

Ethnic Mobilization and Ethnic Violence

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1 Introduction

Why are political coalitions, movements, and structures of patron-client relations so often organized along ethnic lines? Why is ethnicity politicized in these ways in some countries more than others, and what accounts for variation over time within particular countries? Under what conditions is the politicization of ethnicity accompanied by significant ethnic violence?

The sizable body of work on these questions contains few analyses that use tools or ideas from microeconomic theory, the hallmarks of “political economy” as conceived in this volume. In what follows I briefly review the main answers advanced in the broader literature, and situate and discuss the contributions of several political-economy analyses.

The paper has four main sections. In the first two I sketch some of the stylized facts concerning cross-national and temporal variation in the politicization of ethnicity and ethnic violence.¹ In the third and fourth I discuss attempts to explain the prevalence and variation of politicized ethnicity, and then arguments proposing to explain the occurrence of ethnic violence.

Some definitional matters must be addressed before starting. In ordinary English usage, the term “ethnic group” is typically used to refer to groups larger than a family in which membership is reckoned primarily by a descent rule (Fearon and Laitin 2000*a*; Fearon 2003). That is, one is or can be a member of an ethnic group if one’s parents were also judged members (conventions and circumstance decide cases of mixed parentage). There are some groups that meet this criterion but that intuition may reject as “ethnic,” such as clans, classical Indian castes, or European nobility. But even in these cases analysts often recognize a “family resemblance” to ethnic groups based on the use of descent as the basis for membership.²

Members of the *prototypical* ethnic group share a common language, religion, customs, sense of a homeland, and relatively dense social networks. However, any or all of these may be missing and a group might still be described as “ethnic” if the descent rule for membership is satisfied.³ In other words, while shared cultural features often distinguish ethnic groups, these are contingent rather than constitutive aspects of the idea of an “ethnic group.” Becoming fluent in the language, manners, and customs of Armenia will not make me “ethnically Armenian.” The key constitutive feature is membership reckoned by descent.

¹By a “stylized fact” I mean a defensible empirical generalization, one that is typically though not universally valid and possibly in need of further elaboration or qualification.

²Horowitz (1985) and Chandra (2004), for example, argue for coding Indian castes as ethnic groups.

³For instance, Roma and other nomadic groups have no real sense of homeland; Germans profess multiple religions; Jews speak multiple first languages; and Somali clans are not distinguished from each other by any notable cultural features. Each of these groups might or might not be considered an “ethnic group” by some, but they are all at least candidates so considered by others.

This observation helps explain why groups considered “religious” in one context may be reasonably considered “ethnic” in another. In the United States, Protestants and Catholics are religious rather than ethnic groups because membership is reckoned by profession of faith rather than descent; one can become a member of either group by conversion. In Northern Ireland, descent rather than profession of faith is the relevant criterion for deciding membership, even though religion is the main cultural feature distinguishing the two main social groups. Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland can thus reasonably be described as ethnic groups despite common language, appearance, many customs, and genetic ancestry (in some sense). This contrast also makes clear that ethnic distinctions are not a matter of biology but rather are conventions determined by politics and history.

2 Some stylized facts about the politicization of ethnicity

Ethnicity is *socially relevant* when people notice and condition their actions on ethnic distinctions in everyday life. Ethnicity is *politicized* when political coalitions are organized along ethnic lines, or when access to political or economic benefits depends on ethnicity. Ethnicity can be socially relevant in a country without it being much politicized, and the degree to which ethnicity is politicized can vary across countries and over time.

