

Democratisation and Conflict in Ethnically Divided Societies

Judith Vorrath

ETH Zurich | Center for Security Studies | vorrath@sipo.gess.ethz.ch

Lutz F. Krebs

ETH Zurich | International Conflict Research | krebs@icr.gess.ethz.ch

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This article reviews three important factors in the academic debate on ethnic civil wars: the role of ethnicity in causing and structuring violence, the spread of ethnic civil wars once they have started, and the influence of democratic transitions in divided societies. The review displays the range of discussion on conflict, the state and political systems in ethnically divided societies, covering both theoretical and empirical contributions.

Introduction

The question why civil wars break out and what dynamics drive them remains one of the most complex and fascinating research topics in political science. The more important violent, internal conflicts have become on the international political agenda, the more academic studies have tried to grasp this phenomenon in theoretical and empirical terms. This review focuses primarily on ethnically divided societies and outlines the state of scientific debate concerning three core questions:

- ◆ Why do people get involved in ethnic conflicts?
- ◆ Why and how do ethnic civil wars spread?
- ◆ How are democratisation, state capacity and institutions linked with the outbreak of (ethnic) violence?

Each section of this review provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature in the area, with a strong focus on recent studies. The main goal is to identify major strands of discussion, not to provide exhaustive accounts. The review concludes with an outlook on current data projects that will influence the debate in the near future.

War Over Borders: Mobilisation in Ethnically Heterogeneous Countries

Ethnicity often plays a role in defining and structuring conflict. Civil wars between ethnic groups constitute a substantial part, if not the majority of all wars since the late 1950s, and the share of ethno-nationalist civil wars has risen steadily over the last seven decades (Wimmer and Min 2006). The veracity of this claim depends of course on the definition of ethnic groups, which are generally seen as groups formed on the basis of cultural, religious, linguistic or biological characteristics perceived to be shared by their members. While ethnic groups are essentially defined and delineated by a shared identity, their uniting characteristics are not primordial. In reviewing historic conceptions of ethnicity, Smith (1986, 21) found that “the common denominator appears to be the sense of a number of people or animals living together and acting together, though not necessarily belonging to the same clan or tribe”. In essence, the constructivist view that currently dominates the debate sees

interaction as the key, arguing that the relevant concept should not be the group “but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable” (Brubaker 2004, 38).

Since the end of the cold war, conflict between ethnic groups has increasingly received academics’ attention (cf. Gellner 1983, Horowitz 1985, Huntington 1993a and Wimmer 2002). However, the role that ethnicity plays in motivating and structuring civil wars remains an unsettled question, particularly due to the fluid nature of ethnic groups and their endogenous development during conflict. This section reviews the different arguments concerning the role of ethnicity in conflict.

The spectrum of opinions regarding the importance of ethnicity covers a significant range. One end of the scale is defined by the consideration that ethnicity and “ancient hatreds” between different ethnic groups are the exclusive basis of conflicts between them (as argued e.g. by Kaplan 1993), even going so far as to argue that ethnic heterogeneity in itself is conflictive (Vanhanen 1999). The other extreme is represented by the argument that parties to ethnic wars are nothing but “bands of opportunistic marauders recruited by political leaders” (Mueller 2000, 42), operating under the banner of a shared ethnicity mostly for the sake of convenience and increased legitimacy. However, neither of the two extreme positions on this scale can stand on its own: if ethnic heterogeneity has an inherent propensity to stimulate violent conflict, ethnic wars should be much more prevalent in a predominantly heterogeneous world (Fearon and Laitin 1996). Yet, the fact that ethnicity has been the factor common to the majority of the world’s conflicts suggests that it is more than just a thin veil, a marketing ploy used by common thugs.

