

Repression and refuge: Why only some politically excluded ethnic groups rebel

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Stefan Lindemann

KfW Development Bank

Andreas Wimmer

Department of Sociology, Columbia University

Abstract

This article asks why ethnic exclusion from executive-level state power leads to armed conflict in some cases but not in others. To resolve this puzzle, it focuses on the possible role of five additional, qualitatively coded factors that have been considered by either grievance or opportunity theories of civil war but for which quantitative data are not readily available. To assess the combined relevance of these factors, the authors use qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to explore the diverging conflict trajectories of 58 ‘most similar’ ethnic groups. These groups have a uniformly high conflict propensity because they are politically excluded, situated in poor countries, live geographically concentrated, and comprise substantial parts of the population; yet, only 25 of them actually experienced violent conflict. The results show that the resentment created by ethno-political exclusion translates into violent conflict if the state reacts against initial protests and mobilization with indiscriminate violence, and if there is a refuge area either within or outside the country that allows regime opponents to organize armed resistance. Moreover, a more processual analysis of conflict dynamics reveals that the conditions conducive to ethnic rebellion appear in a particular temporal sequence with a clear and universal escalation pattern.

Keywords

civil war, ethnic conflict, QCA, refuge, repression

Introduction

Recent quantitative research suggests that armed rebellion is more likely to emerge among ethnic groups that lack access to executive-level state power (Cederman, Wimmer & Min, 2010). Conformingly, countries where large segments of the population are politically excluded on ethnic grounds are more war-prone (Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009). However, the grievances produced by ethno-political exclusion are clearly not a sufficient condition for rebellion: the overwhelming majority of politically marginalized groups never experienced armed conflict.¹

¹ In the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset on which the above results are based, we find almost 18,000 periods during which an ethnic group was excluded from government in any of the countries of the world between 1946 and 2005. And yet this led to the outbreak of ethnic conflict in only 119 cases.

Research puzzle and main argument

To understand why ethno-political exclusion leads to rebellion in some cases but not in others, we explore the possible role of five additional factors. To begin with, we consider three well-known grievance arguments. First, the horizontal inequality literature suggests that socio-economic inequalities along ethnic lines lead to violent conflict (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch, 2011; Stewart, 2008). Second, it has long been argued that cultural discrimination facilitates violent mobilization by marginalized groups (Gurr, 1993). Third, students of state repression suggest that indiscriminate rather than selective state violence leads to the escalation of conflict (Kalyvas, 2006; Mason & Krane, 1989). We also explore the role of two opportunity arguments. First, an

Corresponding author:
stefan.lindemann@kfw.de

important strand of research argues that whether or not grievances translate into rebellion depends on the repressive capacity of the state (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Fjelde & De Soysa, 2009). Second, it has been suggested that external actors such as other states (Gleditsch, 2007), diasporas (Salehyan, 2009), or ethnic kin (Cederman, Girardin & Gleditsch, 2009) encourage or even instigate armed conflict.

For most of these five conditions reliable quantitative indicators are not readily available, especially for indiscriminate violence, the repressive capacity of the state, and external support. Existing quantitative research has therefore relied on imprecise proxies, for example using GDP per capita to gauge the state's capacity to repress rebellions (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). We try to go beyond this approach, albeit for a reduced number of cases, by carefully coding these additional conditions on the basis of existing case studies, unpublished reports and, where available, survey data.

Cases are selected using a strategic sampling design, relying on the EPR dataset (Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009). We first limit ourselves to the subset of ethnic groups that are excluded from central and regional government and thus have a higher baseline conflict propensity than included groups. We further reduce the sample to cases with medium-high conflict propensity by selecting those groups that share three other well-known civil war risk factors: groups that are situated in poor (but not extraordinarily poor) countries, live geographically concentrated, and comprise large parts of the population (but not the majority). This leads to a subset of 92 'most similar' ethnic group periods, covering 58 different ethnic groups from a total of 33 countries (mostly in Africa but also in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia).² Only 27 of the selected 92 ethnic group periods (respectively 25 of the 58 ethnic groups) are marked by the onset of armed conflict.

To explore which combinations of the five grievance and opportunity arguments explain these diverging conflict trajectories, we make use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) – a Boolean method of analysis, which is ideally suited to discover whether different causal pathways lead to an outcome. Beyond QCA, we also use our data for a more processual analysis of conflict dynamics

by analyzing whether the conditions conducive to ethnic rebellion appear in a particular temporal sequence.

We arrive at a surprisingly succinct list of conditions under which the resentment created by ethno-political exclusion translates into armed conflict: if the state reacts against initial protests and mobilization with indiscriminate violence, further fanning grievances against the state and delegitimizing those in power; and if the organizers of armed resistance can take advantage of a refuge area beyond the control of the state, thus providing an opportunity for rebels to organize. Such a refuge area can be situated either within the country because the state lacks the capacity to monitor its entire territory, or outside of the country when a neighboring state offers a sanctuary. The processual analysis of conflict dynamics shows that there is only one temporal sequence to ethnic war. While not all ethnic wars emerge from the sequential appearance of all five conditions, the conditions always appear in the same order with a clear and universal escalation pattern leading from a limited or diminishing repressive capacity of the state, to indiscriminate state violence, to the offer of external sanctuary and, finally, to armed rebellion.

The article is organized as follows. After a brief discussion of our main contributions to the civil war literature in the second section, the third section introduces the five additional grievance and opportunity arguments in more detail and discusses the empirical measurements we used to test them. This is followed by a fourth section on case selection and a fifth one on the QCA methodology. The sixth section presents the results, and the final section concludes.

Contribution to the literature and nature of the findings

The civil war literature has often been framed in terms of 'opportunity' versus 'grievance' arguments. The former emphasize state capacity to repress rebellions (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Fjelde & De Soysa, 2009), economic incentives for civil war (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004), or the availability of external support (Gleditsch, 2007). Grievance arguments, by contrast, focus on economic (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch, 2011; Stewart, 2008), political (Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009) or cultural (Gurr, 1993) inequality that motivates members of disadvantaged groups to rebel. While many observers have noted that these two schools of thought are not necessarily mutually exclusive (see references in Bara, 2014: 697), a precise analysis of how opportunities and grievances combine – if they do – to produce conflict has eluded existing research.

² In the EPR dataset a new group period is initiated as soon as one element of the overall ethno-political power configuration changes, i.e. the power status of one of the ethnic groups changes or a new ethnic group becomes politically relevant. This is why a total of 21 groups appear several times in our universe of cases (see Table I).

