Application of the Conflict-Cohesion Hypothesis to Nation-States: Developing the Inter and Intrastate War Correlation

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**Introduction**

In recent years, the world has seen a decline in interstate war, especially among the developed states of the West. As globalization and complex interdependence have taken root in these countries, and as they take root in others, wars like those fought in the early parts of the twentieth century seem increasingly unlikely. International law, spawned in large part in the aftermath of those wars, also makes the occurrence of protracted international wars even more unlikely as they embody norms which condemn military aggression of any kind.

While a marked decrease in interstate war is clearly present in the latter half of the twentieth century and the early parts of twenty-first century, intrastate war has *increased* in quantity during that time periods, primarily among the less developed countries of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia.

This paper will explore the connection between these two phenomenon, making the claim that interstate war creates a national myth, which causes individuals to identify more as members of that state rather than as members of disparate ethnic groups. Lowered perceptions of ethnic heterogeneity cause increases in social cohesion and decreases in inequality which in turn cause a decrease in intrastate war.

In the first section of this paper, we will explore the causes of intrastate war, establishing two broad main camps: the literature that contends that ethnic heterogeneity (and its many auxiliary effects) cause intrastate war and then the literature that states that a lack of state capacity or reach is the main explanatory variable. The second section will explore the effects of violence on the micro level, and then it will delineate on the macro level what effects interstate war has on a country, again separating it into two camps: those that purport that nationalism and social cohesion are the most important legacy and those that claim state capacity is. The third section will analyze data collected by the World Values Survey, Correlates of War database, and the World Bank in order to test our hypothesis.

**Causes of Intrastate War**

In this section, we focus on two specific causes of intrastate conflict: ethnic heterogeneity, and governmental capacity. The first of these, ethnic heterogeneity, correlates with an increased likelihood of ethnic intrastate war (Sambanis, 2001; Alesina et al., 2004; Caselli & Coleman, 2006; Melander, 2009; Fearon & Laitin, 2012), because—in situations where political goods are limited—leaders of a specific ethnic group are more likely to look after themselves and others of the same ethnicity, and to view other groups as threats to their ethnic well-being. Consequently, each group takes steps to secure goods for their own identity group, and too often at the expense of other identity groups. This security dilemma produces increased instances of conflict in ethnically heterogeneous regions, especially in regions in which those ethnic groups are in close proximity to one another. And although there are benefits to ethnic heterogeneity—such as an increased variety of private goods borne from an increased variety of skills inherent in a more diverse society—any gains are overshadowed by the inability of ethnic heterogeneous societies to decide on the public policy and distribution of public good (Alesina, 2004), which increases inequality. Additionally, heterogeneous societies in the developing world possess elites that can more easily enforce membership because that membership so often fall along ethnic lines. And with ethnicity being the distinguishing factor between members and non-members, elite leadership can enforce more easily membership and prevent the dissemination of resources to non-members. Consequently, those outside the elite group, made more unequal as a result, will resort to conflict in an attempt to secure those resources that would have otherwise been gradually dispersed had the borders between elite and non-elite, and between ethnic groups, been more porous (Caselli et al., 2006).

How groups react to that inequality caused by that retention of resources depends on the *perceptions* of the power disparity between the groups. For example, if the disadvantaged groups sees the disparity as insurmountable (that is, if they believe no actions will be met with success), then the disadvantaged group will generally never rebel. However, if those with a desire to react perceive that they’ll be accompanied by others, and if they believe they have a reasonable chance of success, they will generally do so (Abbink et al., 2012).

At the same time, however, the inequality must reach a certain threshold; when it does, *both* groups wage conflict, either through repressing or rebelling. For example, conflict in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nepal, Angola, and the DRC can be adequately explained and accounted for: as equality reaches a particular point, conflict arises (Dutta et al., 2014).