The discussion has therefore moved to the dynamics underlying the use of ethnicity in conflict. A first proposed link between ethnicity and conflict works through the concept of nationalism, the demand that the political state should be congruent with the territory of a nation (Gellner 1983). Given that nations are predominantly defined in ethnic terms—such as a shared heritage, culture, or language—this strand of the literature connects the existence of ethnic heterogeneity with underlying political and social processes. Conflicts associated with ethno-nationalism can be wars of secession, where an ethnic group tries to secede from an ethnically heterogeneous state to form their own independent state. Irredentist conflicts are a subgroup

of secessionist wars, defined by an ethnic group pursuing the annexation of “its” territory by a neighbouring country populated by its kin. Examples of the former include the bid for an Abkhaz state in the north-west of the current internationally recognised borders of Georgia. Northern Irish republicanism, due to its demand for unification with the Republic of Ireland, is an irredentist movement. Alternatively, instead of seceding, ethnic groups can attempt to seize control of their ethnically heterogeneous state under the banner of nationalism. Instances of ethnic cleansing and genocide may occur if an ethnic group attempts to homogenise a multi-ethnic state.

The goal of attaining political control over an ethnically homogenous territory as such suggests certain pre-conditions for such conflicts. Gurr (1993) argues that the existence of a cultural identity in combination with collective political or economic grievances is the basis of group mobilisation. Kaufman (2006, see also the discussion in Grigorian and Kaufmann 2007) also identifies three main pre-conditions for mobilisation that match Gurr’s reasoning: firstly, the existence of narratives that define the ethnic in-group and in doing so also create an out-group, the in-group’s opponent. Secondly, fears regarding the future of the in-group that can be linked to political exclusion and discrimination. Finally, a territorial base or a homeland for the ethnic group.

Empirical evidence from Beissinger’s (2002) studies on the break-up of the Soviet Union supports the importance of these pre-conditions. Sufficiently large groups with a common group narrative and a clearly delineated homeland were recognised within the federal structure of the USSR, co-opting these groups at first, but also enabling ethno-nationalist mobilisation that contributed to the break-up of the Soviet Union. Additional support for the importance of grievances can be found in Reynol-Querol’s (2002) confirmation of Lijphart’s (1984) theory that consociational systems prevent conflict better than other systems in the face of incendiary divisions between religious groups: by ensuring that even small groups have a say in the decisions that affect them, consociational systems better manage to allay small groups’ fears.

On top of these main pre-conditions for ethnic conflict, Kaufman (2006) identifies three additional conditions necessary for the mobilisation for violent conflict. The additional conditions can be seen as inter-linked stages in the build-up to violence: appeals to group myths, the presence of extreme mass hostility and the development of a security dilemma. Such ethnic security dilemmas are based on the commitment problem between groups lacking access to an impartial third party that could enforce agreements between them (Fearon 1998). Given these factors, the temptation for each group to strike first in order to gain the advantage of early action can be substantial. Yugoslavian politics leading up to the wars of 1991 – 1995 can serve as an example here.

These conditions suggest that ethnic groups in themselves should not be considered unitary actors. Instead, ethnic groups often have multiple, competing leadership figures with their own followers, vying for the attention and support of the people. Leaders, followers and the politically not (yet) mobilised population may have different, individualistic goals. A second strand of the literature follows such an individualistic approach and argues that group grievances are less convincing conflict-generating factors than individual, rational cost-benefit calculations (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a present the core

argument of this strand of the literature). Material reasons for conflict can be found both at the leadership level and at the level of the foot-soldiers.¹ Here, ethnicity is not so much an explanatory factor as it is a tool for the elites to manipulate the masses into supporting them in the pursuit of their personal, material goals (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Seen from this perspective, ethnicity brings with it practical advantages such as the reduction of organisational problems, for instance by reducing action costs through shared language, culture habits etc. (Sambanis 2001). On the level of followers, the individualistic approach argues for a rational cost/benefit calculation that factors in the possible gains from joining a rebellion and related opportunity costs such as expectations of future employment.