We build on a similar recent effort by Bara (2014), who pioneered the use of QCA methods in conflict research. Rather than pitting opportunity and grievance explanations against each other, we join Bara (2014) in using a combinatorial logic of analysis. On the one hand, our analysis is more limited than Bara's in that we focus exclusively on rebellions by excluded ethnic groups (the vast majority of ethnic conflicts) and a subsample of such cases. On the other hand, our strategy is more comprehensive since we introduce newly coded data for factors of crucial theoretical importance, such as indiscriminate violence, the repressive capacity of the state, and external support. This allows us to offer unprecedented precision in identifying the conditions that lead excluded ethnic groups to armed rebellion. Moreover, this article breaks new ground with a processual analysis of conflict dynamics suggesting that the conditions conducive to ethnic rebellion appear in a particular temporal sequence. It remains to be seen whether this analysis travels beyond the universe of the 58 ethnic groups considered in the article and whether parts of it can perhaps even be generalized to non-ethnic conflicts.

How far are our findings of a causal nature? The coding rules ensured that the conditions identified were in place *before* armed rebellion occurred, thus minimizing the risk of reverse causation. We also avoided coding bias because we had no intuition of what results the QCA analysis would produce when coding individual cases. Still, the various conditions identified in this analysis might be dependent on the outcome not through biased coding or reverse causation, but through the empirical mechanism of anticipation: indiscriminate repression may be unleashed only at groups that are *planning* a rebellion, and external sanctuary may only be offered by states when the intention of rebellion is already manifest. However, while states may indeed sometimes launch indiscriminate violence preemptively, there are many examples where indiscriminate repression was launched before any group with the capacity to organize a rebellion had emerged.³ The indiscriminate repression is therefore causally independent of the intention to rebel. Similarly, there are many cases in which the neighboring government is simply

too weak to prevent its border regions from being used as a sanctuary, which is therefore not offered in anticipation of a rebellion.⁴

In any case, several examples in our sample show that without indiscriminate repression and an external refuge, a latent intention to rebel does not materialize.⁵ Indiscriminate repression and an external refuge therefore do not merely indicate that rebellion is imminent but actually contribute to the escalation dynamics in the sense that without the presence of these two factors the spiral of escalation would come to a halt. Even if both factors are not always causally independent of the intention to rebel, it is only through their addition that this intention to rebel is realized. The escalation dynamics is therefore 'endogenous' in the sense that one action in the sequence follows upon the other to cumulatively cause the outcome, as is common in historical modes of analysis (Mahoney, 2003). None of these conditions are therefore 'exogenous', as would be an external shock such as an earthquake or an experimental 'treatment' in a laboratory.

Arguments and measurements⁶

In this section we explore additional grievance and opportunity arguments that could explain variation in the conflict propensity of politically excluded ethnic groups. Before this, we need to briefly clarify what we understand by ethnic civil war. We base our definition and data on the EPR dataset (Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009), which is based on the well-known Uppsala University's Armed Conflict dataset. An ethnic civil war is defined as an armed confrontation between government forces and a non-state armed actor that causes at least 25 battle-deaths per year and where the non-state actor claims to represent an ethnic community, largely recruits fighters among this community, and forges alliances mainly based on ethnic affinity.⁷

³ Examples include, among others, northerners, 2000–02 (Côte d'Ivoire), other northern groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan), Mayas, 1946–85 (Guatemala), Albanians, 1993–99 (Yugoslavia) and Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey) (see Online appendix 3).

⁴ These include, among others, Albanians, 1993–99 (Yugoslavia), Lari/Bakongo, 1969–71 (Congo), Muslim Sahel groups, 1960–75 (Chad), Mayas, 1946–85 (Guatemala), and Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey).

⁵ Examples include, among others, the Malinke, 1986–2005 (Guinea), Yoruba, 1992–98 (Nigeria), Kikuyu-Meru-Emb, 1979–2002 (Kenya), indigenous peoples, 1946–89 (Ecuador), and Sunni Kurds, 1970–2005 (Syria).

⁶ See Online appendix 1 for detailed coding rules.

⁷ We also identified 12 additional cases of ethnic civil war in our dataset and decided that two of the civil wars that EAC codes as ethnic are non-ethnic in nature. See Table I in Online appendix 2.

Grievance arguments 1: Socio-economic inequality and cultural discrimination

According to Stewart (2008) and Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch (2011), socio-economic marginalization along ethnic lines breeds ethno-political conflict. Socio-economic marginalization may also increase the salience of political exclusion and thus make the task of organizing rebellion easier. This is in line with the older 'cross-cutting cleavage' argument from Lipset to Gubler & Selway (2012), according to which parallel social divides facilitate mobilization, whereas cross-cutting cleavages hamper collective action.

While case-based research has long pointed to a link between socio-economic inequalities and ethnic conflict, quantitative research initially arrived at the opposite conclusion (Gurr, 1993). Yet, more recent studies found a significant statistical association between socio-economic marginalization and ethnic conflict (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch, 2011; Østby, 2008). These studies also confirm that socio-economic disadvantage is especially likely to lead to ethnic conflict if it coincides with political exclusion, in line with the 'cross-cutting cleavage' argument.

Our measurement of socio-economic marginalization focuses on access to basic economic assets and education. Data on the distribution of household assets such as a radio or a motorcycle and years of education are available for most countries from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), albeit only for selected years.⁸ We calculated asset and educational inequality using the following formulas:⁹

$$Soecmarg_{assets} = A/a \text{ if } a < A, 0 \text{ otherwise}$$

$$Soecmarg_{education} = E/e \text{ if } e < E, 0 \text{ otherwise}$$

where a/e is the average asset/educational attainment score of the focal ethnic group, and A/E is the average asset/educational attainment score in the country. A group was coded as socio-economically marginalized ($Soecmarg = 1$) if its members were disadvantaged in terms of access to *both* basic economic assets and education. If DHS data were not available, we relied on the G-Econ dataset (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch,

2011), that is, $Soecmarg$ took on the value of 1 if the respective group was economically poorer than the country average.

