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## Who Fights First: Grievances, Community and Collective Action

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### *Summary*

In this article I examine the participation of the earliest entrants in the War in Croatia (1991-1995). I address the greed/grievance debate within the conflict literature by demonstrating that measuring grievances at the macro level misses the micro level processes involved in mobilization. Using interviews with 21 Croatian war veterans, I look at who fought first, comparing the initial differences between early and later participants, those who joined before June 25, 1991, and those that joined after. I argue that early joiners belonged to a bounded community of those disaffected with Yugoslavia and Communism; however, these grievances alone do not explain their participation, rather it was an individual's inclusion in the dissident community and the social relationships within that community that clarify how the first participants were mobilized. The findings show that all but one of the earliest joiners who joined through a social connection belonged to Croatia's dissident community and were from families that supported NDH. The other joiners joined by themselves after encountering violence from the fighting first hand. The majority of the later joiners joined after experiencing violence as well. Two of the three who joined through a social connection were also part of the dissident community and from NDH associated families.

*Keywords:* War in Croatia, Mobilization, Collective Action, Domestic Conflict, War Veterans

### **Introduction**

Why do individuals participate in armed conflict?<sup>1</sup> In recent years, much of the research on internal conflict has offered two competing explanations. The motives

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behind rebels, insurgents, and members of paramilitary organizations' involvement in armed violence are seen to be either the chance to take advantage of material opportunities (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hoeffler 2011), or as a means of righting a perceived injustice (Taydas et al. 2011; Gurr 1970, 1993; Weinstein 2005). Though the debate continues, most of the findings see the role of material opportunity as a more significant influence in the onset of conflict, than that of injustice. Though this dichotomy has come to dominate the discourse on internal conflict, it also has its critics who see it as too reductive to provide an accurate understanding of why individuals participate in the fighting (Lichbach 1998; Kalyvas 2003; Dixon 2009; Ross 2004). At its core, the greatest affliction facing this line of research is the literature's reliance on macro level variables for both material opportunity and injustice. Here macro level refers to aggregated data at the country. Though this area of research has produced a surfeit amount of work demonstrating the correlations between economic development, injustice and conflict, the fact that these studies rely on broad macro level data and proxy variables, such as GDP and unemployment, leaves a strong possibility that the more fundamental micro processes involved in the onset of conflict are lost when examined in the aggregate (Kalyvas 2003; Dixon 2009; Francisco 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role material opportunity and injustice play in fostering participation at the micro level. By micro level I am referring to data at the individual level.

In this article I engage in an examination of the micro level processes involved in participation by focusing on a specific conflict's earliest entrants. Appreciating the importance of the first participants is necessary in understanding the dynamics within a conflict as these individuals are ultimately responsible for developing the strategies and circumstances that induce greater mobilization over the course of the war. Using interviews with war veterans from the Croatian Homeland War (1991-1995), I look at who fought first, comparing the initial differences between early and later participants. I argue that early joiners belonged to a bounded community of those disaffected with Yugoslavia and Communism; however, these grievances alone do not explain their participation, rather it was an individual's inclusion in the dissident community and the social relationships within that community that explain how the first participants were mobilized. I offer that the first fighters were socially mobilized into participating in the earliest days of the conflict. This perspective challenges those views that place an emphasis on material incentives (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hoeffler 2011) and those that regard grievances as the sole independent variable (Gurr 1970). By exploring the discontent of early joiners I am

Fellowship in Croatia for 2011-2012. This is a reworked chapter from a larger work *Why Do They Fight: Explaining Participation in the War in Croatia*. The full work can be found here: [http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/12222/1/Brown\\_ku\\_0099D\\_12992\\_DATA\\_1.pdf](http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/12222/1/Brown_ku_0099D_12992_DATA_1.pdf)

able to show that grievances do have an influence on the onset of conflict, though it is not as direct as some models assume (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Gurr 1970, 1993); secondly, by demonstrating that these grievances were largely contained to a specific community within the broader society, I am able to explain why there fails to be a strong relationship between grievances and the onset of conflict at the aggregate level (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Taydas et al. 2011).

I begin by discussing theories of conflict via the collective action problem and the limitations of the greed/grievance dichotomy in explaining the onset of war. I then explore non-material solutions to the collective action problem, paying particular attention to the importance of community solutions (Lichbach 1998). I then outline the boundaries and membership of the Croat dissident community in Yugoslavia. I explore the role of the grievances in early joining, explaining that among first fighters we should see a stronger attachment to the conflict's main grievance or central cleavage than among later joiners. Afterwards, I present the interview methodology and the initial differences between early and later joiners. I then engage in an analysis of the early joiners, using evidence from interviews, showing that early joiners' grievances served to create a community from which individuals were mobilized by someone they knew, and who was involved in the preparation and organization of Croatia's fledgling military forces. I argue that while the grievances helped identify likely candidates for recruitment, the mobilizing factor was actually the need to maintain good social relationships among the recruited and recruiters. In order to understand the importance of social relationships in Croatia, I engage in a brief explanation of the phenomenon of *kumstvo*, or family sponsorship. I then show that recruiting individuals who were members of the dissident community was a conscious strategy among the HDZ leadership.