While a lack of future perspectives may very well be a strong motivating factor, people joining a rebel movement generally need to be prepared to commit murder at the rate required in violent conflict, as the literature points out. This in turn requires a convincing narrative that transcends material motivations (Chirot and McCauley 2006). Such a narrative often focuses on group dynamics, such as displaying the out-group as less than human, threatening to the existence of the in-group or even unworthy of existence in general (Chirot and McCauley 2006).

In essence, there is agreement in the literature that ethnicity is a powerful factor in the structuring of ethnic conflict. The debate primarily centres on the question whether structural, material or symbolic factors are the primary *causes* of civil war. Within each school of thought, scholars have presented substantial theoretical and empirical evidence to support their respective arguments. The discussion is now moving on to the detailed study of the role of actors and the sequencing of processes at the monadic and dyadic group level.²

The configuration of ethnicity also means that the state level is not necessarily the most suitable level of analysis. Civil wars predominantly take place in parts of the world where borders still reflect the organisational interests of previous colonial powers rather than having been established by local political and identity-forming processes. This does not only result in internal conflict, but at times it also makes the spread of conflict across borders more likely. The following section explores the literature on this phenomenon.

War Without Borders: The Spread of Ethnic Conflict

Irrespective of the reasons for the onset of ethnic conflict, neighbouring states tend to be anxious when conflict erupts in their immediate vicinity—on the one hand in terms of indirect negative effects of a mainly economic nature,³ and on the other

1 Collier and Hoeffler 2004a and Fearon and Laitin 2003 stress the influence of economic cost/benefit structures that favour seeking “employment” with conflict parties due to the absence of other gainful employment opportunities. These can take the form of incentives such as rents to be extracted from natural resources or be the result of a lack of choice represented by a lack of school education, high unemployment or low per capita income.

2 The concluding section will link to some recent and ongoing data generation efforts in this direction.

3 These effects were discussed in detail and whenever possible quantified in Collier and Hoeffler 2004b; 2006.

hand in terms of their own military security. This part of the review deals with the second of these threats: the spread of conflict from one unit—normally a state—to another.

There is little doubt that the probability of conflict in any given country does not depend only on its own individual attributes and great power politics, but also on the regional setting. A whole series of studies has shown that violent conflicts tend to cluster in space and time, and that countries bordering on scenes of conflict face a higher risk of instability and even civil war (Esty et al. 1995, Ward and Gleditsch 2002, Goldstone et al. 2003). Since this could be due to regional clusters of conflict-relevant attributes rather than to transnational processes, statistical analyses (e.g. Buhaug and Gleditsch 2005) have been used to show that there are verifiable neighbourhood and contagion effects. In addition, a very recent study has shown that internal conflicts do tend to turn into internationalised warfare (Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008 (forthcoming)). Thus, countries are not merely “infected” by others triggering new civil wars, but existing conflicts can spill over to new territories and actors. The internationalisation of the Rwandan civil war after the 1994 genocide and the involvement of up to seven states in the subsequent Congo Wars are a case in point.

Ethnic civil wars are often seen as being especially prone to spread; accordingly, there are “waves” of ethnic conflict (such as after 1990 in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and parts of Africa (Lake and Rothchild 1998)). Indeed, the fact that international borders frequently run right through ethnic groups is one of the most commonly named factors causing or driving conflict and conflict spread. Other potential independent variables include transnational arms trafficking, state weakness, (regional) alliances and porous boundaries (Weiner 1996; cf. Lambach 2007 for the spread of state failure). Transnational ethnic groups have been identified as a source of conflict spread because they represent a mismatch between cultural and political boundaries (Brubaker 1996). If an ethnic group is a minority in one state, but a majority—or at least a significant group in terms of political power—in another, there is an opportunity for international alliances based on cultural similarity which can be a source of conflict spread (Moore and Davis 1998). This constellation has variously been interpreted as foreign policy behaviour (Moore and Davis 1998), or as an interdependent relational nexus of national minorities, nationalising states, and external national homelands (Brubaker 1996).