We also include *Cultural marginality* as a third form of group-level inequality besides ethno-political and socio-economic exclusion. Following Brown & Langer (2008: 46–50), we consider the recognition of a group's (1) religion and the right to operate religious schools and celebrate corresponding holidays, (2) language and associated rights, including for education and broadcasting in the vernacular, and (3) ethno-cultural practices such as rituals, costumes, holidays and festivals, customary law, and leadership. An ethnic group was coded as culturally marginalized ($Culmarg = 1$) if group members faced restrictions in *at least two* of these three dimensions. As there are no readily available group-level data on cultural inequalities, we based our assessment on a comprehensive review of secondary sources. To avoid endogeneity problems, we established whether group members faced cultural marginalization *before* the onset of armed conflict; for the cases that remained peaceful, the coding refers to the entire period under consideration. This approach was also used for the measurement of the other conditions.

Grievance arguments 2: Indiscriminate state violence

Whether state repression precipitates armed conflict has received surprisingly little attention in the literature, which may again be due to a lack of readily available global data. Even though many have recognized that repression can be a powerful motivator for regime opponents (Gurr, 2000: 71–72), its empirical impact on violent conflict remains unclear (Davenport, 2007), perhaps because researchers have not distinguished between different types of state repression but instead relied on aggregate indices.

One key distinction to be made is between selective and indiscriminate state violence (Kalyvas, 2006; Mason & Krane, 1989). Selective violence punishes individuals suspected of organizing an armed rebellion, whereas indiscriminate violence is targeted at an entire (ethnic) group associated with a political opposition. Selective violence will have only a limited 'inflammatory' effect among the population at large as it threatens only those who are at the forefront of subversive activity. Indiscriminate repression, by contrast, is likely to escalate resentment since selecting victims on the basis of group membership will reinforce group boundaries (Wright, 1987), be perceived as unfair and thus lend credence to the oppositional discourse, and trigger an emotional

⁸ See <http://www.measuredhs.com/>. DHS data are only available from the late 1980s. For ethnic group periods in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s we used the earliest available DHS. This is imperfect yet defensible given that relative intergroup inequality (unlike absolute wealth) is known to exhibit considerable inertia over time (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch, 2011; Stewart, 2008).

⁹ This draws on Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch (2011).

desire for revenge (Kalyvas, 2006). In extreme cases of indiscriminate violence, it may well be that participation in armed rebellion is no longer costlier than non-participation, thus overcoming the collective action dilemma that armed opponents usually face (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007).

How did we code whether a state used indiscriminate violence against members of an ethnic community? *Indiscriminate repression (Indisrep)* was coded 1 if group members were subjected to indiscriminate acts of state violence such as beatings, arrests, torture, killings, etc., before the onset of an armed rebellion. The important qualifier is that such violence was not targeted at particular individuals but instead at the ethnic collective, that is, at 'Kurdish villages' rather than at specific leaders of Kurdish organizations and their families.

Opportunity arguments 1: Limited territorial reach of the state

In Fearon & Laitin's (2003) seminal work, civil wars occur when states lack the capacity to repress potential rebels. So far, quantitative research has not been able to identify a straightforward measurement of the repressive capacity of states but instead has relied on GDP per capita, railroad density, or taxation as proxy variables (for critical reviews of the literature see Hendrix, 2010; Soifer, 2008). We qualitatively coded two more straightforward indicators, namely the territorial reach of the state's security apparatus on the one hand, and the territorial presence of the ruling party on the other hand. The territorial reach of the state represents a crucial aspect of state capacity, as has long been argued by political sociologists (Mann, 1986).

The *territorial reach of the state's security apparatus* refers to the extent to which the military, the police and/or the secret services are present throughout a territory. If security presence is confined to urban areas, this will seriously constrain the state's ability to detect and eliminate subversive organizations. As a consequence, leaders of such organizations will be able to recruit and train followers in what we term 'internal sanctuaries'. Prime examples are the tribal Pashtu areas in Pakistan or the vast forest areas in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The *territorial reach of the ruling party* may be of similar importance, especially in autocratic regimes with well-developed party machines. Recent research shows that such single-party authoritarian regimes run lower civil war risks than military regimes and multi-party electoral autocracies (Fjelde, 2010). A key reason for this

may be that political mobilization and the organization of an armed rebellion is more difficult when ruling elites have built an infrastructure of party cells reaching down to individual villages and urban blocks.

To qualitatively code the territorial reach of the state's security forces (*Secureach*) and the territorial reach of the ruling/dominant political party (*Partyreach*) turned out to be rather laborious and difficult. No quantitative data on police posts and party cells per square mile are available. A particular useful source for the qualitative assessment were the *Area Handbooks/Country Studies* published by the US government, which routinely include information on the territorial organization of the country's security apparatus and – to a lesser extent – of its political parties. *Secureach* was coded 1 if the state's security forces (military, police, and/ or secret services) maintained a presence even in the rural areas of the focal ethnic group's territory. Analogously, *Partyreach* was coded 1 if the ruling/dominant party maintained a presence even in rural areas, with party structures down to the village level. We then integrated *Secureach* and *Partyreach* into a single condition called *territorial reach of the state (Statereach)*. It was coded 1 if either the security or the party apparatus was represented in the rural hinterland of a group's settlement area.

Opportunity arguments 2: External support

The transnational dimensions of civil wars have recently received more attention (Gleditsch, 2007; Salehyan, 2009). Outside support represents an opportunity for potential rebels who would otherwise remain quiescent. We coded two distinct types of external support. *International support* refers to financial or military support from foreign governments, NGOs, diaspora networks, or other armed groups. Such external support might compensate for the weak capacity of potential rebel groups to raise resources domestically. *External sanctuary* describes a situation where group members find refuge on a neighboring country's territory, thereby escaping the jurisdiction of their own state. In some cases, foreign governments not only provide rebel movements with a 'safe haven' and military training but even allow them to use their territory to launch attacks. In other cases, neighboring states merely tolerate rebel activities on their territory or are simply too weak to prevent them.

Both types of external support have received some attention in the literature, yet they have rarely been measured with appropriately specific data. Idean Salehyan (2007, 2009) was the first to point to the important role of external sanctuaries in explaining civil war. He had to

use rough proxy variables, such as whether a state is bordered by a rival state, a weak state, or a state that hosts refugees. We improve on Saleyhan's work by directly coding whether or not ethnic organizations and movements counted on external support, relying on a range of case specific reports and scholarly literatures.

The condition *external sanctuary* (*Exsanc*) was coded 1 if we could find evidence that there were opportunities to organize and pursue dissident activities on the territory of a neighboring country. The condition *international support* (*Intsup*), finally, was given the value 1 if ethnic organizations within the country received financial and/or military support from foreign governments or other external actors. We then merged *Exsanc* and *Intsup* into a single condition that we call *external support* (*Exsup*). It was coded as 1 if either a territorial sanctuary across the border was available or the oppositional organization received external support.