More than simply producing a more conflict-prone state, increased ethnic diversity also correlates with a decrease in trust, social solidarity, and social capital, even among those of the same ethnic group. In time, a new more inclusive identity *can* be formed, and the resulting negative effects of decreased social trust and solidarity ameliorated (Putnam, 2007). That lack of trust or social solidarity discussed by Putnam leads to an increased likelihood of intrastate war taking place, says Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014). This, because conflict represents a failure to cooperate, an act dependent in large part on trust and good faith (Rohner et al., 2013)

In summary, the presence of ethnic heterogeneity correlates positively with an increased inability to decide on public policy and good distribution and increased rate of retention of resources by ethnic elites because of nonporous membership lines. These two dependent variables both increase inequality, which in turn increases the likelihood of intrastate war. Additionally, ethnically diverse society suffer from a deficiency in social capital, solidarity, and trust. Because trust is so integral to cooperation, especially between ethnic groups, a lack thereof makes it that much harder and makes conflict that much more likely. Security dilemmas ensue, encouraging groups to strike first to gain the advantage.

The second potential cause of intrastate war is state reach and capacity (DeRouen et al., 2010; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Holtermann, 2012; Taydas & Peksen, 2012; DiGiuseppe et al., 2012). State reach and capacity are generally defined as the ability of the state to determine the amount and direction of government spending and the level of trust the public has in state institutions (Fjelde & Soysa, 2009). Governmental spending is derived from two sources, both of which increase state reach and capacity: the government’s ability and willingness to extract taxes, and the government’s access to international credit (DiGuiseppe et al. 2012). Government spending increases trust in government, and trust in government in turn decreases the likelihood of intrastate war. This is because governmental spending generally alleviates economic disparity between ethnic groups, removing incentive for conflict. Conversely, states with limited reach and capacity are more likely to experience intrastate war. (Hutchison & Johnson 2011; Taydas & Peksen, 2012).

However, there are exceptions to these assumptions. Holtermann (2012) states that economic factors alleviated by governmental expenditure are largely irrelevant to predicting intrastate war; rather, it is the extent of governmental spending in military matters and the resulting increase in the reach of its military that then denies rebels and dissidents the opportunity to create conflict in the first place. Additionally, Collier et al. (2009) also contend while ethnic groups may be upset by economic disparity, the feasibility of success is a larger determinant of conflict. That is, disparity may actually prevent conflict, especially since a successful conflict requires extensive funding.

**Effects of Violence and War**

On a micro-level, violence has many effects on individuals and groups, both short- and long-term. Perhaps most prominent among those effects is an increase in social cohesion; that is, conflict with an out-group produces cohesion among the in-group (Stein, 1976; Howard, 1979; Herbst, 1990; Ayoob, 1995; Hutchison, 2007; Bowles, 2008; Voors et al., 2010; Gibler et al., 2012; Gilligan et al., 2014). Stein (1976) sets conditions on this phenomenon, stating that the conflict must threaten all within the group equally and must be a solvable issue. Parent (2011) echoes this sentiment, arguing that the threat must be “symmetrically shared” in order for it to be beneficial to the group. Stein (1976) also warns that the threatened group itself must possess certain characteristics; namely, it must have existed before, possess some semblance of cohesion beforehand, have leadership capable of enforcing cohesion, and be capable of dealing with the external threat.

Furthermore, several studies have found that exposure to violence and conflict produce a marked increase in political participation (Blattman, 2009; Bellows & Miguel, 2009). That political participation mentioned includes voting, taking part in leadership positions, being more willing to pay taxes and contribute funding to other public works, attending community meetings, and joining politically and socially active groups. Moreover, Benard (2012) argues that exposure to conflict increases an individual’s willingness to contribute to, and participate with, the in-group, and that it also increases an individual’s willingness to pressure others to do the same. This may also contribute to the purging effect spoken of by Gilligan et al. (2014) in which those who are unwilling to sacrifice for the community depart (whether willingly or unwillingly), leaving only the committed behind. Benard also states that it encourages the in-group participants to seek centralized leadership (an obvious deviation from the position taken by Stein who says that leadership should already been in place).