The discussion of transnational ethnic groups is linked to another factor frequently examined in the mainly qualitative, empirical discussion of conflict spread: refugee flows. Most people fleeing from civil war remain within their region of origin, thus placing a strong burden on neighbouring countries as in the case of the estimated 2.2 million Iraqi refugees in countries like Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States.⁴ Refugees might simply pose a threat to local stability by fuelling competition over resources, such as food, land and jobs, but various studies have also directed attention to the phenomenon of refugee “warriors” or the manipulation of refugee populations for military ends (Muggah 2006, Lischer 2005, Stedman and Tanner 2003). The latter point is linked to the difficulty of separating refugees and fighters and the (mis-)use of humanitarian assistance for refugees to sustain military activities.

Where transnational ethnic groups are present, refugees might trigger even more far-reaching dynamics by impacting directly or indirectly on ethnic relations in their host country. Frequently, phenomena like refugee manipulation and militarisation have been highlighted in the context of ethnic civil wars like in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and in the Balkans (Muggah 2006, Lischer 2005). However, most empirical studies have not set different sources of conflict spread in relation to one another or categorised them according to their significance. It is generally acknowledged that neither transnational ethnic groups nor refugee flows nor state weakness is responsible for the spread of conflict per se; they simply shape opportunity structures. Therefore, the particular constellation of these variables is important. For example, refugee militarisation seems more likely in a context of low state capacities on the part of the receiving state. This has been demonstrated by the different impact the mass influx of refugees from Rwanda had on the DR Congo and Tanzania, respectively (Whitaker 2003), or the same Bosnian refugees fleeing first to Bosanska Krajina and later to Croatia (Lischer 2005).

Overall, this literature either analyses single factors of conflict spread or very general “shopping lists” of potentially significant explanatory factors. For a more systematic view on conflict spread in ethnic civil wars and its mechanisms, it is necessary to turn to the predominantly theoretical literature.

There are few studies focusing on the dynamics of the actual processes leading to the spread of ethnic conflict. This strand of literature differentiates certain effects driving the spread of ethnic conflict, for example chain reactions and demonstration effects (Fearon 1998). The most systematic account is probably the categorisation by Lake and Rothchild (1998), which introduces the two main forms of spread: diffusion and escalation. Diffusion refers to conflict in one area altering the likelihood of conflict elsewhere. Escalation means spread through the involvement of new actors—usually foreign participants entering an otherwise internal conflict. Thus, intra-state violence develops into inter-state conflict.

Lake and Rothchild (1998) stress that diffusion processes mainly take place through the direct change in the ethnic balance of one country by ethnic conflict in a neighbouring country. In addition to such contagion, demonstration effects might operate behind apparent conflict diffusion. This more indirect effect refers to the change in a group’s beliefs about the likely behaviour of certain actors caused by ethnic conflict in another country. Demonstration can also bring about learning processes at the elite level regarding promising strategies and tactics (Lake and Rothchild 1998, Fearon 1998). The factors supposedly driving conflict escalation seem to be more concrete than those driving diffusion, as escalation is often based on the conscious decision of one or several actors to enter a conflict. Apart from the occurrence of unintentional spill-over, potential routes to conflict escalation include alliances between transnational ethnic groups, irredentist demands, the strategy of diverting attention from domestic problems by focussing on or even creating external problems, and the predatory behaviour of states seeking to benefit (economically) from the weakened abilities of other states currently experiencing conflict (Lake and Rothchild 1998).

Lake and Rothchild (1998) include commonly mentioned factors potentially causing conflict spread in their specification of mechanisms. Refugee flows, for example, can change the power

⁴ Refugee numbers as estimated by Human Rights Watch.

balance in the host country and internal weakness caused by civil wars can make states easy targets for predatory (neighbouring) states. However, the authors place these single factors in the context of processes.