Ethnicity is socially relevant in all but a few countries whose citizens have come to believe that they are highly ethnically homogenous (such as Ireland, Iceland, Korea, and Lesotho). In most countries, citizens consider that there are multiple ethnic groups, and in some they largely agree on what the main ethnic groups are. For example, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics ethnicity was officially classified and enumerated by the state, which seems to have yielded a high degree of consensus on the category systems. By contrast, in many countries, such as the United States and India, there is less agreement on how to think about what the “ethnic groups” are, although everyone agrees that they exist. In the U.S., for example, the current census categories include White, African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and Pacific Islanders.⁴ But why not separate out Arab Americans, Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Peruvian Americans, German Americans, Scottish Americans, and so on? This sort of problem is almost infinitely worse for India and very bad for many countries, rendering it difficult to make more than quite subjective estimates of the number of ethnic groups in many countries.

One could argue for attempting to base estimates on the way that most people in the country think about what the main ethnic groups are. Using secondary sources rather than survey data (which is not available), Fearon (2003) attempts this for about 160 countries, considering only groups with greater than 1% of country population. Table 1 provides some basic descriptive statis-

⁴The U.S. government insists on a distinction between “race” and “ethnicity,” though without really explaining why or on what basis.

tics by region. By these estimates the average country has about five ethnic groups greater than 1% of population, with a range from 3.2 per country in the West to 8.2 per country in subSaharan Africa. SubSaharan Africa stands out as the only region in which fewer than half of the countries have an ethnic majority group, and it has only one country with a group comprising more than 90% of the population (Botswana).⁵ The West stands out for having an ethnic majority in every single country, and three-out-of-five with a “dominant” ethnic group (90% or more). Interestingly, countries with a “dominant” group in this sense are rare in the rest of the world. Socially relevant ethnic distinctions are thus extremely common.

The politicization of ethnicity varies markedly, in a pattern that to some extent reflects variation in the prevalence of socially relevant ethnic distinctions. Ethnically based parties are common in subSaharan Africa, and access to political and economic benefits is frequently structured along ethnic lines. This is also the case for most of the more ethnically diverse countries of South and Southeast Asia. Ethnic parties are less common in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and North Asia. However, at least during the communist era the allocation of political and economic benefits was often formally structured along ethnic lines in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Slezkine 1994; Suny 1993); the same seems true, more informally, of China, Korea, and Japan. Ethnic parties are rare in the more homogenous Western countries, excepting Belgium and to a lesser extent Spain, Britain, and Canada. Access to political and economic benefits can certainly be influenced by ethnicity in the Western countries (for example, in labor markets and often in urban politics), though to an extent that generally seems small when compared to most countries in other regions.

Traditionally, political cleavages in Latin America were understood in terms of class rather than ethnicity, despite ample “raw material” for ethnic politics in the form of socially relevant ethnic distinctions in most countries (indigenous versus mestizo versus whites, and in some cases intra-indigenous ethnic distinctions). It is an interesting question why Latin American countries have seen so little politicization of ethnicity in the form of political parties and movements, especially when political and economic benefits have long been allocated along ethnic lines in many countries of the region.⁶ Middle Eastern and North African countries with marked linguistic or religious heterogeneity such as Cyprus, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran have experienced political mobilization along ethnic lines, while in many countries in this region politics among Arabs is structured by clan and tribal distinctions.

The politicization of ethnicity also varies a great deal over time. In the broadest terms, a large

⁵The sample includes only countries with greater than 500,000 in population in 1990, so Lesotho was excluded. I coded the major Somali clans as ethnic groups, though some might not see them as such.

⁶Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a notable increase in political mobilization on the basis of ethnicity in some Latin American countries (Yashar 1999). The resolution of the puzzle may have something to do with the fact that even today, in many Latin American countries an “indigenous” person can choose to become “mestizo” simply by language and lifestyle choices. That is, the categories are not understood as unambiguously descent-based.