### **Collective Action and Greed/grievance**

It is largely accepted that prior to the onset of fighting, insurgents, rebels, defenders, paramilitaries, and revolutionaries all face a collective action problem (Olson 1965; DeNardo 1985; Lichbach 1998; Kalyvas 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Weinstein 2005, 2007; Francisco 2009, 2010). When faced with fighting for a public good (whether it be independence, freedom, increased autonomy, or regime change) most would-be participants will free-ride, preferring to let someone else do the fighting, but still hoping to take part in the rewards (Olson 1965; Lichbach 1998). In order to overcome their collective action problem, dissidents need to be provided with selective incentives available only to those who participate. Material rewards, via pay from the dissident organization or loot from the battlefield are considered the most readily available and obvious forms of selective incentives with which participants are able to be induced into participating. From this perspective participa-

tion can be explained through participants' own greed for material rewards (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hoeffler 2011).

Macro level models of conflict contend that amid economic crisis or limited economic development, individuals will be more willing to engage in conflict for material rewards (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). The opportunity to profit from war looks more advantageous when facing an anemic economy or in areas with high unemployment. Initially this logic is compatible with the logic of collective action. One's material self-interest is assumed to be the invisible hand of rebellion. Meanwhile, the injustice perspective appears problematic. If we assume that the righting of a collective wrong is the goal of a dissident organization, then we are still left wondering how that organization can overcome its collective action problem. After a community's collective grievance is assuaged, all of the members of that community benefit. At first glance, the grievance thesis is much less compatible with collective action literature on conflict than the greed thesis and its emphasis on material incentives. When it comes to macro level models, the greed hypothesis has been vindicated with stronger results than the grievance based models (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hoeffler 2011; Taydas et al. 2011). However, before we completely reject the grievance approach to conflict we first need to understand that while there exist strong correlations between economic variables and conflict, and weaker correlations between grievance based variables and conflict, this could very well be due to the type of variables used and the reliance on macro level models.

In their model Collier and Hoeffler (2004) use ethnic and religious fractionalization, ethnic dominance and polarization as a measure of grievances. Gurr (1993) uses ordinal scales to measure grievances, such as a group's economic rights, social rights, as well as an ordinal scale to measure a group's disadvantages. The problem with each of these studies is that group based and macro level measures may be missing the grievances felt by the minority of the overall minority population. As Lichbach's 5% rule indicates, in 95% of cases it is less than 5% of a given population that will first participate in collective dissent (Lichbach 1998; Ainsworth 2002). The processes involved in mobilizing the earliest participants are more likely than not to be unobserved in aggregated data, group wide measurements and macro level models.

Returning to the problem of collective action we see that its solution depends less on macro level or broad contextual circumstances and more on the actions of those organizations and individuals seeking to mobilize a set of dissidents (Lichbach 1998; Weinstein 2005; Francisco 2009). Taken from this perspective it is necessary to examine the role of grievances and material incentives at the micro level.

## Beyond Material Incentives

Although much of the conflict literature is dominated by an emphasis on the relationship between participation and material incentives (Ross 2004; Collier et al. 2004; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hoeffler 2011; Taydas et al. 2011), other research on domestic conflict acknowledges that social factors can also help induce participation (Olson 1965; Lichbach 1998; Kalyvas 2003; Wood 2003; Sageman 2004; Weinstein 2005, 2007). Lichbach refers to such solutions as those that are capable of overcoming “pecuniary self-interest” (Lichbach 1998: 111). In the place of material rewards, normative values and shared identities within pre-existing organizations, networks, or communities are capable of producing solutions to the collective action problem (Lichbach 1998; Wood 2003; Sageman 2004; Weinstein 2007). A key piece of the solution is reciprocity within a bounded community. As Weinstein explains:

The fact that participants have been and believe they will continue to be engaged in repeated interaction with others from the groups makes it important for them to cooperate today in order that others will cooperate with them in the future. (Weinstein 2007: 99)

Members of a community or group will assist each other in the present in order to ensure that they continue to be assisted in the future.

In her work on collective action during the civil war in El Salvador, Wood (2003) observes that participation can result from the pleasure of engaging in effective action. Acquiring agency can motivate individuals to act, especially in circumstances and among groups that have developed common values that support and endorse such action (Wood 2003; Lichbach 1998). Sageman extends this perspective by offering that cliques within a larger network operate as,

The social mechanism that puts pressure on prospective participants to join, defines a certain social reality for the ever more intimate friends, and facilitates the development of a shared collective social identity and strong emotional feelings for the in-group. (2004: 154)

Groups alone can foster an in-group specific view of the world which is transmitted to new members in their desire to belong to the group.

Another advantage of a pre-existing community is that such groups and networks commonly engage in a great deal of communication concerning their intentions and goals prior to engaging in collective dissent. Such steady forms of communication are more likely to induce members to join in collective action. Weinstein (2007), Lichbach (1998), Wood (2003) and Sageman (2004) all argue that communication can be important in establishing values for action and dissent within a par-

ticular community, endowing members with a mutual understanding that one's participation is dependent on another's, and vice versa (Lichbach 1998: 113). Mancur Olson (1965) stressed that small groups can exert interpersonal pressure to force members to act. In a small group an actor who knows that others' participation is dependent on hers, and that participation is expected among all members of the group creates efficacious feelings and establishes norms of reciprocity.