Though the studies of the existence and mechanisms of the spread of ethnic conflict are convincing, some issues remain unsettled. Firstly, Fearon (1998) has pointed out that such dynamics cannot work in one direction only. In other words, if chain reactions and demonstration effects can have destabilising effects, they must also potentially have stabilising effects, depending on the situation (Fearon 1998).

To explain the direction of such effects, the same strategic dilemmas (information failures, commitment problems or security dilemmas) that take hold in the original conflict situation are identified as significant for spread. Overall, conflict in one locale is supposed to generate or worsen dilemmas in another locale (Lake and Rothchild 1998). Secondly, Fearon (1998) has stressed that ethnic wars are essentially self-limiting. In his view, they normally do not have the potential for (geographically) far-reaching spread because they are particular rather than universal by virtue of their identity base. In addition, ethnic conflicts often involve irredentist or secessionist demands and therefore only extend as far as there are ethnic brethren. Overall, conflict spread seems to be more likely when there are "nested" minorities, like on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Fearon 1998).

Beyond the debate on the likely scope of conflict spread, the classic work of Lake and Rothchild (1998) evokes a number of more far-reaching questions. Firstly, the authors' distinction between diffusion and escalation is questionable. Though useful as a means of categorisation, the application of these separate concepts to empirical observations in crisis regions might be difficult. Quite often, spread means that the conflict extends to new territories as well as to new actors.

In addition, the explanatory force of spread by escalation from internal to inter-state war is reduced by the non-consideration of proxy warfare and by the very limited reference to non-state actors. This shortcoming is especially serious when referring to ethnic civil wars where non-state actors might be proxies linked to state actors representing the same cultural group. States can support (or even create) non-state actors in neighbouring countries, either to influence the political and military situation, or in a wholly predatory manner, for instance to get access to mineral wealth. Likewise, alliances of non-state actors are possible as in the case of battalions from Chechnya and other North Caucasian regions fighting in Abkhazia, and battalions from North Ossetia fighting in South Ossetia.

Equally problematic is the common unit of analysis in this field of research. Spread is normally defined as spread across international borders. However, it can occur between as well as within countries, and the latter process might not be any less severe. As Saideman (1998) has pointed out regarding secessionist conflicts, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia occurred through spread from republic to republic within one state. Saideman moreover proposed that the larger phenomenon of ethnic conflicts is often confined to state boundaries, because ethnic groups are first and foremost involved in struggles over the control of the state they live in.

Though states remain central actors and can be the logical unit of analysis, regional concepts might be helpful in analysing and explaining transnational links and conflict spread. The regional security complex approach (Buzan and Wæver 2003) assumes that "since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 4). Therefore, regional groups of states are inter-linked in their security concerns, with a substantial degree of autonomy from global processes. An analysis based on this concept might provide a useful starting point for understanding transnational security links, but it remains ultimately linked to territoriality and the state as unit and actor. Though the definition of a region used by Buzan and Wæver does refer to states as well as other units, their theoretical argument as well as the empirical underpinnings clearly focus on (nation-)states.

For the purpose of including non-state actors and the sub-national level in the analysis of conflict spread, Rubin's concept of regional conflict formations (as developed in Rubin, Armstrong and Ntegeye 2001) can be seen as an interesting complement. While the primacy of local conflict causes is taken into account, the actor formations approach to regional conflict can shed light on regional interdependencies by focussing on sets of transnational conflicts which are related to one another in military, political, economic, and/or social terms.

Within a regional framework it would be essential to investigate further the interaction between predominantly structural factors (e.g. ethnic configuration, state strength, conflict history), process factors that come into play because of the outbreak of the original conflict (e.g. refugee flows, cross-border military activities), and elites' (and other actors') strategic actions. Though unintended spill-over can occur, demonstration and contagion effects are normally present, too, as the result of conscious decisions in response to tangible strategic dilemmas. In addition, inter-regional comparison could provide useful insights as to why conflict histories in certain regions like the African Great Lakes region show strong transnational linkages, while conflict histories in other regions that have had their share of instability and violence like the Caucasus show rather weak regional dynamics.

