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Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Data Set

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1. THE ETHNIC POWER RELATIONS DATA SET (EPR)

The Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data set improves on earlier work along similar lines (Buhaug, Cederman, and Rød 2008; Cederman and Girardin 2007) by covering the entire world, recording changes in power relations over time, and using a more fine-grained typology of access to state power. The project relied on the expert input of nearly 100 students of ethnic politics to assess formal and informal degrees of political participation and exclusion along ethnic lines.¹ Apart from being relatively

inexpensive and feasible, expert surveys have the advantage of summing intangible and contextual knowledge that more mechanistic tools cannot capture.² This method has been applied to a wide variety of areas in the social sciences, including, most prominently, the estimation of party platforms (Benoit and Laver 2006).

¹ The process of contacting and interacting with country experts took almost two years. Once sufficient coding responses were available, we held workshops with regional experts to decide on the final coding. We discussed each coding in light of the experts' comments, as well as additional data sources and the accumulating comparative knowledge of the project team itself. In many cases, we returned to the

initial coders or invited additional experts to help synthesize the data.

² We prefer this expert survey approach to the more straightforward strategy of recording the ethnic background of heads of state (cf. Fearon, Kasara, and Laitin 2007), even at the expense of generating some ambiguity and measurement problems. The ethnic background of the head of state may not adequately capture how ethnicity structures access to political power, particularly because it does not consider "token" representatives of ethnic communities.

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1.1 POLITICALLY RELEVANT ETHNIC GROUPS

Following the Weberian tradition, we define ethnicity as a subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and shared culture. Different markers may be used to indicate such shared ancestry and culture: common language, similar phenotypical features, adherence to the same faith, and so on. Our definition of ethnicity thus includes ethnolinguistic, ethnosomatic (or “racial”), and ethnoreligious groups, but not tribes and clans that conceive of ancestry in genealogical terms, nor regions that do not define commonality on the basis of shared ancestry. Ethnic categories may be hierarchically nested and comprise several levels of differentiation, not all of which are politically relevant (on the notion of ethnicity underlying this project, see Wimmer 2008).

An ethnic category is politically relevant if at least one significant political actor claims to represent the interests of that group in the national political arena, or if members of an ethnic category are systematically and intentionally discriminated against in the domain of public politics. By “significant” political actor we mean a political organization (not necessarily a party) that is active in the national political arena. We define discrimination as political exclusion directly targeted at an ethnic community—thus disregarding indirect discrimination based, for example, on educational disadvantage or discrimination in the labor or credit markets. The coding scheme allows us to identify countries or specific periods in which political objectives, alliances, or disputes were never framed in ethnic terms, thus avoiding using an ethnic lens for countries not characterized by ethnic

politics, such as Tanzania and Korea. The coding rules mirror the MAR data set’s definition of political relevance but, by coding majority and dominant groups as well, do not restrict the universe of cases to politically excluded minorities.

We do not distinguish between degrees of representativity of political actors who claim to speak for an ethnic group, nor do we code the heterogeneity of political positions voiced by leaders claiming to represent the same community (Bowen 1996; Brubaker 2004; Zartman 2004). Such detail is beyond the scope of this project and would require a coding scheme in which political organizations form the units of observation. We thus assume that ethnic categories become politically relevant as soon as there is a minimal degree of political mobilization or intentional political discrimination along ethnic lines. This happens regardless of the level of support for an ethnopolitical project and whatever the heterogeneity of positions voiced in the name of a group. Our data set does not code information regarding the process leading to such ethnic mobilization but only records its effect—that a particular ethnic category has become a meaningful reference in the dynamics of national politics.

Because politically relevant categories and access to political power may change over time, coders divided the 1946 to 2005 period and provided separate codings for each subperiod. This was also necessary when the list of politically relevant categories changed from one year to the next. Next, we coded the degree of access to power enjoyed by political leaders who claimed to represent various groups.