Violence also has an effect on how altruistic individuals are toward the in-group (Bowles, 2008; Voors et al., 2010), which may help explain why they are willing to donate and contribute to the in-group in the first place. However, the idea of an increase in altruistic behavior conflicts with those posited by Benard (2012) who states that individuals pressure their fellow members of the in-group into obeying the social norms of group contribution, even to the point of withdrawal from the community (Gilligan et al., 2014).

On the macro scale, warfare and violence have similar effects on states as a whole. In addition to the effect of increased social cohesion and a more cohesive national identity (Howard, 1979; Ayoob, 1995; Hutchison, 2007; Gibler et al., 2012), there are many that contend that the most salient result of warfare is the creation and strengthening of the state and its institutions (Tilly, 1990; Desch, 1996; Gongora, 1997; Centuro, 1997; Thies, 2004; Taylor & Botea, 2008). Amid the two camps, there is much interplay; Herbst (1990), for instance, recognizes that both an increase in the ability to tax and cohesiveness created by nationalism are profound effects of war.

Among those focusing on the cohesiveness legacy achieved by war, Howard (1979) claims that cohesive national identities form from war because it creates national myths large and impactful enough to do so. Additionally, war also causes individuals to display decreased tolerance for political deviation and difference and to support ideas of national unity and conformism (Hutchison & Gliber, 2007); however, it also encourages cooperation and compromise, as Alesina and La Ferrara (2004) find, stating that power-sharing in government, between ethnic groups is more likely when faced by an external threat. And while Gibler et al. (2012) find that defensive conflict causes individuals to self-identify as members of the state rather than as members of individual ethnic groups (and vice versa), Miller (2013) says that states that continually defend in international conflicts possess citizens with decreased individual happiness. The opposite is also true, that individuals who reside in states which aggressively start wars are happier, because they perceive their state attempting to secure resources for their betterment. Regardless of whether the conflict is defensive or offensive in nature, Hutchison (2011) claims that there are decreases in protest behavior and increases in non-voting political participation across the board.

Among those that focus on state strength, Tilly (1990) posits that wars make states stronger in three areas specifically: it allows states to centralize of control, create additional “administrative structures,” and negotiate with civilians who (through taxes) will fund and populate administrative positions within the state. This creates a symbiotic relationship between the state and the people, which requires the creation of citizenship and the further inclusion of the citizenry in matters once considered the territory of the state (Howard, 1979; Giddens, 1987). Centeno (1997) disagrees with Tilly in the context of the contemporary developing world; rather than those things developing as a result of war, Centeno contends that they are a prerequisite for war to be effective at furthering the building of the state, adding that a dominate, consolidated class capable of ruling is also necessary. Furthermore, Taylor and Botea (2008) add that ethnic homogeneity and a unifying, “revolutionary ideology” also prove integral to such efforts.

Regardless, of these differences in chronological development of the state, both authors emphasize the relationship between the state, its wars, and its structure. In fact, many claim that the current international structure—partially informed by pressures from the international community via laws and norms—is distinctly different from the situation experienced by European powers in their formative years. This is especially true for developing nations (Herbst, 1990; Desch, 1996; Leander, 2002; Kisangani & Pickering, 2014), which explains much of the variation in observations between Tilly and Centeno.

However, even if the international structure wasn’t as benign as it is now, many challenges would still face the state. The intensified focus on resources and sophistication of technology of military operations increasingly requires funding that outstrips the capabilities of local taxation and, as a result, foreign aid and loans are relied on (Gongora, 1997). This lack of necessity or ability to tax its people completely preempts the processes described by Tilly and others in which the need for taxation necessitates negotiations and eventually exchange of citizenship for services (Tilly, 1990; Leander, 2002).

