



Are ethnic contenders greedy?

Ulrike Theuerkauf

Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science

Introduction

Contrary to the expectations of many scholars and policy makers, the end of the Cold War did not lead to a new era of peace and political stability (Brown 1993). Although violent intrastate conflicts had been increasing steadily in number since the 1950s (Hegre 2004) and have outweighed the frequency of war between sovereign countries vastly since the early 1960s (Hewitt 2007), it was not until the collapse of communism that people realised how big a challenge civil wars pose to the stability of states and international security (Brown 1993). Among these conflicts, those that are ethnopolitically motivated – that is where ethnic cleavages are the central lines along which mobilisation for violent action takes place (Gurr 2000) – deserve particular attention, as they represented nearly two-thirds of all violent intrastate disputes within the last two decades of the 20th century alone (Scherrer 1999).

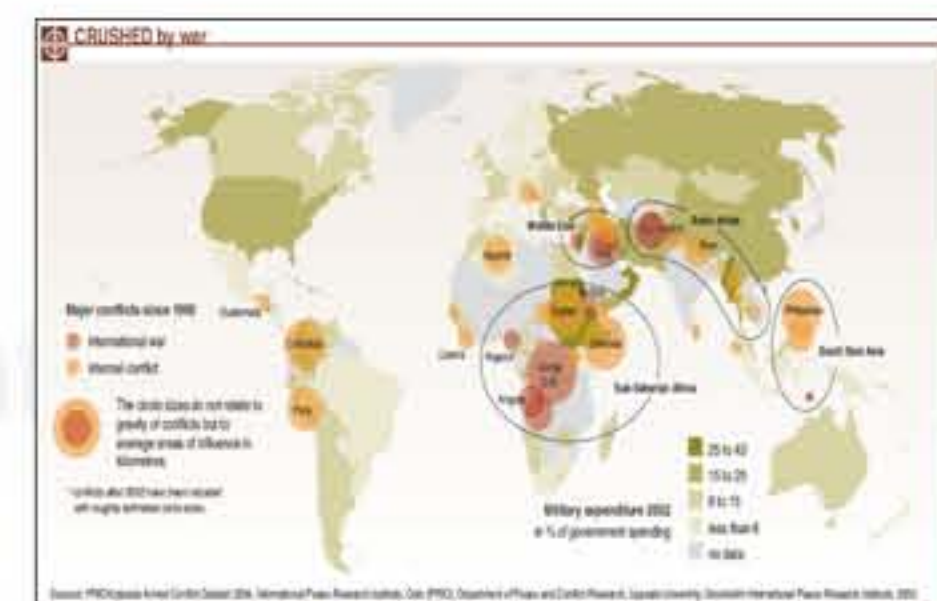


Figure 1. Major armed interstate and intrastate conflicts between 1990 and 2003. Source: Emmanuelle Boumay, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, Crushed by War, 2005.

Explaining ethnic violence

Since the late 1990s, the academic debate on the causes of civil war has been dominated by the juxtaposition of greed versus grievance factors.

Grievance-based explanations of violent intrastate conflict argue that ethnic violence is an expression of grievances about the non-fulfilment of certain value expectations: ethnic groups who perceive that they cannot get the values they feel entitled to, are expected to develop emotions of anger and resentment which – under the “right” circumstances – can translate into violent action (Harff and Gurr 2003).

Greed-based explanations, on the other hand, argue that the risk of violent intrastate conflicts increases depending on financial opportunities (Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and expected gains conditional upon victory that outweigh the costs of intrastate conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 1998).

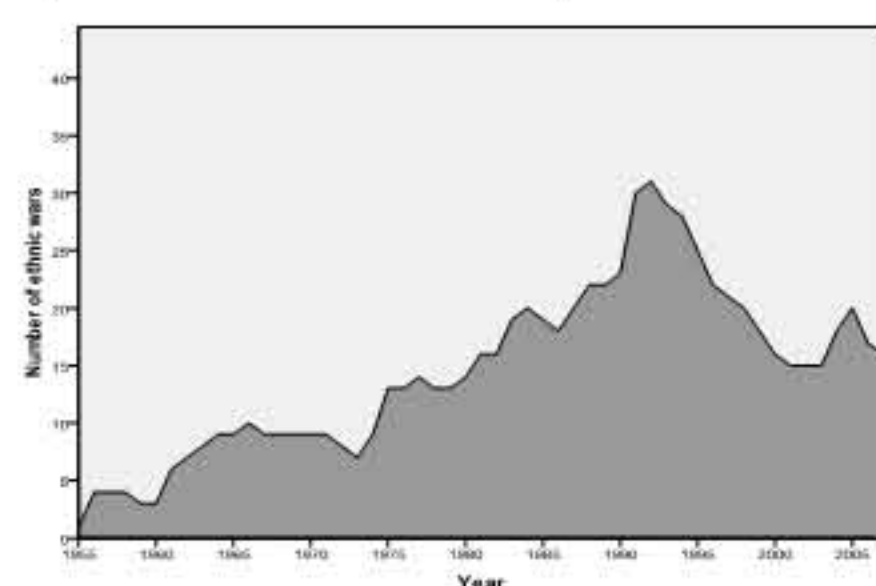


Figure 2. Number of ethnic wars between 1955 and 2007, based on data by the Political Instability Task Force (2009).