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1.2 CODING ACCESS TO POWER

We focus only on executive-level power, that is, representation in the presidency, cabinet, and senior posts in the administration, including the army. The weight given to these institutions depends on the de facto power constellations of the country in question. Experts focused on the most relevant dimension (e.g., in a military dictatorship, power over the army; in presidential systems, the senior cabinet). We were primarily interested in major power shifts, rather than day-to-day reorganizations of cabinets or the promotion of officers in the army. In all cases, coders focused on absolute access to power irrespective of the question of under- or overrepresentation relative to the demographic size of an ethnic category.

We categorized all politically relevant ethnic groups according to the degree of access to central state power by those who claimed to represent them. Some held full control of the executive branch with no meaningful participation by members of any other group, some shared power with members of other groups, and some were excluded altogether from decision-making authority. Within each of these three categories, coders differentiated between further subtypes, including absolute power, power sharing regimes, and exclusion from central power.

ABSOLUTE POWER. In this case, the political elites who claim to represent an ethnic group do not significantly share power with other political leaders. There are two possibilities, monopoly and dominant.

Monopoly: Elite members hold monopoly power in the executive-level at the exclusion of members of other ethnic groups. The Ladino community in Guatemala is a good

example. They ruled without any significant participation from the indigenous population until the end of the civil war.

Dominant: Elite members of the group hold dominant power in the executive-level but there is some limited inclusion of members of other groups. This includes token members of the cabinet coming from other ethnic groups, such as Saddam Hussein's minister of foreign affairs, who was Christian rather than Sunni Arab. Token members do not effectively act as representatives of the nondominant group, nor do they advocate for policies that would correspond to demands voiced by other leaders of the nondominant group.

POWER SHARING REGIMES. By power sharing, we mean any arrangement that divides executive power among leaders who claim to represent particular ethnic groups. Such an arrangement can be either formal, as in Lebanon, or informal, as in Switzerland. Although consociationalism illustrates this type of governance, we do not limit it to this category. The representatives of an ethnic category can play one of two roles in a coalition, either senior or junior partner.

Senior partner: Representatives participate as senior partners in a formal or informal power sharing arrangement

Junior partner: Representatives participate as junior partners in government.³

³ The choice between senior and junior depends on the number and relative importance of the positions controlled by group members. For example, in ethnic party systems such as that of Malaysia, the Malay governing party is the senior partner, while the Chinese party is a junior partner. Even in countries without ethnic party systems, such as Switzerland, it is possible to identify the Swiss Germans as the

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EXCLUSION FROM CENTRAL POWER. Finally, when political leaders who claim to represent a particular ethnic category are excluded from participation in central government, we distinguish between those with local autonomy and those who are powerless or discriminated against.

Regional autonomy: Elite members of the group have no central power but have some influence at the subnational level (i.e., the provincial or district level, depending on the vertical organization of the state).⁴ Georgians under Soviet rule are an example. Local governments controlled by representatives of an ethnic category who have declared their territory independent from central government, such as Abkhazians in independent Georgia, are a special case. We mark such situations with an additional coding, “secessionist autonomy.”⁵

Powerless: Elite representatives hold no political power at the national or regional levels without being explicitly discriminated against.

Discriminated: Group members are subjected to active, intentional, and targeted discrimination with the intent of excluding them from both regional and national power. Examples include African Americans until the civil rights movement and Guatemaltecan Indians until the end of the civil war. Such active discrimination can be either formal or informal. Formal discrimination legally limits access to government positions to citizens who speak a certain mother tongue, display certain phenotypical features, or are members of certain religious groups. Informal discrimination actively and intentionally inhibits individuals with certain ethnic backgrounds from rising within the ranks of government.⁶

1.3 WAR CODING

Our coding of wars is based on the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflicts Data Set (ACD) (Gleditsch et al. 2002). ACD defines armed conflict as any armed and organized confrontation between government troops and rebel organizations, or between army

senior partner and the French and Italian speakers as the junior ones, based on the informally fixed distribution of cabinet seats along ethnolinguistic lines.

⁴ We do not consider local power below this level. By influence, we mean that group members have a leading position or are coalition partners in a regional government (where such governments exist); or that they participate significantly in the executive branch on the regional level (e.g., where regional governors are appointed by the central government); or there are ethnic quotas in the regional or local administration (such as in India or the FSU).