It should be said that operating in tandem with community solutions in the Homeland War were two crucial elements. The first was a pre-existing organization, in this case the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ). The second was the hierarchical structure of the party. I mention this in order to show that the dissident community in Croatia did not suddenly and spontaneously decide to form its members into a fighting force, rather it was the HDZ leadership that made the initial steps towards mobilization; however, it was among the dissident community and through its norms and relationships that HDZ was able to locate recruits and mobilize them. I anticipate that the earliest joiners were social joiners, meaning they joined through a relationship with a member of the same community, while the later joiners were mobilized, not by relationships and shared values, but by the prevalence of indiscriminate violence.

It is important to briefly address the relationship between violence and participation. While it is often assumed that increased violence deters participation, research shows that in fact increased violence, especially when seen as indiscriminate, shares a positive relationship with participation. This was first developed by Lichbach (1998) who argues that dissident actions often purposely provoke state reprisals in order to stimulate greater mobilization. Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) demonstrate that individuals may see the costs of not participating as greater than those that come with participation. In another paper, I statistically confirm a positive relationship between the number of attacks and the number of participants in a given municipality in Croatia during the Homeland War (Brown 2013). Based on my own findings and those of the broader literature, the expectation that later joiners were mobilized by violence is well supported. The relationship between violence and participation makes understanding the early joiners all the more compelling as they joined prior to the onset of sustained fighting.

## **Community**

In order to accurately observe the role of community solutions in overcoming the collective action problem it is necessary to identify the community in question. I do not assume that the boundaries of this community included all Croats and excluded all non-Croats. Croatian national and ethnic identity was certainly not that monolithic, nor did Croats all share the same goals. For instance we see that the

majority of Croats did not favor full independence. As Gagnon (2006) shows, only 15% of Croats wanted full independence for Croatia in 1990, while 64% favored a confederation with Yugoslavia (Gagnon 2006: 135). Klanjšek and Flere (2011) also show that there was not an overwhelming longing for an independent homeland among the majority of Croats in 1990. Even among HDZ supporters, only 30% favored independence over a confederation (Gagnon 2006: 135). Therefore, the community from which the first fighters began to participate in the preparation and organization of the conflict was relatively small. It is necessary then to identify its boundaries and the criteria for membership.

Charles Tilly offers that broader societies often have contiguous zones within them that serve as boundaries among members of a wider community (2005: 134). For our purposes I regard what interview subjects referred to as the *hrvatska stvar* (the Croatian thing, but understood better in English as the Croatian question) to be the contiguous zone around which social boundaries were delineated in Croatia and Yugoslavia. The central issues of the Croatian question can be understood as the issues of Croat goals for an independent state, the rights of Croats in Yugoslavia, Croatia's position in the socialist federation, and interpretations regarding Croatia's past, especially during the Second World War.

The clarity of this boundary was intensified by the Communist's prohibition on unofficial public discussions of the past and by suppressing outward displays of Croatian nationalism or even patriotism. Croatian national aspirations go at least as far back as the 19th century; however, during the Second World War the Croatian Independent State (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) was aligned with Axis Powers and led by a Fascist regime, the Ustaša. In the post-war period Croatian support for independence or patriotism became associated with the Fascist regime and its crimes. What is more, in the aftermath of the war, Croats who had (or were suspected of having) supported the NDH were discriminated against by the Communists. Associates of the NDH were denied employment and educational opportunities (Hockenos 2003). Members of this community, those on the losing side of WWII in Croatia, were not allowed to openly mourn their losses, nor were they allowed to publicly air their dissatisfaction with Yugoslavia.

While discussions of the past and the Croatian question were interdicted publicly, they continued privately. The memory of the war and the goal of an independent Croatia endured among certain members of the public. Many of these individuals migrated to Western Europe, North America and Australia, where they formed organizations aimed at overthrowing the Communist regime and liberating Croatia (Hockenos 2003). Many of those who remained in Yugoslavia continued to be concerned with the Croatian question. For example, in an interview in Drniš my interlocutor explained that his family frequently discussed the Second World War and

what they saw as limitations on Croat rights in Yugoslavia. The subject went on to explain that everyone in the area remembered whose side each family had been on, but that you only discussed such things with those who had been on the same side. He added that this was the reason they (meaning his family) hated Communist Partisans. Saying, they hated Partisans more than Četniks (Serb royalist, nationalist paramilitaries in WWII), since at least with a Četnik you knew where he stood. Partisans, on the other hand, were traitors since they were Croat, but potentially traitors of Croatia (Drniš 02/24/2012).

Other interview subjects related similar experiences, suggesting that precluded discussions of the past in the public helped create a discreet community in which the cost of membership could be further discrimination or even jail. Some interviewees went to jail or had relatives jailed for dissident activities involving the Croatian question, such as singing patriotic songs, having contact with the nationalist diaspora, or writing patriotic graffiti in public view. Belonging to the community itself was an act of dissent, which helped foster the values and norms that would later facilitate collective action. The boundaries of the community were how one regarded the Croatian question, while the level of belonging to this community was determined by one's stance, and the strength of that stance, on the Croatian question.