When discussing the outbreak and spread of ethnic conflict, the political system is obviously of central importance, as it provides certain incentives for political actors. The following section focusses more specifically on one aspect of the political system, namely democratisation and its link to ethnic conflict.

Democratising into Violence? Democratic Transitions and (Ethnic) Conflict

Democratisation has long been seen as a possible way towards more security within as well as between states. Almost irrespective of the exact definition of democracy, it is expected to bring about more accountable, legitimate and transparent government. Since citizens are consulted on a regular basis and institutionalised checks and balances are in place in democratic regimes, the assumption is that the outbreak of violent conflict or war becomes less likely, especially between established democracies. Thus, policy makers have increasingly promoted democratisation and, in the case of development policy, introduced measures of conditionality concerning good

governance, rule of law and the respect for human rights. The underlying assumption is that security as well as (economic) development can only be preserved in the context of a democratic system. While the hypothesis establishing that democracies do not go to war against each other has frequently found empirical support (Russett 1993), processes of change from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic one can display very different characteristics. Not only can conflict—or as Tilly (2000) more generally calls it, occasional shocks in the form of conquest, confrontation, colonisation, or revolution—be the starting point for democratisation with all the well-known uncertainties and dangers of a re-occurrence of violence: democratisation can even be the very cause of instability and war.

Earlier strands of the theoretical literature on democratisation mainly focused on “why does democracy come about and what makes it endure?” (Gill 2000, 2), while the empirical spotlight in the course of the third democratisation wave often centred on cases in Southern Europe, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Though this literature does not deal directly with ethnic divisions and civil war, the general discussion of conditions for the success (or failure) of particular democracies contributes to our understanding of destabilising factors and mechanisms in democratic transitions and is, thus, included in this review.

On the basis of empirical evidence from the three mentioned regions, Bunce (2003) identifies the following three elements as central to a successful and peaceful democratic transition:

1. The national and state questions need to be settled.
2. The rules of the transition and the new political order are the result of bargaining between a small group of the autocratic elites and a small group of representatives of the democratic opposition.
3. The co-operation of the authoritarians can be secured through co-optation. The transition is essentially a compromise between the old and the new elites. The public can be demobilised so that it does not pose a threat to the old elites, which otherwise could provide them with a rationale to undermine the transition process.

The first point corresponds with Rustow's (1970) argument on the importance of a consensus on national identity prior to democratisation. Put differently, this is the question about who is part of the demos and of the nation, respectively. The last two points on Bunce's list are less convincing in light of the fact that the transitions in the former communist states did not display these features. The most successful transitions there were characterised by nationalist mass mobilisation and a clear break with the old elites. Bunce explains this apparent problem with reference to the timing of national mobilisation relative to the timing of the destabilisation of the old regime, which she identifies as the decisive factor for the success of democratic transitions in these countries (Bunce 2003). States where nationalist demonstrations occurred before the regime began to unravel took a much less favourable course than states where the sequence was reversed. Where nationalist movements were present before a transition set in, there was no room for a liberal agenda to emerge when the regimes started to break apart (Bunce 2003). Other authors have underlined that a legitimate and viable order has to be established first, whether this refers to

strong political institutions (e.g. Huntington 1968), a functioning state bureaucracy (Linz and Stepan 1996)⁵, or the rule of law (Bratton and Chang 2006). In all these arguments, sequence matters and where transitions take place before the basis has been laid, democracy is said to be likely to fail.