⁵ We code local autonomy exclusively for politically relevant groups. We therefore do not consider ethnic communities whose representatives control municipal governments because of a high local population share but never appear in a regional or national political arena (e.g., Albanian speakers in Italy). We exclude such groups from the data and consider them politically irrelevant.

⁶ We do not include in this category (1) groups suffering from *indirect* discrimination because they are disadvantaged in the economic sphere or the educational sector and thus are unlikely to successfully compete in the political arena; (2) general social discrimination (e.g., on the labor and marriage markets); and (3) the exclusion of noncitizens from power, as long as they hold passports of other states and can effectively return to their country of origin. This notion of discrimination does not rely on representation compared with population size. A large group may be underrepresented in government without being actively and intentionally discriminated against.

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factions, that reaches an annual battle-death threshold of 25 people. Massacres and genocides are not included because the victims are neither organized nor armed; communal riots and pogroms are excluded because the government is not directly involved. We drew primarily on version 3-2005b of the ACD data set, which provides two levels of conflict identification, a more general war ID number and a disaggregated sub-ID that identifies whenever the constellation of rebel organizations changes completely or when more than 10 years elapse between episodes of violence. We relied on these sub-IDs to construct our own conflict list because we are interested in a disaggregated dependent variable that would allow us to differentiate between conflicts fought by actors claiming to represent different ethnic communities.⁷ As a result, we code a larger number of armed conflict onsets than does the original ACD. To preserve comparability with other studies of civil war, we identify high-intensity conflicts as those that reach the standard threshold of 1,000 battle deaths in at least one year. For each conflict, we coded whether actors pursued ethnonationalist aims and if they pursued secessionist objectives.

Ethnic/nonethnic conflicts are distinguished by the aims of the armed organizations and their recruitment and alliance structures, in line with other ongoing coding projects (Sambanis 2009). Ethnic wars typically involve conflicts over ethnonational self-

determination, the ethnic balance of power in government, ethnoregional autonomy, ethnic and racial discrimination (whether alleged or real), and language and other cultural rights. We define all other war aims as nonethnic. Examples of nonethnic conflicts include the various military coups staged in Argentina and the civil wars in China, Greece, and Algeria. Regarding recruitment and alliance structures, we define ethnic wars as those fought by armed organizations that recruit fighters predominantly among their own ethnic group and who forge alliances on the basis of ethnic affiliation. For a conflict to be classified as ethnic, armed organizations have to both explicitly pursue ethnonationalist aims, motivations, and interests *and* recruit fighters and forge alliances on the basis of ethnic affiliations.

We linked all ethnic conflicts to the politically relevant ethnic category in the name of which an armed organization instigated the conflict. We looked at the aims and recruitment patterns of each armed organization separately. In some complex cases (e.g., Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Uganda, Angola, and Zaire), we disaggregated a conflict into several war fronts with different ethnic claims made on the nongovernmental side. This was necessary when the constellation of rebel organizations changed dramatically over time.

Separatist wars are fought by armed organizations that aim at establishing a separate, independent, internationally recognized state or that want to join another existing state (irredentism). We assessed the intentions of the armed organizations immediately at the outbreak of war—not how their intentions developed in the course of the armed conflict—because our analysis

⁷ The ACD data set appears to be more consistent with regard to coding sub-IDs from 1989 onward. We fused sub-IDs that were based on a change in the type of civil war (e.g., internationalized versus non-internationalized conflicts). We also split or merged some wars to be consistent with the rules governing sub-ID coding. A list of our conflicts and how they relate to the ACD war IDs is available upon request.

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takes war onset as the dependent variable. We also distinguished between cases where the demand for independence was tactical (the Karen's threat to establish an independent state) or represented a long-term strategic objective.

Our data set includes 215 armed conflicts fought between 1946 and 2005, 110 of which were ethnic conflicts. Of the 215 conflicts, 60 had secessionist aims, the vast majority of which were also ethnic in character. Among the 110 ethnic conflicts, 20 were fought by groups in power, 64 by powerless or discriminated groups, and 26 by autonomous groups. One half of the conflicts reached the standard threshold of civil war (more than 1,000 battle deaths in a year).⁸ Table S1 summarizes the conflict classifications.