### **Local and Central Motivations**

Examining the differences between the early and later joiners can also help clarify where violence originates. On top of the greed/grievance dichotomy the literature has developed another dichotomy surrounding the origins of violence. Violence is regarded as a consequence of local or central interests (Kalyvas 2003). Centrally interested actors are thought to be motivated by the grievances concerning the conflict's central cleavage; locally interested actors are believed to be motivated by local, often material interests. In this paper, I argue that the earliest participants joined socially from a pre-existing community whose boundaries were defined by one's stance on the conflict's central cleavage, the Croatian question (i.e., the goal of an independent Croatia), demonstrating that the earliest violence has origins at the center of the conflict. Early joiners should all exhibit a strong orientation around the central cleavage of the conflict, while later joiners should demonstrate a greater ideological and social distance from the central cleavage, which explains why they were mobilized later, by localized violence.

The fact that the group's identity was bounded by individuals' dissatisfaction with the status quo in Yugoslavia exemplifies that these individuals held strong grievances against the state and the Communist authorities. We see then that the central cleavage, in this case, is also a shared grievance. At the same time, the fact that the community's grievances were largely related to past events and further in-



tensified by the interactions within the group itself (Sageman 2004) is a good indication as to why any statistical significance between the central cleavage and the onset of the conflict would not be observed at the aggregate level. The measure of grievance is not necessarily evident in the present. As this chapter will show, the participation of these individuals very much depended on their dissatisfaction with Croatia's historical lot in Yugoslavia, and the early actions of these individuals played a crucial role in the opening days of the conflict.

### **Research Methodology**

I use interviews with former participants in the Croatian War in order to show the differences between early and later joiners. From February 2012 to September 2012, I conducted 32 interviews with Croatian war veterans in Dalmatia, Central Croatia and Slavonia. The interviews usually lasted between one to three hours and were conducted in subjects' place of business, homes, or cafes. The topic of the Croatian Homeland War remains a very sensitive issue in Croatia and the surrounding countries. As a result I usually had to use someone to personally request the interview with the subject. This required us to find family members and friends of war veterans to introduce us and ask for an interview. Even still, many of the individuals we requested interviews with declined. This was especially the case with former members of paramilitary groups. Given the sensitive nature of the Homeland War today, it was necessary to offer anonymity or confidentiality to each subject. Even though the interviews were confidential or anonymous, most subjects refused to let us record the conversation. Therefore, my research assistant and I took rigorous notes during each interview and afterward combined them in detailed summaries. Anywhere that I use quoted text is a translation of a quote that was written down verbatim. Everywhere else, what the subject reported is paraphrased in a way that tries to closely capture what the subject said and how it was said.

I asked each subject several open ended questions concerning their involvement in the War, life in Yugoslavia, and their family's role in the Second World War (see Appendix for a full description of the questions). For the purposes of this chapter I focus on when and how each individual began serving the homeland, asked as "Kad ste se i kako stavili u službu domovine"? (When and how did you begin serving the homeland?). I also look at which side his family supported during the Second World War, labeled as SFRJ for Partisan or Yugoslavia supporters and NDH for supporters of the Croatian Fascist regime or groups associated with it; the presence of personal connections to someone involved in the early stages of the conflict prior to joining; and whether or not the subject experienced violence before joining. Out of the 32 interviews only 28 are considered viable. Some subjects refused to answer questions in a way that could support this research. Those inter-

views have been subsequently removed from the analysis. Two interviews were conducted with individuals who were too young to enlist in 1991, and have also been removed from the analysis in this chapter. Additionally, the 5 interviews with members of the paramilitary group the Croatian Defense Forces (Hrvatske obrambene snage, HOS) are not included. The total number of interviews used for analysis is 21. In the remainder of the article I look at interviews with war veterans and explore the motives of early joiners.

### **The Pattern of Participation**

I define an early joiner as someone who joined in the preparation, organization, and fighting in Croatia before June 25, 1991, the day Croatia first declared its independence from Yugoslavia. Later joiners are those who joined after this date, but before the introduction of conscription. The period of focus here is from 1990 to October 4, 1991, the day before President Tudman announced de-facto conscription (Immigration 1993). The contending explanations for early and later involvement are the social relationships individuals shared with other participants or an individual's experience with violence. As stated earlier, I expect that early joiners should exhibit stronger social ties within a specific dissident community than later joiners, while later joiners should have greater experience with levels of indiscriminate violence.

Tables 1 and 2 show that my expectations are, for the most part, correct. In Table 1, only three out of 12 early joiners did not have a connection or relationship with either the nationalist community or individuals already involved in the conflict. Two of the three with no relationship discussed a violent incident as factoring in on their decision to join, the 11 other individuals joined through someone, leaving only one participant who does not fit either expectation. Table 2 shows that six of nine later joiners joined without a connection and after experiencing some level of violence, while the other three joined without experiencing violence but through a social relationship. In the remainder of this chapter I provide further evidence in support of the social aspects of early joining by exploring the process through which early participants joined in the conflict via respondents' interviews.