Case selection

Since we are interested in grievance and opportunity factors whose role has so far not been tested with appropriate data, we choose to reduce the universe of cases to those where other well-known factors predict a medium high, yet not overwhelmingly high conflict propensity. It would not make much sense, for example, to explore why Switzerland's French-speaking minority does not engage in armed conflict since we know that groups sharing government power in very rich countries are very unlikely to resort to arms. Yet, the baseline probability should not be too high either, because then none of the conditions that we explore in this article might be relevant. The likelihood of armed rebellion by politically excluded groups in very poor failed states, for instance, is so high that none of the factors we explore in this article might matter. To arrive at such a subset of ethnic groups with a medium-high predicted probability of armed rebellion, we proceeded as follows:

- We first selected all group periods in the EPR dataset where ethnic groups were excluded from central and regional government, which is known to increase conflict probability considerably compared to groups with regional autonomy or those that share power in central government. We were thus left with the groups that EPR categorizes as either 'powerless' or 'discriminated against'.

From this subset of group periods we further selected those that shared three other well-known civil war risk factors:

- Groups with a population share between 10% and 44%: We calculated predicted probabilities of rebellion based on group size, using the EPR dataset, and discovered that the likelihood of rebellion below 10% decreases quite substantially. Conversely, it is extraordinarily high among groups with more than 45% of the population, that is, in regimes with an ethnocratic power configuration (see Table 2 in Online appendix 2). Following our 'most-similar' case selection strategy, we thus excluded both very small minorities and majorities from consideration.
- Geographically concentrated groups coded as 'regionally based' or 'regional and urban' in the GeoEPR dataset (Wucherpfennig et al., 2011): Geographical concentration is a robust predictor of ethnic rebellion according to a range of different studies that use different data sources (e.g. Toft, 2002; Weidmann, 2009). It arguably facilitates the interaction of group members and therefore increases the capacity for collective action.
- Groups in countries with low income: Low GDP per capita is the most robust determinant of civil war onset (Hegre & Sambanis, 2006) for a variety of possible reasons that have been extensively discussed in the literature. We focus on 'lower middle income countries' with an average GDP per capita below 4,000 USD but exclude the 'least developed countries' with an average GDP per capita below 1,000 USD (according to Penn World Tables 6.3). The latter are known to have a very high conflict propensity. Of all 36 countries in the EPR dataset with a GDP per capita below 1,000 USD in at least two years since 1946, only four never experienced armed conflict.

We thus followed a quasi-experimental design of selecting group periods in the EPR dataset where the predicted probability for armed conflict was equally high but not exorbitant, thus opening up the space of variation needed for the exploration of additional mechanisms. As shown in Table I, this yielded a sample of 92 'most similar' ethnic group periods (the unit of observation), covering 58 ethnic groups from a total of 33 countries. The latter are mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Latin America (Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia), Europe (Yugoslavia, Moldova), the Middle East (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) and Asia (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand). Significantly, only 27 of the selected 92

Table I. Universe of cases

Africa

Northern, 1966–67 (Benin)
 Southeastern, 1968–69 (Benin)
 Kru, 1960–93 (Côte-Ivoire)*
 Northerners, 1994–99 (Côte d'Ivoire)
 Southern Mande, 1994–99 (Côte d'Ivoire)
 Kru, 1994–99 (Côte d'Ivoire)
 Northerners, 2000–02 (Côte d'Ivoire)*
 Peul, 1986–2005 (Guinea)
 Malinke, 1986–2005 (Guinea)
 Northern groups, 1964–67 (Sierra Leone)
 Mende, 1968–91 (Sierra Leone)
 Ewe, 1970–71 (Ghana)
 Ewe, 1967–90 (Togo)*
 Ijaw, 1960–64 (Nigeria)
 Ijaw, 1979–83 (Nigeria)
 Yoruba, 1992–98 (Nigeria)
 Igbo, 1992–98 (Nigeria)
 Ijaw, 1992–98 (Nigeria)
 Ijaw, 1999–2005 (Nigeria)*
 Muslim Sahel groups, 1960–75 (Chad)*
 Arabs, 1960–75 (Chad)*
 Batéké, 1960–63 (Congo)
 Mbochi, 1960–63 (Congo)
 Lari, 1964–68 (Congo)
 Mbochi, 1964–68 (Congo)
 Batéké, 1964–68 (Congo)
 Lari/Bakongo, 1969–71 (Congo)*
 Lari/Bakongo, 1972–76 (Congo)
 Batéké, 1972–76 (Congo)
 Lari/Bakongo, 1977–78 (Congo)
 Batéké, 1977–78 (Congo)
 Lari/Bakongo, 1979–84 (Congo)
 Lari/Bakongo, 1985–90 (Congo)
 Nibolek, 1998–2005 (Congo)*
 Lari/Bakongo, 1998–2005 (Congo)*
 Mongo, 1966–90 (DR Congo)
 Bakongo, 1966–90 (DR Congo)
 South-Westerners, 1966–69 (Uganda)
 Baganda, 1966–69 (Uganda)*
 South-Westerners, 1970–71 (Uganda)
 Baganda, 1970–71 (Uganda)
 South-Westerners, 1972–73 (Uganda)
 Baganda, 1972–73 (Uganda)
 Langi/Acholi, 1972–73 (Uganda)*
 Luo, 1967–78 (Kenya)
 Kikuyu-Meru-Emb, 1979–2002 (Kenya)
 Luo, 1979–2002 (Kenya)*
 Ovimbundu-Ovambo, 1975–2002 (Angola)*
 Bakongo, 1975–2002 (Angola)*
 Ovimbundu-Ovambo, 2003–05 (Angola)
 Bakongo, 2003–05 (Angola)

Africa (continued)

Ndebele-Kalanga, 1982–87 (Zimbabwe)*
 Manyika (Shona subgroup), 1988–91 (Zimbabwe)
 Ndebele-Kalanga, 2000–05 (Zimbabwe)
 Berbers, 1956–2005 (Morocco)*
 Highlanders, 1960–72 (Madagascar)
 Other Arab groups, 1956–71 (Sudan)
 Other northern groups, 1956–71 (Sudan)
 Dinka, 1956–71 (Sudan)*
 Other Arab groups, 1972–82 (Sudan)
 Other northern groups, 1972–82 (Sudan)
 Other Arab groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan)
 Other northern groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan)*
 Dinka, 1983–2003 (Sudan)*
 Other Arab groups, 2003–05 (Sudan)