Table S2 provides summary statistics for the core variables in our data set. It includes 7,155 observations covering 156 sovereign states in all years after independence from 1946 to 2005.

2. FIRST DIFFERENCE EFFECTS AND ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

Table S3 displays first difference effects of changes in independent variables based on Table 2, Model 7 in the article. Increasing the share of the excluded population from 6 to 32 percent (an increase of one standard deviation from the mean) results in a 25 percent increase in the probability of ethnic conflict. A one standard deviation increase in center segmentation leads to a 9 percent increased risk of conflict, while a similar increase in years under imperial rule

increases the chance of armed conflict by 13 percent. As a whole, the aggregate effects of a one standard deviation increase in the three measures of ethnic politics are associated with changes in war risk of similar or greater magnitude than the effects of GDP per capita or population size, the two most robust variables in the civil war literature.

We performed several robustness and sensitivity checks on all results presented in the article. They are available in the supplement on the first author's homepage: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/wimmer/AppendixEthnicPolitics.pdf>.

⁸ In comparison, Fearon and Laitin (2003) identify 114 civil wars, of which 78 are ethnic, from 1945 to 1999. Sambanis (2004) counts 145 civil wars in his data set covering the same timeframe.

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Table S1. The Conflict Data Set

| | Ethnic conflicts | Nonethnic Conflicts | Total Conflicts |
|-----------------|---|--|-----------------|
| Secessionist | 57 | 3 | 60 |
| Nonsecessionist | 53 | 102 | 155 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>110</i> | <i>105</i> | <i>215</i> |
| | 20 | 90 | |
| | Infighting (conflicts fought in the name of groups in power) | Rebellions (conflicts fought in the name of excluded groups) | |

Table S2. Summary Statistics of Core Variables

| Variable | Observations | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum |
|--|--------------|-------|--------|---------|---------|
| Exclusion (logged) | 7,138 | 1.864 | 1.589 | 0 | 4.595 |
| Center segmentation | 7,138 | 1.638 | 1.856 | 0 | 14 |
| Imperial past | 7,155 | .475 | .314 | 0 | 1 |
| Linguistic fractionalization | 7,151 | .381 | .284 | .001 | .925 |
| GDP per capita (in 1,000 USD) | 6,990 | 5.968 | 7.292 | .028 | 110.315 |
| Population (logged) | 7,060 | 9.188 | 1.390 | 5.581 | 14.076 |
| Mountainous terrain (logged) | 7,155 | 2.204 | 1.391 | 0 | 4.421 |
| Soldiers per capita | 6,489 | 7.719 | 9.432 | 0 | 211.297 |
| Political instability | 7,155 | .122 | .327 | 0 | 1 |
| Anocracy | 6,986 | .224 | .417 | 0 | 1 |
| Oil production per capita (in barrels) | 7,060 | 2.072 | 13.087 | 0 | 272.403 |

Table S3. First Difference Effects on Ethnic Conflict (based on Table 2, Model 7)

| Variable | Change in Variable by One Standard Deviation from Mean | Increase in Probability of Ethnic Conflict |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Exclusion | 6% to 32% of population | 25.5%** |
| Center segmentation | 1 to 3 groups | 9.2%** |
| Imperial past | 47% to 79% years since 1816 | 12.9%* |
| Linguistic fractionalization | .38 to .67 | 17.0%** |
| GDP per capita | \$5,968 to \$13,260 | -22.0%** |
| Population size | 9.19 to 10.58 million | 13.4%** |
| Mountainous terrain | 2.20 to 3.60 | 10.6% |
| Political instability | 0 to 1 | 7.9% |
| Anocracy | 0 to 1 | 20.6%* |
| Oil production per capita | 2.07 to 15.16 barrels/person/day | 10.5%* |
| Ongoing war | 0 to 1 | 2.6% |

Note: The observed rate of ethnic conflict in the sample is 110/7,155 country years or 1.54 percent. Statistical significance of beta coefficients in underlying model indicated by: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.