Yet the description of greed versus grievance factors as antagonistic ‘either-or’ explanations of ethnic violence is both artificial and misleading: when applied to questions of institutional design in divided societies, greed and grievance factors become indistinguishable.

The three values of political representation

There are three distinct values of being represented politically, which is why political institutions that reduce the chances of political representation particularly for ethnic minorities can be expected to increase the odds of ethnic violence.

I. The intrinsic value of political representation

Intrinsic values relate to the worth of objects and practices by themselves, i.e. objects and practices are intrinsically valuable if they are considered a relevant good *per se* (Réaume 2000).

The argument that political representation is intrinsically valuable is based on the normative assumption that having “voice” in the political decision-making process is an intrinsically rewarding experience for all ethnic groups:

ethnic groups want to make their interests heard and government to respond to them, as it affirms their status as recognised members of a political community (Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Sen 2003; Wimmer 2002).

II. The first instrumental value of political representation

Objects or practices have instrumental value if they help achieve relevant extrinsic ends, i.e. objectives that are important independently of the objects or practices that helped achieve them (Réaume 2000).

The argument about the first instrumental value of political representation is based on the recognition that political institutions have an impact on the distribution of powers and resources among political actors (March and Olsen 1989):

those ethnic groups that are represented in formal political institutions can affect the distribution of resources and powers in their own favour (Pande 2003).

III. The second instrumental value of political representation

The second instrumental value of political representation is based on the implications of the ethnic security dilemma as described by Saideman (1998) and Saideman et al. (2002):

political representation makes ethnic groups feel politically, physically and economically more secure, as it increases the likelihood with which they can influence potentially harmful government policies.

A grievance-based explanation of ethnic violence

In sum, there are three distinct values of being represented politically, which is why political institutions that reduce chances of political representation are expected to increase the odds of ethnic violence: those ethnic groups who perceive that they cannot get the values of political representation they feel entitled to, are expected to develop emotions of anger and resentment which – under the “right” circumstances – can translate into violent action.

Empirical evidence

There is ample evidence to illustrate the apparent link between political institutions that provide comparatively low chances of political representation and the risk of ethnic violence.

Formal political institutions that provide comparatively low chances of political representation include:

presidentialism: due to the zero-sum character of presidential elections (Linz 1990);

majoritarian electoral systems: due to their winner-take-all character (Norris 2002);

unitary state structures: due to the concentration of political power in the central government (Lijphart 1999).

[Note that this overview intentionally neglects

- a) subtypes/variations in the design of each of these political institutions and
- b) informal political institutions such as clientelism and networks of corruption that can equally reduce chances of political representation for specific ethnic groups.]

Case in point: Nigeria

The presidential form of government in the Second [1979-1983] and Fourth Republic [since 1999] exacerbated ethno-regional anxieties and inter-ethnic tensions due to the inevitable zero-sum character of presidential elections (Suberu and Diamond 2002).



Case in point: Sri Lanka

The first-past-the-post electoral system for the legislature [in use until 1989] laid an “institutional basis” for the ethnic war between Tamil insurgents and Sinhalese-dominated government authorities [1983-2009], as it disadvantaged ethnic minorities and encouraged strategies of ethnic outbidding (De Votta 2005).



Table 1: The effects of combinations of a majoritarian electoral system, presidential form of government and unitary state structure on the odds of ethnic violence

Variable	Coefficient (s)	Odds ratio (exp(B))	Standard error (SE)
Combination category A	1.603***	4.970***	0.502
Ethnic fractionalization	0.967**	2.605**	0.400
Colonial experience (British)	0.610***	1.840***	0.221
Colonial experience (French)	0.411**	1.508**	0.301
Colonial experience (Other)	1.183***	3.264***	0.380
DPPAC	0.089**	1.091**	0.023
Socio economic inequalities	0.008	1.008	0.012
War in neighbouring country	1.213***	3.362***	0.178
Involved in international conflict	1.248***	3.556***	0.399
Prior duration of peace	-1.001***	0.165***	0.11
SPINE_1	-0.019***	0.981***	0
SPINE_2	0.009***	1.009***	0
SPINE_3	-0.002***	0.998***	0
Constant	-0.257	0.774	0.23
Chi square	2764.311		
n	5966		

Significance: *** at 0.01 level; ** at 0.05 level; * at 0.1 level

Table 1. The effects of combinations of a majoritarian electoral system for the legislature, presidential form of government and unitary state structure (=“Combination Category A”) on the odds of ethnic violence. The results are based on a personally designed dataset that contains information on all independent countries between 1955 and 2005.