literature on the origins of nationalism observes that until the last 100 to 200 years (depending on where you look), ethnic groups were not seen as natural bases for political mobilization or political authority. As Breuilly (1993, 3) notes, in the 14th century Dante could write an essay identifying and extolling an Italian language and nation without ever imagining that this group should have anything to do with politics. Indeed, he also wrote an essay arguing for a universal monarchy in which it never occurs to him that the monarchy should have any national basis or tasks. In 17th and 18th century Europe, religion and class were the most politicized (and violent) social cleavages, and except in a few places religion was not simply a marker for ethnicity. (For example, religious conversion was possible, common, and often put family members on different sides of a divide). Moreover, ethnic distinctions were not politicized in pre- and early-modern Europe despite the fact that European countries were far more ethnically fractionalized in that period, at least if measured by linguistic diversity (see Weber (1976) on France, for example). During the 19th century, national homogenization projects pursued by European states via school systems and militaries paralleled a secular increase in the politicization of nationality understood in ethnic terms. The success of nationalist doctrine is now so complete that almost no one questions whether cultural groups (and in particular “nations” understood as ethnic groups) form the proper basis for political community (Gellner 1983).

The politicization of ethnicity can also vary on shorter time scales. A striking stylized fact, noted by Horowitz (1985) and Bates (1983) among others, concerns the production or reformulation of ethnic groups in response to changed political boundaries. For instance, a great many ethnic groups in Africa did not exist as such prior to the colonial period. The groups now called the Yoruba or the Kikuyu (to give just two examples) are amalgams of smaller groups that spoke related dialects but had no common social or political identity (on the Yoruba, see Laitin 1985, and more generally, Vail 1991). The sense of Yoruba and Kikuyu ethnicity, identity, and political interest developed in the context of the new colonial states, which enlarged the field of political and economic competition and oriented it towards colonial capitals.

Shrinking political boundaries can have the opposite effect. Horowitz (1985, 66) mentions the 1953 reorganization of Madras state in India which led to the separation of Tamil Nadu from Andhra Pradesh. In Madras state, “with large Tamil and Telugu populations, cleavages within the Telugu group were not very important. As soon as a separate Telugu-speaking state was carved out of Madras, however, Telugu subgroups – caste, regional, and religious – quickly formed the bases of political action.” Posner (forthcoming) shows how in Zambia ethnic coalitions have formed along lines of either language or tribe, depending on whether the elections were national or local. Young (1976) famously observed that individuals’ perceptions of ethnic group memberships were “situational” in the sense that they might identify with and mobilize according to multiple different ethnic categorizations, shifting identifications depending on the political context (e.g., one might identify as a Yoruba in the north of Nigeria but as an Oyo, a subgroup of the Yoruba, in the south).

Finally, a number of authors have noted that violence can have powerful effects on the politicization of ethnicity. Violent attacks made along ethnic lines have often caused rapid and extreme

ethnic polarization in societies in which ethnicity had not been much politicized (Laitin 1995; Kaufmann 1996; Mueller 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2000*b*).

3 Some stylized facts about ethnic violence

Many different sorts of violent events may be referred to as “ethnic,” from bar fights to hate crimes to riots to civil wars. Generally speaking, a violent attack might be described as “ethnic” if either (a) it is motivated by animosity towards ethnic others; (b) the victims are chosen by ethnic criteria; or (c) the attack is made in the name of an ethnic group.⁷

Compared to the myriad opportunities for conflict between contiguous ethnic dyads in the world’s numerous multiethnic states, low-level societal ethnic violence is extremely rare (Fearon and Laitin 1996). At least since World War II, the vast majority of ethnic killing has come from either state oppression or fighting between a state and an armed group intending to represent an ethnic group (typically a minority). Of the 709 minority ethnic groups in Fearon’s (2003) list, at least 100 (14.1%) had members engaged in significant rebellion against the state on behalf of the group at some time between 1945 and 1998.⁸ In the 1990s alone, almost one-in-ten of these ethnic minorities engaged in significant violent conflict with the state. Table 2 shows great variation across regions. More than one quarter of the relatively few ethnic minorities (greater than 1% of country population) in Asia and North Africa/Middle East were involved in significant violence, whereas only one-in-ten of the many minorities in subSaharan Africa were. Across countries, there is no correlation between percentage of ethnic groups experiencing violence with the state and the number or fractionalization of ethnic groups in the country.