### **Explaining Early Joiners**

The first subject from Zagreb was in the Reserve Police (RP). During Yugoslavia the RP existed in the event that if the city or republic needed more police officers than those it had on hand, it could mobilize these reservists. According to the subject, beginning in 1990 the RP began acting as a parallel police force, designed to monitor what other police and the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslavenska narodna armija, JNA) were doing. At this point the certainty to which the newly elected HDZ

**Table 1:** Summary Table of Early Joiners

	Location	Violence	Family	Relationship
With Violence	Zagreb	Yes	NDH-SFRJ	Yes
	Stobreč	Yes	SFRJ	No
	Podstrana	Yes	NDH	Yes
	Ernest.	Yes	NDH	No
Without Violence	Zagreb	No	NDH	Yes
	Zagreb	No	NDH	Yes
	Zagreb	No	N/A	No
	Solin	No	SFRJ	Yes
	S. Brod	No	NDH	Yes
	Osijek	No	NDH	Yes
	Drniš	No	NDH	Yes
	Drniš	No	NDH	Yes

**Table 2:** Summary Table of Later Joiners

	Location	Violence	Family	Relationship
With Violence	Split	Yes	NDH-SFRJ	No
	Sisak	Yes	SFRJ	No
	Osijek	Yes	SFRJ	No
	Omiš	Yes	NDH	No
	Drniš	Yes	NDH	No
	Drniš	Yes	NDH	No
Without Violence	Drniš	No	NDH	Yes
	Zagreb	No	NDH	Yes
	Split	No	N/A	Yes

Government controlled the power structures in Croatia was in question. For example, during a riot between Dinamo (Zagreb) and Red Star (Belgrade) football fans in Zagreb on May 13, 1990 there was the impression that the police acted more aggressively towards Croats than towards Serbs (Tanner 1997: 228). A look at Table 3 on the next page shows that nearly 30% of all sections of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova, MUP) in Croatia were populated by Serbs. The loyalty of the Serb policemen to Croatia was in question by President Tuđman's newly elected government. It was feared that if the Serb policemen left Croatia or refused to follow orders, the police force would be considerably weakened. Therefore, according to the interview subject, it was necessary to create a parallel police structure, one that could monitor the activities of police and the Serb dominated JNA while also waiting in the wings to fill any vacancies left by the defections of Serb po-

**Table 3:** Ethnic Makeup of the Croatian Interior Ministry 1990

Ethnicity	Police	Inspectors	Managers	Remaining	Total
Croat	45.8	46.1	66.3	59.3	50.3
Serb	32.8	34.5	29.2	23.3	30.1
Yugoslav	16.6	15.9	2.6	14.2	15.6
Other	4.8	3.5	1.8	3.2	4.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Table taken from Radelic et al. 2006: 82.

lice officers. In order to assure that the RP would be loyal to the new regime, only selected individuals were called to participate. Sometime in 1990 the subject was contacted by his *kum* who worked in MUP. (The word *kum* can refer to one's Godfather or Best Man in Southeastern Europe, see below for a more detailed explanation). The subject was then told to recruit two other individuals that he knew and trusted. The subject told me that in this way loyal RP cells were set up all over Zagreb.

The subject also related that in addition to his involvement with the RP he also helped Croat conscripts defect from the JNA. Again, these actions involved family members or family friends. The subject, and others, would use vehicles from MUP to drive onto a JNA base with the purpose of taking a relative or friend out to lunch. This person would have already packed a few of his belongings in advance and would then leave in the MUP vehicle. He would be driven to his family's residence for an hour or so, and then he would be taken somewhere where he could join the fledgling National Guard (Zbor narodne garde, ZNG). According to the subject, the strategy here was threefold: 1) it was a way to find able bodied men to join the ZNG; 2) it denied such a person to the JNA; 3) it made the Croats remaining in the JNA nervous about being the only Croats remaining in the JNA. Therefore it was hoped that they too would consider defecting. While this strategy is interesting in itself, what is most important is that the early defections relied on trust and familiarity between the recruits and the recruiters. According to the subject, the initial orders for recruitment came from HDZ.

The next subject, also from Zagreb, worked for the railroads during Yugoslavia. His family's past involvement with the NDH (his uncle was an Ustaša) made it difficult for his father to find work. He therefore emigrated to Germany. Through his father and traveling around the continent on the railroads the subject had strong ties with the radical elements in the Croatian diaspora residing in Western Europe. According to the subject, in order to maintain his job and as a result of his connection with the nationalist diaspora he was forced to work for Yugoslavia's secret police, the State Security Administration (Uprava državne bezbednosti, UDBA), informing

on individuals in the diaspora. The subject relates that the leaders of the diaspora knew he was an informant and coached him on providing just enough correct information for his UDBA handlers to keep them interested and to keep him employed. Eventually the subject became a reserve officer in the JNA. Sometime in 1990, the subject relates that he and other like minded officers held secret meetings organized by HDZ, in which they discussed how to establish an army for Croatia in the event of a war. According to the subject, the individuals at this meeting were those each member trusted, meaning someone with known greater sympathies to Croatia than to Yugoslavia. After establishing an army structure for Croatia the officers would recruit individuals to participate. A relationship and knowledge of one's position on the issue of Croatia was a necessary precondition for recruitment. When asked how they would identify recruits, the subject simply replied that they knew "who would and who wouldn't" participate (Zagreb 03/28/2012).