**Combination of Literatures**

The combination of these literatures provide a unique look at the interplay between interstate and intrastate war, between what the effects are of violence and what those effects have on communities. Already, there has been work done at connecting these fields of research, as in the case of Gibler (2014) who argues that interstate war increases state capacity (as argued by Tilly and those that followed) and that state capacity decreases the likelihood of intrastate war breaking out because of the state’s increased capacity to crush dissidents. However, crushing dissent would not be necessary (and so would not prove the most salient of legacies imbued by war), since interstate war creates a superseding national identity that would in turn create social cohesion, making the presence of dissidents in society less likely. Still further, with increases in social capital and social cohesion that come from decreases in perceived ethnic diversity, the “idea of the state”—a collective conceptualization of the country’s governing apparatus, which hinges on a strong national identity and social cohesion—strengthens and, as a result, increases state strength (Buzan, 2008).

National myths are spawned from warfare, cohering diverse ethnic identities into one larger, national community. With a perceived decrease in ethnic heterogeneity (due to the superseding nature of the larger national identity), social solidarity and cohesion increase; a more solid idea of “the state” is formed, which increases state strength; and the likelihood of intrastate war declines.

Within those states that initiate or endure war, individuals exhibit greater levels of altruism toward those within their country; individuals display a greater desire to participate politically either through registering to vote, running for office, etc.; individuals contribute public goods; and individuals who protest far less. On the whole, it creates individuals who contributes to the in-group and who persuade and pressure others to do the same, which ultimately purges some from the state who are unwilling to do so, generating a state that prizes unity and conformism above dissention.

An increase in solidarity among those left within the state similarly leads to a decrease in inequality, as those within the in-group are more willing to contribute and help their fellow in-group members and contribute to the state via taxes (which comes back around as welfare programs), and with that decrease in inequality precipitates another decrease in the probability of intrastate war.

In summary, exposure to, and participation in, international warfare creates national myths which form the backbone of national identities; increases in social solidarity, cohesiveness, and capital follow as internal (or ethnic) divisions fall away; inequality falls as wealth is less likely to be retained by the few distinguished by their ethnic identity; the state is strengthened as a byproduct as desire for centralized leadership increases, the willingness to contribute to the public grows, and a clear concept of what the state should be is formed in the minds of the people.

**Methods**

Our statistical model has been broken down into two parts: first, we will test the ability of inter-state war to effectively generate social cohesion and solidarity. We measure this concept with an item in the WVS that asks respondents to indicate whether agree with the following statements: (1) The entire way our society is organized must be radically changed by revolutionary action, (2) Our society must be gradually improved by reforms, or (3) Our present society must be valiantly defended against all subversive forces. Though an imperfect measure, we think that those who agree with the third statement are those who fit our theoretic expectations. As such, we dummy code this variable where 1 indicates agreement with the third statement and 0 represents all other responses. And secondly, we will test whether that social cohesion has any meaningful effect on the likelihood of intrastate war. For both intra- and interstate war, the data comes from the Correlates of War dataset (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010).

As we test the ability of interstate war to produce social cohesion and as we test the ability of that social cohesion to produce meaningful effects on the likelihood of intrastate war, we simultaneously test state capacity as a competing variable, as an alternative explanation for why intra-state war decreases with inter-state conflict. We use the amount of military personnel within a state as an indicator of capacity and we will draw from Correlates of War’s National Military Capabilities dataset for data (Singer, Bremer & Stuckey, 1972). In order to have a variable capable of cross-country comparison, we drew data from the World Bank’s collection of state population and combined it with the military personnel reported on by NMC dataset to create a new variable of military personnel per capita.

We combined all of this data into one, assembling it around the waves of the WVS in which the desired variable was collected (from 1981-2004). In addition to the control variables discussed in the previous paragraph, we include individual-level controls. The WVS uses the standard left-right scale to measure political ideology, and we use this as a control for individual hawkish preferences. In addition, we control for age and gender. Primarily, we expect that inter-state conflict will influence social cohesion.