However, in the literature on the interaction between state-building and democratisation, a capable state is not only seen as a precondition for successful democratisation; democratisation can affect state capacity as well (Schmitter et al. 2005). Though it has been demonstrated that state strength is positively related to the level of democracy, authors like Bratton and Chang (2006) have underlined the mutually reinforcing process between state-building and regime consolidation which can become a vicious cycle leading to or intensifying the decay of the state, as in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo. The advantage of these studies is that they demonstrate how the relationship cannot only work in one direction. Thus, they indirectly question the existence of more or less fixed pre-conditions for successful democratisation. An additional problem with the literature stressing sequencing is that certain countries seem almost doomed to fail when it comes to democratisation because they simply lack the relevant prerequisites.

This obviously applies to the case of ethnically divided countries, as it lies in their nature that the national and state questions have not been settled and that further prerequisites to democracy like a viable and legitimate order are often missing. Thus, some authors linking the political system and violent conflict concentrate more specifically on multi-ethnic states. They concern themselves with identifying the most appropriate political institutions to accommodate different groups, rather than with the “ideal” conditions for democratization. Reynal-Querol (2002) found that in addition to the level of democracy, the type of political system is decisive for the incidence of ethnic civil war. In her study, the level of representation of the population, and thus the degree of inclusiveness, is crucial. In accordance with the well-known work of Lijphart, she recommends consociational systems in divided societies, because they provide adequate procedures for channelling participation. Much of the discussion therefore centres on voting systems and basic constitutional arrangements. Most prominently, the consociational approach proposes power-sharing and regional autonomy arrangements to accommodate elites in heterogeneous societies (e.g. Lijphart 2004). In that way, it does not only provide general inclusiveness, but resembles the compromise between old and new elites emphasised by Bunce. Others have challenged the consociational argument, claiming that power-sharing formulas and quotas deepen existing divisions in the medium and long run. In an alternative approach, Horowitz (1985) proposes incentives for inter-ethnic co-operation, especially by using specific voting systems (vote pooling) to make pre-electoral co-operation necessary, or at least more likely. Two key issues in this context are the controversy over proportional versus majoritarian systems, and the pros and cons of federalism.

Though the (cultural and institutional) setting of democratic transitions is certainly important for their ability to survive, some empirical, mostly quantitative studies call attention to potentially negative consequences of democratisation in general.

⁵ Linz & Stepan name other requirements for democratic consolidation, but in their view a functioning bureaucracy makes it more likely that the other conditions are satisfied (p. 10).

The central works of Mansfield and Snyder (1995a/b, 2001, 2002a/b, 2005) mainly focuses on emerging democracies and international war, though Snyder (2000) has also published on democratisation and internal conflict. In the latest version of their statistical analysis, they find that democratisation is associated with an increased likelihood of (international) war. However, this holds true only for countries experiencing incomplete transitions from autocracy toward democracy, and whose political institutions are weak (Mansfield and Snyder 2005)—a finding which partly fits with the literature highlighting institutional pre-conditions. On the level of mechanisms, Mansfield and Snyder emphasise domestic factors, in contrast to arguments on international influences often stressed by scholars of international relations. They argue that under the condition of weak or absent institutions, “politicians have incentives to resort to violent nationalist appeals, tarring their opponents as enemies of the nation in order to prevail in electoral competition” (Mansfield and Snyder 2005, 2). Especially elites whose positions are threatened have a strong motive to resort to this strategy, because they can pretend to act in the name of “the people” without being fully accountable to them. The opportunities are provided by the process of change, more specifically the opening of the political arena and the introduction of political competition (Vorrath, Krebs and Senn 2007). The same line of argument can be found in Snyder's work on internal conflicts (Snyder 2000) stressing elite manipulation as the driving force. Overall, state weakness is seen as increasing the risk for (violent) action, and anocracies (mid-level democracies) are identified as especially conflict-prone. A number of other studies confirm that anocracies face a higher probability of civil war (e.g. Hegre et al. 2001), one making a direct link between changes brought about by democratisation and civil wars (Gleditsch 2002). A more recent piece indicates that the initiation of a democratisation period has a relatively strong and robust effect on conflict even when including measures of regime type that focus on anocracy (Cederman, Hug, and Krebs, forthcoming). This finding links the onset of civil war to the process of democratisation as such, rather than to regime type.