Latin America

Mayas, 1946–85 (Guatemala)*
 Afrocolombians, 1946–91 (Colombia)
 Indigenous peoples, 1946–89 (Ecuador)
 Quechua, 1946–52 (Bolivia)
 Aymara, 1946–52 (Bolivia)

Europe

Albanians, 1992 (Yugoslavia)
 Albanians, 1993–99 (Yugoslavia)*
 Russians, 1991–2000 (Moldova)*

Asia

Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey)*
 Kurds, 1946–58 (Iraq)
 Kurds, 1976–90 (Iraq)*
 Sunni Arabs, 2003–05 (Iraq)*
 Christians, 1970–2005 (Syria)
 Sunni Kurds, 1970–2005 (Syria)
 Palestinians, 1946–70 (Lebanon)
 Palestinians, 1971–91 (Lebanon)*
 Hazaras, 1946–78 (Afghanistan)
 Uzbeks, 1997–2005 (Tajikistan)
 Uzbeks 1991–2005 (Kyrgyzstan)
 Russians, 1991–2005 (Kyrgyzstan)
 Hindus, 1972–81 (Bangladesh)
 Hindus, 1982–2005 (Bangladesh)
 Indian Tamils, 1964–83 (Sri Lanka)
 Sri Lankan Tamils, 1964–83 (Sri Lanka)*
 Indian Tamils, 1984 (Sri Lanka)
 Chinese, 1953–65 (Thailand)
 Chinese, 1966–71 (Thailand)

*Cases with ethnic armed conflict.

ethnic group periods (respectively 25 of the 58 ethnic groups) were marked by the onset of armed conflict.

This sample of 92 group periods is small enough to allow for high-quality, case-by-case coding of the variables of concern. The quality of the data gathered for this project therefore goes well beyond the usual proxy variables used by large-N cross-national research. Every coding decision is documented in detail in the Online appendix, guaranteeing transparency and allowing researchers to change coding that they feel needs to be corrected. In total, we consulted 289 secondary sources to arrive at the final coding decisions.

Methodology and research design

To identify the configurations of conditions that lead excluded groups to rebel we make use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) – a Boolean method originally developed to allow for valid generalization on complex causal relationships with a small to intermediate number of cases (Ragin, 1987, 2008; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). This methodology has two advantages. First and foremost, the human brain is not equipped to handle 92 cases simultaneously – as is possible with the standard three to five cases in traditional comparative historical analysis. Second, QCA allows to identify multiple causal paths to the same outcome ('equifinality').

The aim in QCA is to explain the relation between one case property defined as the 'outcome' and other case properties defined as 'conditions' (the QCA terminology for explanatory factors or 'treatments'). In contrast to statistical techniques, the data are analyzed in the Boolean tradition as 'set relations' (rather than 'correlations') to be explored by two analytical strategies.

The first is to identify necessary conditions without whose presence the outcome never occurs. An example is Barrington Moore's statement that there is no democracy without a bourgeoisie. However, there might be bourgeoisies without democracy. In other words, bourgeoisies make democracy possible, but they do not ensure it. To know whether individual conditions are necessary for the outcome, one has to determine the 'consistency' of the set relation. In general, consistency signals, similar to significance in statistical analysis, whether there is a solid empirical connection between conditions and outcomes. A condition is conventionally considered necessary if it has a consistency score of at least 0.9 (Schneider & Wagemann, 2007: 213).

If a condition qualifies as necessary, one also has to determine its 'coverage'. To return to the previous example, we can count how many societies with bourgeoisies

are also democracies. The smaller the coverage score, the more limited is the constraining effect of the condition on the outcome. A coverage score of 1, however, would indicate that the condition is not only necessary, but also sufficient: all societies with bourgeoisies are also democracies (sufficiency), and all democracies have bourgeoisies (necessity).

This brings us to the second strategy, which is to identify sufficient conditions independently of the necessity aspect. The goal is here to establish whether a particular (combination of) condition(s) is sufficient for an outcome to occur, meaning that all cases where we observe the condition(s) will also have the expected outcome – independent of how many of the cases with the outcome will show these conditions (the necessity aspects).

The identification of sufficient conditions is more complex. First, a 'truth table' is created, which details all logically possible combinations of conditions and their empirical representation in the data. Configurations that are not empirically represented in the data are called 'logical remainders'. To know which causal combinations are sufficient for an outcome to occur, one gauges the degree to which cases sharing a combination of conditions also display the outcome, as measured by the consistency score (Ragin, 2008: 44). Selected for further analysis are only those combinations of conditions whose consistency score is deemed high enough to warrant a statement of (quasi)-sufficiency, the established cut-off point being 0.75 (2008: 46).

In a next step, QCA discards all redundant information from the remaining rows of the truth table. This results in three logically minimized solutions, which differ in their treatment of logical remainders: a 'complex solution' (no logical remainders used), a 'parsimonious' solution (all logical remainders used, without any evaluation of their plausibility), and an 'intermediate' solution (only theoretically plausible remainders used). Each solution includes consistency scores for each term and the solution as a whole, indicating to what extent membership in the solution term/the complete solution is a subset of the outcome. Moreover, each solution provides information on coverage, that is, the degree to which cases with the outcome show the various combinations of conditions that make up a solution (solution coverage). Raw coverage refers to the proportion of cases with the outcome explained by each individual solution term. Unique coverage, finally, describes the proportion of cases with the outcome explained solely by each individual solution term.

We use the original crisp-set variant of QCA, which was designed for datasets whose cases are coded as either

Table II. Sufficient conditions for ethnic war

 Model: Ethnicwar = f (Soecmarg, Culmarg, Indisrep, Statereach, Exsup)

Intermediate solution

Frequency cutoff: 2.0

Consistency cutoff: 0.80

Assumptions: Soecmarg (present), Culmarg (present), Indisrep (present), ~ Statereach (absent), Exsup (present)

	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
Indisrep* ~ Statereach	0.56	0.22	1.00
Soecmarg*Indisrep*Exsup	0.56	0.22	0.94

Solution coverage: 0.78

Solution consistency: 0.95

Soecmarg = socio-economic marginalization.

Culmarg = cultural marginality.

Indisrep = indiscriminate repression.

Statereach = territorial reach of the state.

Exsup = external support.

fully 'in' (1) or 'out' (0) of a set. We chose this variant rather than the more refined fuzzy-set variant of QCA (where set membership is a matter of degree) mainly because binary coding is more suitable for the outcome to be explained (conflict or peace). Furthermore, a dichotomized coding, while less information-rich, is certainly also less error prone. For example, it is easier to determine whether a ruling party is present in the homeland of an ethnic group than to estimate whether it is present at the level of .6 or .9.