This idea is supported by evidence from other parts of Croatia as well. A subject from Slavonski Brod who was a member on the city council and involved in the preparation for the conflict, relates a similar situation with recruits. The subject hailed from a family with strong NDH ties. His father had been in the Wehrmacht, most likely the 369th Croatian Reinforced Infantry, as he fought and survived at Stalingrad. After also narrowly escaping execution by Yugoslav Partisans in 1947, his father continued to be harassed frequently by the Communist authorities and eventually emigrated to Germany. In 1971, the subject himself was briefly detained for singing patriotic songs in a cafe. According to the subject, when the leaders recruited individuals to join the ZNG in Slavonski Brod in 1991, they only dealt with those individuals whom they knew and who stood on the "right" side of the Croatian question. Moreover, he explicitly stated that by contacting those individuals whom they knew and who knew each other it would be difficult for the recruited to refuse and say "no" (Slavonski Brod 04/10/2012).

A subject from Osijek relates that he was also "instructed" to join the Civilian Defense (Narodna zaštita, NZ) by his *kum*. The subject mentions that at the time the other joiners all knew each other. They were all "friends with whom they had talked with already" (Osijek 04/10/2012), meaning they knew where each stood on the Croatian question. Prior to being recruited the subject had contact with the nationalist diaspora through his brother, who lived in Germany and his father had been a soldier in the NDH.

Other early participants were contacted directly by HDZ and told to begin forming an organization for defense. Two participants in Drniš related that they were both contacted by HDZ members in the government and told to prepare for war. The last subject from Zagreb did not indicate that he was contacted by anyone in particular. Rather he explained he was simply mobilized into the RP sometime

during 1990, but that it was boring and not worth talking about. Later he joined the 1st Brigade. Despite the subject's lack of a stated interpersonal relationship he still fits the profile of the other interviewees. According to the subject it was easier for Serbs to live in Yugoslavia than for "regular" Croats. The subject mentioned that his family went to church, though quietly, and that he could never marry someone who was not a Catholic. The subject had a Serb neighbor, but according to the interview this neighbor did not seem "like a Serb". Even though this individual did not explain his family's history or who recruited him to join the RP, it is clear that his position on the Croatian question was similar to those recruited elsewhere. Given the other examples we can speculate that his views were known to those who mobilized him into the RP.

The final early joiner does not exhibit the same characteristics as those in the previous interviews. Though not a party member the subject was somewhat satisfied with the stability of the Communist system and feels that all the negative aspects of the system intensified after Tito died in 1980. After the Log Revolution, when Serbs in Krajina felled trees, blocking roads, and declared the area independent from Croatia, the subject became concerned with what was going on and phoned a friend who worked in the police. When asked what to do, his friend told him to join the civilian defense (Narodna zaštita, NZ), which he did with some other friends. Even though the subject seems to have been neutral on the Croatian question, I have included him since he joined through a connection in the police department.

## Discussion

What we see from these interviews is that joining early involved several community solutions to the collective action problem. Based on the interviews it is apparent that early joiners belonged to a pre-existing community. The boundaries of this community were delineated by an individual's position on the Croatian question. Those who shared the position that Croatia and Croats were victims in Yugoslavia, disadvantaged and suppressed, were considered members of the same community and therefore trustworthy. The establishment of such a community helped lay the ground for the knowledge and reciprocity that helped facilitate participation. The level of one's integration into this community through interpersonal relationships strengthened the likelihood that he would be recruited and become involved. This last point is largely due to the importance of interpersonal connections, known as *veze*, in Southeastern Europe. As Allcock (2000) notes, despite the lack of scientific inquiry into the importance of connections in the former Yugoslavia, "anybody who has worked in Yugoslavia for any length of time will have encountered them" (2000: 363). Connections in the former Yugoslavia were a necessary way of life. Who you knew and how you knew them was important in overcoming bureaucratic

hurdles, receiving expedited healthcare, and finding employment. While such relationships, particularly between families are thought to be a legacy of a pre-modern phenomenon in the Balkans, Allcock (2000) offers that actually, in the face of Communism's hold over civil society, the tradition of connections helped individuals overcome the limits of the state's capacity and the restraints on other forms of social interaction. The post-Communist problems such as the lack of an established rule of law, coupled with economic uncertainty have ensured that the importance of connections endures in Balkan society.