Like the aforementioned literature on democratisation and state capacity, this strand of literature deals with the consequences of democratisation in general, not only in ethnically diverse countries. Though the link between democratisation and civil war has been substantiated empirically, the question remains if democratisation as such or other factors, like decreasing state capacities, is the driving force behind it. Irrespective of this debate, the earlier literature on democratisation provides valuable insights on necessary pre-conditions for successful transitions, while largely neglecting the interaction between variables. Furthermore, the failure of democratic government in ethnically divided societies seems nearly inevitable from this point of view. Approaches highlighting possible institutional solutions for these societies are therefore of great practical importance, though it has to be taken into account that democratisation might have the potential to cause instability and conflict – irrespective of ethnic divisions and political institutions.

Outlook: Empirical Data to Fuel the Theoretical Debate

The previous three sections highlight the interrelations between ethnicity as a potentially causal conflict-structuring factor, conflict spread on a regional level and democratisation as a possible trigger of civil wars. To fuel the ongoing debates on these three subjects, two new data collection and modelling enterprises are presently underway.

Firstly, spatial disaggregation is required in order to analyse and model the interrelations between ethnic groups. For a long time, the Soviet Atlas Narodov Mira (ANM; Bruk, Apenčenko and Telberg 1964) has served as the basis for such analyses.⁶ A new data collection effort presently underway at the UCLA and the ETH Zurich aims to improve on the ANM by providing maps showing the change in group settlement patterns for the entire post-World War II period. These maps will allow the direct use of such information in group-level statistical analyses. Models on the influence of settlement patterns limited to national census data have already indicated that such information can be used to locate potential flash-points of ethnic conflict (Lim, Metzler and Bar-Yam 2007).

Secondly, the question of power relations between ethnic groups needs to be studied in order to determine what influence exclusion and discrimination play in the onset of conflict. A new, global data set of Ethnic Power Relations (EPR; Wimmer, Cederman and Min (forthcoming)) based on an extensive expert survey of the post-World War II period has just been released and provides support for the link between ethno-nationalist politics and civil war. This data set provides an alternative to frequently used information that operationalises group divisions in different ways: as threatened minorities (Minorities at Risk (MAR) project, Gurr 1993, 2000), as group diversity along religious (Fearon and Laitin 2003), or broader ethnic dimensions (Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalisation (ELF) index, Taylor and Hudson 1972, index of Ethnic Heterogeneity (EH), Vanhanen 1999), as polarisation of society (Esteban and Ray 1994, 1999, Reynal-Querol 2002) or as the group size of the majority (Fearon and Laitin 2003). The EPR data focuses explicitly on the groups' access to political power, allowing more fine-grained analyses of the effects of exclusion from power and discrimination. Moreover, the inclusion of all politically mobilised groups allows the construction of dyads relating excluded ethnic groups to those that are in power.

Information from both new sources can easily be combined with established data sets on intra-state conflict, such as the intra-state war data of the Correlates of War (COW) project (Sarkees 2000) and the civil wars registered in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD; Gleditsch et al. 2002 with the extensions of Harbom and Wallensteen 2007), to allow for the study of conflict dynamics caused by group power imbalances. The EPR data include a subdivision of ACD conflict codings regarding ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars.

These new data sets will enable the study of political processes linking regime change and ethnicity at the proper level of aggregation. We anticipate that these empirical data sets will shed additional light on the theoretical debates presented in this review.

⁶ Examples that employ ANM data include the original ELF index (Taylor and Hudson 1972) as well as Fearon's (2003) analysis of ethnic and cultural diversity. A geo-coded electronic version of the atlas was recently introduced by Cederman, Rød and Weidmann (2007).

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