Results

In this section we first present the results of the QCA.¹⁰ In a second step, we go beyond classical QCA by moving towards a processual analysis of escalation dynamics, identifying the sequences in which the various conditions appear in the historical process leading to armed conflict.

Explaining ethnic conflict

In a first step we found that none of the five conditions qualifies as a necessary condition for ethnic war (see Table 3 in Online appendix 2). Turning to the identification of sufficient (combinations of) conditions, we

only explored combinations that occurred in at least two empirical cases, as this is the recommended practice with samples containing more than 50 cases (Skaaning, 2011: 402). The consistency threshold for a truth table row to be included into the minimization process was set at 0.79, which is a bit higher than the recommended 0.75 consistency threshold (Ragin, 2008: 46). We then used the fs/QCA software¹¹ to reduce the truth table. In line with common practice, we preferred the results of the intermediate solution since the complex solution involves only minimal simplification and the most parsimonious solution includes too many difficult, implausible counterfactuals.¹²

The solution presented in Table II has a very high consistency score of 0.95, meaning that almost all cases with this combination of conditions indeed saw armed conflict. The coverage score of 0.78 means that almost four-fifths of all ethnic war cases (21 out of 27) are explained by this solution. The solution indicates that there are only two alternative paths to ethnic war. While the first path combines indiscriminate state violence and a low territorial reach of the state (*Indisrep*~Statereach*), the second one involves a conjunction of socio-economic marginalization, indiscriminate repression and external support (*Soecmarg*Indisrep*Exsup*). We label these two paths the 'repression-domestic sanctuary' path and the 'repression-external sanctuary' path,

¹⁰ We here focus on the necessary and sufficient conditions for ethnic war. Note that many QCA analyses also explore the necessary and sufficient conditions for the negative outcome ('ethnic peace' in the context of this article). We report the results of this additional analysis in Online appendix 2 (Tables 5 and 6).

¹¹ See <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~cragin/fsQCA/software.shtml>.

¹² For all three QCA solutions see Table 4 in Online appendix 2.

Table III. Ethnic war cases covered by the QCA solution

<i>'Indiscriminate repression-domestic sanctuary' path</i> (<i>Indisrep*~Statereach</i>)	<i>'Indiscriminate repression-external sanctuary' path</i> (<i>Soecmarg*Indisrep*Exsup</i>)
Northerners, 2000–02 (Côte d'Ivoire)	Northerners, 2000–02 (Côte d'Ivoire)**
Ijaw, 1999–2005 (Nigeria)*	Muslim Sahel groups, 1960–75 (Chad)**
Muslim Sahel groups, 1960–75 (Chad)	Arabs, 1960–75 (Chad)**
Arabs, 1960–75 (Chad)	Langi/Acholi, 1972–73 (Uganda)*
Lari/Bakongo, 1969–71 (Congo)*	Ovimbundu-Ovambo, 1975–2002 (Angola)
Nibolek, 1998–2005 (Congo)*	Ndebele-Kalanga, 1982–87 (Zimbabwe)*
Lari/Bakongo, 1998–2005 (Congo)*	Dinka, 1956–71 (Sudan)**
Ovimbundu-Ovambo, 1975–2002 (Angola)**	Other northern groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan)
Bakongo, 1975–2002 (Angola)*	Dinka, 1983–2003 (Sudan)*
Dinka, 1956–71 (Sudan)	Mayas, 1946–85 (Guatemala)*
Other northern groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan)**	Albanians, 1993–99 (Yugoslavia)*
Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey)	Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey)**
Sunni Arabs, 2003–05 (Iraq)*	Kurds, 1976–90 (Iraq)*
Palestinians, 1971–91 (Lebanon)**	Palestinians, 1971–91 (Lebanon)
Sri Lankan Tamils, 1964–83 (Sri Lanka)	Sri Lankan Tamils, 1964–83 (Sri Lanka)**

* Cases that are only covered by this solution term (unique coverage).

** Cases covered by both solution terms, yet better explained by this solution year.

respectively. Simplifying slightly by omitting the horizontal inequality element that appears in only one causal pathway, we arrive at one single overall logic of ethnic violence under conditions of ethno-political exclusion: indiscriminate repression against members of an excluded group by the state leads to the radicalization of regime opponents, while having an internal or external sanctuary – a territory beyond the control of the state – allows them to take up arms and organize a violent opposition to the regime.

Table III shows which ethnic war cases fall under which of the two pathways. Both have a raw coverage of 0.56, which means that they each cover 15 out of the 27 ethnic war cases. They also have the same unique coverage score (0.22), that is, they both exclusively cover six ethnic war cases (marked with one asterisk in Table III). As nine ethnic war cases are covered by both pathways (marked with two asterisks in Table III), we additionally used case-specific knowledge to determine which path provides a qualitatively better, more plausible explanation for each of these nine cases. We found that the 'indiscriminate repression-external sanctuary' path is arguably the better explanation in six of the nine 'ambiguous' cases.

The 'indiscriminate repression-external sanctuary' path includes cases as regionally diverse as the Mayan rebellions in Guatemala (1975–96), the Albanian uprising in former Yugoslavia (1998–99), the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey (1984–today), the Tamil insurrection in Sri Lanka (1983–2009), and the northern rebellion in

Côte d'Ivoire (2002–04). The latter offers a useful example to illustrate the underlying escalation dynamics.¹³

In post-1993 Côte d'Ivoire, politicians of northern ethnic groups (mainly Voltaic-speakers and Northern Mande) were not only excluded from positions of political and military power (Kieffer, 2000; Langer, 2005) but also faced exclusionary citizenship policies that denied them and their co-ethnics Ivoirian citizenship on the basis of their (putative) Burkinabé origins (Marshall-Fratani, 2006). Political inequality was compounded by the longstanding socio-economic marginalization of the north (Langer, 2005) and the implementation of the 1998 land law, which paved the way for the expropriation of all those who could not trace their ancestry to local origins in the south-west, which affected mostly northerners and immigrants from Burkina Faso (Chauveau & Richards, 2008).

The key factor in the subsequent escalation process, however, was indiscriminate state violence. Anti-northern repression began during the mid-1990s and escalated under President Laurent Gbagbo. The 2000 elections were marred by unprecedented violence against northerners and immigrants, leaving over 200 people dead and hundreds wounded (HRW, 2001). Significantly, victims were selected 'less on the basis of their political affiliation than solely and explicitly on the basis of their religion, ethnic group and/or perceived nationality' (2001: 4).