The best example of the long history and importance of interpersonal relationships in the Balkans is the concept of *kumstvo*, which when translated into English can refer to godparenthood or even a form of familial sponsorship. In the interviews several individuals mentioned being instructed by their *kum* during the recruitment process. While conducting this research we were granted several interviews as a result of the person requesting the interview for us being the research subject's *kum*. *Kumstvo* is a complex Southeastern European social custom. A *kum* is either a godfather or a bridegroom; however, *kum* can also be referred to as the whole family of the godfather or bridegroom. For example, a man who was the best man at another man's wedding is *kum*, while his wife is also *kuma* and any subsequent children from the marriage may also be *kum* (Hammel 1968). At its core *kumstvo* establishes a strong sense of social reciprocity between the acting parties. An example of its importance as a form of reciprocity can be seen in how it was once traditionally used to end blood feuds or make amends for a grievous wrong. Righting the wrong of an accidental death involved the person responsible for the death offering the victim's family *kumstvo*. Saving another's life could also be rewarded with *kumstvo* (Hammel 1968). Though *kumstvo* is no longer used as a form of restitution for murder, it remains an important social institution. *Kumstvo* usually possesses asymmetric power relationships, meaning one party is often more obligated than the other party; however, there are shared obligations on both sides (Hammel 1968). While it is not wholly correct to say that someone cannot refuse a *kum*'s request, to refuse a request would create serious and negative social ramifications, especially in a situation where a *kum* is someone with more social importance or greater connections than the person being requested to do the favor. This is not to say that an individual participated in the conflict simply because his *kum* told him to, rather it was the recruit's position on the Croatian question, the awareness of that position by those seeking recruits, coupled with the recruit's relationships in the community and with his *kum* that operated together to induce participation in the earliest days of the conflict. The interviews evince that the values of the community and the recruits' desire to maintain a good standing as members in that community propelled individuals into participation. The request of one's *kum* created a situation in which a refusal

**Table 4:** Early Joiners' Pay

	Location
Received pay	S. Brod
	Podstrana
	Zagreb
Received no pay	Stobreč
	Ernest.
	Zagreb
	Zagreb
	Zagreb
	Solin
	Osijek
Drniš	
	Drniš

would easily diminish one's position within his own social environment. The interviews and relationships among the early joiners show that norms of reciprocity and forward thinking about one's future social standing were factors in the first fighters' decisions to participate.

So far I have presented evidence that supports the role of interpersonal relationships and community solutions in order to explain early joiners. To further strengthen this argument I look at the marginal role played by material incentives in mobilizing this group of participants. Table 4 shows that only three of the 12 subjects were paid for their participation in the early days of the War. These three were paid for their service through their place of employment before the conflict. This was standard practice in Yugoslavia. Firms would pay those employees who were in the military when they went on short exercises. The firms were then reimbursed by the Ministry of Defense. This is interesting as it indicates that for those employed and enlisted in the ZNG, participation was materially neutral; however, some subjects did say that when in the field their pay was raised to what it was when they had to travel for work. Many of the other participants were employed at the time of their involvement, but participated in the conflict through organizations that were seen as voluntary, such as the NZ or the organized defense in Drniš. Since the first actions of the Reserve Police were clandestine, none of those participants were paid until they joined the ZNG after or right before the conflict escalated into a sustained war.

As it relates to the center-periphery dichotomy we see that the early efforts of mobilization involved the center in many different ways. While those who joined early clearly show a strong orientation around the conflict's central cleavage, this



alone is not enough to explain their involvement. Nowhere in the interviews did any of the subjects mention that they spontaneously decided to fight for Croatian independence. The fact that this community existed in Yugoslavia since the Second World War and did little in the way of challenging the regime, shows that even the strongest of communities continue to face difficulties in overcoming the collective action problem. We see that the mobilization process was not a peripheral affair; it was initiated from the center of power, by the leadership of HDZ, and it utilized individuals' orientations to the central grievances as a way of selecting the most reliable and likely recruits. It took the mobilization efforts of HDZ to provide collective action solutions. That is, a pre-existing organization with its own incentives and hierarchical structure took the first step in organizing the Croatian forces. At the same time, to say that it was only the efforts of the HDZ leadership is also incomplete. To have an accurate answer to the question of why the earliest joiners participated at all, we have to understand that it was both the pre-existing organization, HDZ, and the pre-existing dissident community that made collective action possible.

This is exemplified by a debate within the HDZ and military leadership between Croatia's second Defense Minister, Martin Špegelj and President Tuđman. Mobilizing through the party and its interpersonal relationships with individuals within the dissident community was a conscious decision by President Tuđman. Tuđman felt the need to go through the party, rather than the structures of the official organizations because he was uncertain of who could be trusted and who could not. In an interview with Špegelj, the Minister explained that while he wanted to mobilize the Croatian Territorial Defense forces (Teritorijalna obrana, TO), Tuđman was unsure that officers in the TO would support Croatia's independence at that time and preferred instead to recruit and mobilize through the party and the interpersonal relationships among recruiters and recruits. Špegelj explained the situation as,

This was the problem: I was trying to organize HV, as a state, not a political organization... This is what I wanted to accomplish with the organization of the Territorial Defense, that had been here 20, 30 years. The Territorial Defense was militarily trained and called territorial only because of the way a potential war would have been fought. Otherwise, it is an army like any other army. I wanted to organize it so that in a relatively short period of time it could be mobilized, armed and have a good balance of power toward the opponent. But he [Tuđman] did not want that. He wanted mercenaries who will be under his political control. And there arose a problem. I could not control him and that's why in the fall of 1991 I resigned. (Zagreb 11/19/2012)