Conclusions

The overlap of greed and grievances

The three values of political representation [relating to i) the political recognition of ethnic groups, ii) the likelihood with which resources and powers are distributed in their favour, and iii) their perceptions of political, physical and economic security] illustrate that – when applied to questions of institutional design in divided societies – the distinction between greed and grievance factors is both artificial and misleading:

following the second and third value of political representation, grievances about political institutions that provide only low chances of political representation are themselves a product of the strife for resource access and economic security.

Are ethnic contenders greedy?

Not necessarily:

The overlap of greed and grievance factors when applied to questions about the chances of political representation provided by institutional design does not imply that ethnic contenders are exclusively driven by greed:

political representation is a valuable good for ethnic groups beyond the purely economic dimension, as it equally affirms their status as recognised members of a political community, and affects their perceptions of physical and political security alike.

Literature cited

Brown, Michael E. (1993) 'Causes and Implications of Ethnic Conflict' in Michael E. Brown (ed.) *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, pp. 3-26.

Collier, Paul and Jake Hoeffler (1998) 'On Economic Causes of Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers* 50(4):503-523.

Collier, Paul and Jake Hoeffler (2004) 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4):563-595.

De Votta, Neil (2005) 'From Ethnic Outbidding to Ethnic Conflict: The Institutional Basis for Sri Lanka's Separatist War', *Asian Survey and Monographs* 11(1):141-159.

Durr, Ted R. (2000) *Peoples versus States: Adversities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Harff, Barbara and Thane Gustaf (2003) *Ethnic Conflict: World Politics and Action*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Hegre, Howard (2004) 'The Duration and Termination of Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research* 41(2):243-252.

Hewitt, J. Joseph (2007) 'Trends in Global Conflict, 1946-2000' in J. Joseph Hewitt, Konstantin Willebrandt and Ted R. Durr (eds.) *Peace and Conflict 2008*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, pp. 21-26.

Kymlicka, Will and Wayne Norman (1994) 'Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory', *Ethics* 104(2):352-381.

Lijphart, Arend (1999) *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Lisa Han J. (1990) 'The Paradox of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy* 11(3):51-69.

March, James G. and John P. Olsen (1989) *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. New York: The Free Press.

Norris, Pippa (2002) 'Ballots not Bullets: Testing Conventional Theories of Ethnic Conflict, Electoral Systems, and Democratization', in Andrew Reynolds (ed.) *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 206-247.

Pande, Rohini (2003) 'Can Mandated Political Representation Increase Policy Influence for Disadvantaged Minorities? Theory and Evidence from India', *The American Economic Review* 93(4):1152-1151.

Réaume, Denise G. (2000) 'Official Language Rights: Intrinsic Value and the Protection of Difference', in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (eds.) *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*. New York: Oxford UP, pp. 245-272.

Saideman, Stephen M. (1998) 'Is Pandora's Box Half Empty or Half Full? The Limited Violence of Secessionism and the Domestic Sources of Disintegration', in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds.) *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Envy, and Escalation*. Princeton, Princeton UP, pp. 127-150.

Saideman, Stephen M., David J. Laitin, Michael Camporini and Samuel Staton (2002) 'Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1945-1998', *Comparative Political Studies* 35(1):118-129.

Schuler, Christian P. (1999) 'Towards a Comprehensive Analysis of Ethnicity and Mass Violence: Types, Dynamics, Characteristics and Trends' in Håkan Wiberg and Christian P. Schuler (eds.) *Ethnicity and Asymmetric Conflict*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 52-88.

Sen, Amartya (2003) 'Democracy and Its Global Roots: Why Democratization is not the same as Westernization', *The New Yorker* 29(14):28-35.

Sibero, Robert J. and Larry Diamond (2002) 'Institutional Design, Ethnic Conflict Management, and Democracy in Nigeria' in Andrew Reynolds (ed.) *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 400-428.

Wimmer, Andrew (2002) *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

For further information

Please contact:

Ulrike Gisela Theuerkauf
PhD candidate in Political Science, Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.

Email: u.g.theuerkauf@lse.ac.uk