causal relationship between the end of the Cold War and the incidence of ethnic conflict is unfruitful, but this doesn't mean the end of the Cold War wasn't a relevant factor in some cases.

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

Literature

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