The disagreement between Špegelj and Tuđman appears to be one over the importance of individuals' attachment to the central cleavage and how assured the regime could be of such individuals' participation. Špegelj believed he could mo-

bilize the TO based on his authority as Defense Minister and through his own personal relationships with the commanders in the JNA in Croatia.<sup>2</sup> Špegelj had been a general in charge of the 5th Army of the JNA in the 1980s. As Špegelj said in the interview he had Serb commanders willing to defect to the Croatian side. We see then that with Špegelj's plan an individual's position on the Croatian question or a close orientation to the central cleavage was not seen as a necessary precondition for participation, rather it was his own personal relationship and the subsequent relationships shared with the commanding officers in Croatia. While there is no way to know if Špegelj's plan would have worked as well as he believes it would have, the contrast between him and Tuđman does reveal that from at least part of the Croatian leadership, community solutions involving the central cleavage were seen as important to the Republic's mobilization efforts. Špegelj explains that everything was organized through HDZ and not as he wanted it, through the Croatian state, in order for Tuđman to be assured of individuals' "loyalty to the party" (Zagreb 11/19/2012). Tuđman appears to have understood that those individuals who were already disposed to the idea of Croatian independence, Croat grievances and connected to individuals in HDZ with the same disposition, would be more likely to participate if recruited. As most of the interviews with early joiners demonstrate, this was the strategy used by the earliest organizers.

While the central cleavage and grievances may not be important to most of a conflict's participants, in the early stages of the war, prior to the availability of vast resources to the weaker organization and before the escalation of violence to the point that it induces expanded participation, leaders will target their recruitment efforts on those who they know share a strong inclination to the conflict's central cleavage or grievance. This orientation is created by the norms of a particular community. The fact that it is confined to a community of a certain size may explain why at the aggregate level, the relevance of grievances often fails to show a significant relationship with the onset of conflict. While the boundaries of a community are a necessary precondition, it is the members' involvement with each other in that community via mechanisms for reciprocity and a shared understanding of mutual commitments that helps facilitate collective action.

<sup>2</sup> Here I do not quote Špegelj because during the interview his wife, Stanka Špegelj interjected and related all of this information. Špegelj just confirmed it. Here is the quote: "Martin was the commander of the Western District during Yugoslavia – Croatia, Slovenia and part of Bosnia. And he had control of all the barracks, warehouses, people, he knew where everybody was. So the Serbs were terribly afraid of him... And since he knew it all, he organized it to take their weapons. He went for example to Varaždin, met with a group of people who he organized to take control of the barracks. He got the commander of the barracks to go along, although he was a Serb" (Zagreb 11/19/2012).

## Conclusion

The relationship between material rewards available to insurgents and the onset of conflict has dominated the literature; however, the positive correlation between macro economic variables and conflict may mask the processes underlying a conflict's origins. As this paper shows, the earliest entrants in Croatia's military organizations were mostly members who belonged to a community of dissidents dissatisfied with Croatia's position in Yugoslavia. At the same time we see that individuals' grievances alone were not enough to mobilize them into participating in conflict, rather it was the importance of social relationships within this specific community that led to these individuals' involvement in the war. We have seen then that not only is the importance of grievances difficult to measure in the aggregate, as they belong only to a minority of the overall population, but that also grievances alone are incapable of solving the collective action problem.

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- Former member of the 116th Brigade, interviewed in Solin on 05/07/2012
- Former member of the 1st Brigade, interviewed in Zagreb on 03/20/2012
- Former Minister of Defense, Martin Špegelj, interviewed in Zagreb on 11/19/2012

### Appendix

Information	Primary Questions	Additional Questions
Life long before the war	Could you tell us what life was like a few years before the war? What was your job? How were things in general?	How did you feel about the Communists? Why? (Family background)
Life shortly before the war	Had things changed much just before the war? When did they change?	In what way? What do you think brought those changes? Or why did they change?
Feelings toward Serbs	During Yugoslavia what was life like between Croats and Serbs? Were there problems? If so what kind of problems?	When did problems appear? What do you think were the causes of these problems?

Information	Primary Questions	Additional Questions
Participation in “struggle” for Croatia	When did and how did you begin serving for the Homeland? <i>Kad ste se i kako stavili u službu domovine?</i>	How did you understand what was happening in the country at the time? How did you become involved in that? What did you think about doing such things?
Risk and threat from Serbian aggression	How did you understand the threat facing Croats? <i>Kako ste doživljavali prijetnju s kojom su se suočavali Hrvati?</i>	What do you think the Serbs wanted in the war?
Joining HV or HOS	Could you describe how you joined ZNG/HV/HOS? How did you decide to join? Where? How did you feel once you joined? (If HOS, ask why not HV)	What was happening in the country at that time?
Life in HV or HOS	When did you begin to be paid? What kind of equipment did you receive?	
Goals	What were your goals for Croatia in the Homeland War?	
Political and ideological organization	Which party did you support in the 1991 election? Why that one?	What do you think were the main differences between HDZ, HSP, and SDP?
Perceptions	In your mind, when did the war begin?	

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