¹³ See Lindemann, 2014.

In line with expectations, this fanned northern grievances further and greatly facilitated mobilization by those who claimed to represent northern interests.

Finally, escalation into armed conflict was made possible by a key ‘opportunity factor’, namely the availability of an external sanctuary in neighboring Burkina Faso (Banegas & Otayek, 2003). As violence against northerners and Burkinabé immigrants escalated under Ghagbo, Burkina Faso’s President Blaise Compaoré thought that installing a trusted president in the neighboring country would allow the three million migrants from Burkina to return to their jobs and livelihoods in the Ivory Coast. The Burkinabé government therefore offered sanctuary to army officers from northern Côte d’Ivoire who had previously been purged from the military. These dissident soldiers then prepared openly to overthrow the Gbagbo government (Banegas & Otayek, 2003). They were not only trained in logistics, communication, and clandestine operations but also equipped with weapons. In September 2002, the Compaoré government finally gave the go-ahead for the marching of the so-called *Forces Nouvelles* (FN) into Côte d’Ivoire.

The second path to ethnic war, the ‘indiscriminate repression-domestic sanctuary’ path, also includes a broad spectrum of cases. A well-known example is the Sunni Arab rebellion in post-2003 Iraq. After the US invasion, through the dismantlement of the Iraqi army, a ban on the re-employment of members of the former ruling party, and the installation of a Shiite-dominated regime, the Sunni elites – most notably ex-Baathists – were marginalized, especially in the armed forces and bureaucracy (ICG, 2006). More important for the subsequent escalation process, however, was the indiscriminate anti-Sunni violence that went beyond the selective repression against former members of the ousted Hussein regime. In the context of the broad military sweeps through the Sunni Triangle during the early phases of the occupation, thousands of Sunni Arab civilians were detained and often subjected to rough and degrading treatment (Eisenstadt & Jeffrey, 2005). At the same time, the Sunni Triangle offered ex-Baathist and other anti-American forces a domestic sanctuary, as both the coalition forces and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) lacked the numbers needed to control every village and town or to secure Iraq’s borders against the infiltration of foreign jihadists (Eisenstadt & Jeffrey, 2005).

In 2003–04, among the first armed groups to emerge were the *Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (TQJBR), *Ansar al-Islam* (later *Jaiish Ansar Al-Sunna*), and *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fi Iraq* (IAI). The spectrum of insurgents ranged between the more Sunni Arab, nationalistic on the one hand

(which included many ex-Baathists), and the more jihad-oriented, religiously motivated on the other hand (many of whom were of foreign origin). Quite obviously, the theory outlined here applies only to the Sunni Arab, nationalistic elements among this assortment of armed organizations.

Toward a processual analysis of escalation dynamics

Classical QCA methodology – as employed above – remains relatively static in that it cannot adequately consider the processual nature of social and political life (De Meur, Rihoux & Yamasaki, 2009: 161–163). More specifically, it does not explicitly consider the temporal sequences in which conditions might appear (and disappear). To return to the above analysis, we do not know whether repression usually follows the offer of external sanctuary, or whether it could as well be the other way around, or whether historical sequences do not follow a specific pattern.

To establish a processual view of conflict dynamics that has so far largely eschewed conflict research (but see Sambanis & Zinn, 2006), we mapped out the historical sequence in which the five conditions appeared (if they did) in each case of ethnic war, whether or not these conditions were identified by QCA as sufficient. Establishing temporal sequence between socio-economic and cultural marginalization, however, was often difficult, which led us to code them as occurring simultaneously. Overall, this exercise is considerably more complex compared to the previous step of the analysis, as the conditions present in the different cases of ethnic war are more varied.

However, and somewhat to our surprise, we found that for all 21 cases included in the QCA solution there is only one temporal sequence to ethnic war. Not all ethnic wars emerge from the sequential appearance of *all* five conditions, quite obviously, but the conditions always appear in the same order (if they do indeed appear). As Table IV shows, additional horizontal inequalities (above and beyond the ethno-political inequality common to all cases) appear first, sometimes accompanied by cultural marginalization. This is followed by a limited territorial reach of a new government or the declining reach of an existing regime. Next follows indiscriminate violence by the regime. This connection with previously weakened territorial reach is causal in the cases where such weak territorial penetration indeed precedes indiscriminate violence: low state reach encouraged the regime to use indiscriminate violence to suppress the mobilization against ethno-political exclusion because it lacked the tools for a more effective, targeted elimination of oppositional organizations (see also Kalyvas, 2006).

Table IV. The temporal sequence to ethnic war

<i>Case</i>	<i>Soecmarg</i>	<i>Culmarg</i>	<i>~ Statereach</i>	<i>Indisrep</i>	<i>Exsup</i>	<i>Ethnicwar</i>
Muslim Sahel groups, 1960–75 (Chad)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Arabs, 1960–75 (Chad)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Dinka, 1956–71 (Sudan)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Other northern groups, 1983–2003 (Sudan)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Kurds, 1946–2005 (Turkey)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Sri Lankan Tamils, 1964–83 (Sri Lanka)	1	1	2	3	4	5
Dinka, 1983–2003 (Sudan)	1	1		2	3	4
Mayas, 1946–85 (Guatemala)	1	1		2	3	4
Albanians, 1993–99 (Yugoslavia)	1	1		2	3	4
Kurds, 1976–90 (Iraq)	1	1		2	3	4
Northerners, 2000–02 (Côte d'Ivoire)	1		2	3	4	5
Ovimbundu-Ovambo, 1975–2002 (Angola)	1		2	3	4	5
Palestinians, 1971–91 (Lebanon)	1		2	3	4	5
Ijaw, 1999–2005 (Nigeria)	1		2	3		4
Langi/Acholi, 1972–73 (Uganda)	1			2	3	4
Ndebele-Kalanga, 1982–87 (Zimbabwe)	1			2	3	4
Lari/Bakongo, 1969–71 (Congo)			1	2	3	4
Bakongo, 1975–2002 (Angola)			1	2	3	4
Sunni Arabs, 2003–05 (Iraq)			1	2	3	4
Nibolek, 1998–2005 (Congo)			1	2		3
Lari/Bakongo, 1998–2005 (Congo)			1	2		3