We test this with two separate multilevel logistic regression models. The first model estimates the probability of agreeing with the social cohesion statement using the national and individual level covariates discussed previously. Our country variables are based on both countries and waves of the WVS. For instance, Germany has been in every survey since 1981. The value of state capacity in Germany is based on both the country and the year of the survey. As such, our models include a random intercept for each country and year that they are in the survey. This allows our country-level estimates to be specific to conditions in the country at the time and not strictly country specific.

Table 1: Predicting Social Cohesion and Intra-state Conflict

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) |
|  | Social Cohesion | Intra-state Conflict |
|  |  |  |
| State Capacity | 0.001\*\*\* | -0.008\*\*\* |
|  | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| Inter-state Conflict | 0.049 | 0.216 |
|  | (0.036) | (5.922) |
| Political Ideology | 0.049\*\*\* | -0.037\*\*\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.008) |
| Gender (male baseline) | 0.072\*\*\* | -0.080\* |
|  | (0.008) | (0.048) |
| Age | 0.006\*\*\* | 0.011\*\*\* |
|  | (0.000) | (0.002) |
| Social Cohesion |  | 0.053 |
|  |  | (0.038) |
| Intercept | -2.659\*\*\* | -19.209\*\*\* |
|  | (0.111) | (2.842) |
|  |  |  |
| Observations | 151,462 | 135,388 |
| Number of groups | 64 | 64 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The first column in Table 1 displays the regression coefficients. State capacity is the only country level variable to achieve statistical significance. The coefficient is positive, which suggests that states with greater military capacity are positively associated with social cohesiveness. It is difficult to determine the direction of causality, it could be that military capacity increases social cohesion, or it could be that social cohesion motivates people to support greater military capacity. In addition, the coefficients for the individual level covariates are statistically significant. As expected, conservatives are more likely to agree that with the social cohesion statement, as are men and older people. Contrary to our expectations, inter-state conflict is not statistically associated with social cohesion.

The second model estimates the influence of social cohesion, interstate conflict, and state capacity on the probability of being engaged in intra-state conflict. Again, we hypothesize that inter-state conflict increases cohesive attitudes which makes intrastate conflict less likely. The estimates from this model are remarkably similar to those in the first model. We find significant support for a relationship between state capacity and intrastate conflict, however the coefficient is negative. This implies that as state capacity increases, the probability of intra-state conflict decreases. Contrary to our theoretical expectations, there is not a significant association between social cohesion or inter-state conflict and the probability of a country being engaged in intra-state conflict.

In short, we find little statistical evidence for our theoretical model. However, this does not necessarily imply that our model is incorrect, simply that we do not find empirical support in the World Values Survey. Our measure for social cohesion comes from a single question in the WVS and does not perfectly measure our theoretical construct. Though we are disappointed in these findings, we are confident that a superior research design would likely yield findings consistent with our theoretical model.

**Conclusion**

Widespread interstate war causes the creation of a national myth, under which a larger, more inclusive national identity is formed. Individuals, more likely to identify as members of that state rather than members of ethnic groups, begin to contribute to the public’s good as a whole as increased levels of altruism, social solidarity, and cohesion are felt among broad swaths of society. Because society is perceived as less ethnically heterogeneous by its constituent parts, resources are retained less by elite groups, who are unable to enforce membership as efficiently, allowing the dissemination of resources to more members of society. As more wealth is distributed to more and as more is contributed to the public, inequality lowers and the chances of violent conflict within the state are lowered.

And although we have not found statistical evidence in support of our theoretical model, our claims remain conceptually sound and supported sufficiently by the surrounding literatures. Additionally, we suspect that the WVS is particularly flawed when used in the manner we’ve attempted as countries are less likely to be surveyed by the WVS when both inter and intrastate conflict are occurring.

Furthermore, future statistical models should take into account the intensity of the interstate wars felt by a particular country, as less intense international struggles will naturally have a smaller impact on the state that experienced it and will therefore witness the return of intrastate war or other political violence much faster than more intense wars. This assumption will then account for the numerous instances in our dataset which countries reported neither intrastate nor interstate war. Sufficiently intense wars will have created national myths strong enough to last several decades if not centuries.

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