The case of the Lari/Bakongo in the Republic of Congo between 1998 and 2005 illustrates the escalation pattern. After Sassou-Nguesso's northern-dominated Cobra militia seized power in late 1997, the remnants of former Prime Minister Bernard Kolélas's Ninja militia (mainly composed of Lari and Bakongo fighters) hid in their native Pool region in the south of the country. Initially, Sassou-Nguesso's grip on the country was still rather weak, in particular in the south where his security forces were unable to establish effective territorial control in the countryside (Clark & Decalo, 2012: 23–24). Subsequently, this led the regime to use indiscriminate violence against Lari and Bakongo (Bazenguissa-Ganga & Patrice, 1999: 191–192). Whereas the Ninjas hoped for amnesty and re-integration into the security forces, the new army – made up of Sassou loyalists, the Cobra militia, and Angolan and Chadian troops – engaged in a hunt for the alleged militias. As the latter were difficult to identify in a context of very limited territorial control, everybody capable of carrying a gun in the Pool region was indiscriminately treated as a potential militia member. This led to gross human rights violations not only against former combatants but also against the civilian population. In the end, this prompted the Ninjas to reorganize and culminated in the renewed ethnic war of mid-1998. Indiscriminate violence, however, can also emerge without a previous weakening of territorial control of the state, as the table shows. In QCA language,

the weakened territorial control of the state is not a necessary (but perhaps a sufficient) condition for the indiscriminate violence that follows.

Finally, where an external sanctuary appears, this will be chronologically after indiscriminate violence has already fanned the flames of conflict. This is not, however, a causal relationship, as the case of Kosovo Albanians in former Yugoslavia (1993–99) illustrates. In socio-economic terms, Kosovo has long been by far the poorest part of Yugoslavia (Judah, 2000: 46; Sell, 2002: 69). Indiscriminate repression of Albanian nationalists began during the 1980s and continued throughout the first half of the 1990s. The Serbian police maintained a regime of constant surveillance with routine harassment, beatings, and arrests (Bekaj, 2010: 13; Judah, 2000: 40–41, 84–91). Significantly, whole Albanian villages were frequently surrounded and subjected to violent searches for weapons (HRW, 1993). This indiscriminate violence greatly facilitated the recruitment of fighters for the nascent Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK).

Even more important for the onset of ethnic war in 1998 was that an external sanctuary in neighboring Albania became available. The Albanian government had sought to prevent KLA activities on its territory during the first half of the 1990s. But the prospects for military training in Albania improved dramatically in the spring of 1997 when Albania's government imploded after the pyramid (or 'Ponzi') savings schemes – in which hundreds of thousands of people had invested their fortunes – collapsed (Judah,

2000: 127–129). Confronted with violent demonstrations across the country, the Albanian government lost control over the territory, the army dissolved, the police ran away, and arms depots were thrown open. No central government in Tirana prevented the KLA from organizing on its soil and from smuggling the readily available weapons back to Kosovo. Clearly, the collective punishment of Kosovo Albanians in Milosevic's Serbia did not cause the Ponzi schemes in neighboring Albania to collapse.

Overall, this suggests that the conditions are not ordered in a historical sequence of causal connections. The historically prior condition for ethnic war does not causally generate the second condition for ethnic war. In other words, the logic here is not that of a necessary chain reaction. Rather, the uniform temporal ordering in which conditions become relevant is due to the logic of the escalation process itself, which makes certain conditions relevant at different points in the process, but does not ensure their emergence. The following stages of this escalation process could be hypothesized: mobilization of ethno-nationalists, their initial organization, subsequent radicalization and mass recruitment, and, finally, the emergence of armed organizations.

Different conditions become relevant during these subsequent stages. Further 'grievance'-inducing conditions are relevant for mobilization. Limited state reach might be relevant for initial organization. Indiscriminate violence becomes relevant for subsequent radicalization and mass recruitment – without indiscriminate violence the process of escalation stops here. And finally, an external sanctuary is often relevant for the actual organization of an armed guerrilla front.

Conclusion

This article showed that the opposition between 'grievance' and 'opportunity' factors in the study of civil wars can be reconciled with appropriate data and methodologies. We analyzed a subset of 58 ethnic groups that are excluded from regional and national government and asked what additional factors might explain why only a third of these actually rose up in arms. Despite using QCA methodology, which is especially apt to detect multiple causal pathways, we arrived at only two very similar sets of conditions that make ethno-political conflict highly probable. We found that when the grievances over ethno-political inequality are further inflamed by state violence targeted collectively at group members, conflicts escalate into armed rebellion if the state's repressive institutions have only limited territorial reach or if a neighboring state offers itself as a refuge, both of which provide leaders of the excluded groups with the opportunity to organize an armed rebellion.

Future research should aim at further testing this argument by enlarging the size of the sample. A full coding of the entire EPR dataset with over 700 ethnic groups would obviously demand a massive effort but may very well be rewarding. Such an effort should focus on the three conditions identified here as the most relevant for a more fine-grained understanding of ethno-political conflict.

In a second step, going beyond standard QCA methodology, we tentatively explored the temporal dynamics leading to ethnic conflict by looking at the historical sequence in which these various conditions became relevant. The analysis of individual cases concluded that the conditions are not ordered into a causal chain reaction. Rather, there seems to be a uniform escalation dynamics, which will be stopped, thus preventing further escalation into violence, if subsequent conditions are not produced by other causal force. If the grievances associated with initial ethno-political exclusion are not further aggravated by indiscriminate repression further down the road, the spiral of escalation will not take off. If such repression happens but there is not subsequent weakening of the territorial reach of the state or no outside help appears on the horizon, escalation dynamics also do not proceed further.

Quite obviously, this interpretation of the temporal logic remains rather speculative. It is reassuring, however, that it broadly conforms to the result of a similar exercise by Sambanis & Zinn (2006), who showed that state repression played an important role during an escalation process leading from secessionist movements to full-blown civil war. To go beyond what has been achieved here, a fully processual analysis of the event chains leading to armed conflict would be in order. This, however, would demand a different data structure and dataset altogether and remains well beyond the ambitions of this article.

Replication data

The dataset, codebook, and output files for the empirical analysis in this article, as well as the Online appendix, can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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STEFAN LINDEMANN, PhD in Development Studies (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2010); Project Manager, KfW Development Bank (2012–).

ANDREAS WIMMER, PhD in Social Anthropology (University of Zurich, 1992); Lieber Professor of Sociology and Political Philosophy, Columbia University (2015–); most recent book: *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart* (Princeton University Press, 2018).