Cross-national statistical studies find surprisingly few differences between the determinants of civil war onset in general, versus “ethnic” civil wars in particular. Once one controls for per capita income, neither civil wars nor ethnic civil wars are significantly more frequent in more ethnically diverse countries; nor are they more likely when there is an ethnic majority and a large ethnic minority (Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Fearon and Laitin 2003).⁹ Both ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars have occurred more often in countries that are large, poor, recently independent, or oil-rich (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Ethnic wars may tend to last longer than others on average, though this is probably due to the fact that they are more often fought as guerrilla wars (Fearon 2004).

⁷See Fearon and Laitin (2000*a*) for a fuller discussion.

⁸I matched the groups in Fearon (2003) with the Minorities at Risk (MAR) groups (Gurr 1996), and then counted the number of matched groups that scored 4 or higher on the MAR rebellion scale (i.e., “small,” “intermediate,” or “large-scale” guerrilla activity, or “protracted civil war”) for at least one five-year period since 1945). This underestimates the number of ethnic groups in violent conflict, since the non-MAR groups are not considered. But because MAR tends to select on violence, the underestimate is probably not very far off.

⁹But see Sambanis (2001) for an analysis that finds some differences.

Greater ethnic diversity does not appear to be associated with higher casualties in civil conflict (Lacina 2004).

4 Explanations for the politicization of ethnicity

On one view, described as “primordialist,” no explanation is needed for why ethnicity often forms the basis for political mobilization or discrimination. Ethnic groups are naturally political, either because they have biological roots or because they are so deeply set in history and culture as to be unchangeable “givens” of social and political life. In other words, primordialists assume that certain ethnic categories are always socially relevant, and that political relevance follows automatically from social relevance. The main objection to primordialist arguments is that they can’t make sense of variation in the politicization of ethnicity over time and space.

In political economy work, ethnic groups are sometimes treated as an extreme form of interest group whose members share enduring common preferences over all public policies. Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) pioneered this approach, arguing that democracy is infeasible in an ethnically divided society because polarized ethnic preferences will lead to “ethnic outbidding” and polarized policies, which in turn makes ethnic groups unwilling to share power through elections. Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999) argue that ethnic groups have different preferences over types of public goods, and that such diversity leads to lower aggregate provision. Fearon (1998) shows that if minority and majority ethnic groups in a new state anticipate having conflicting preferences over some public policies, then the majority may have trouble credibly committing to a compromise policy that both sides would prefer to a violent conflict.

In such models, ethnic politicization follows in part from an assumption about the polarization and stability of ethnic preferences. This may be reasonable in the short run for particular cases, but it is dubious as a general proposition. It is also questionable whether, in many cases, ethnic groups disagree that much about the *types* of public goods that should be provided. In multiethnic Africa, for instance, schools, roads, health care, and access to government jobs are universally desired. Ethnic conflict arises when ethnic coalitions form to gain a greater share of commonly desired goods, which is hard to explain in models where “the action” comes from assumptions about conflicting preferences over types of goods.¹⁰

In contrast to primordialist arguments, “modernists” see ethnic groups as political coalitions formed to advance the economic interests of members (or leaders). Variation in the politicization of ethnicity is then explained by an argument about when it makes economic sense to organize a coalition along ethnic lines.

¹⁰Ethnic groups often have sharply conflicting preferences over national language policies, although Laitin (2001) argues that these have been highly amenable to peaceful, bargained solutions.

The most influential of these arguments propose to explain why ethnicity and nationality were a-political in the pre-modern world, but became the foundation for international organization and much domestic political contention by the late 19th century. Deutsch (1953), Gellner (1983), and Anderson (1983) all find the root cause in economic modernization. Economic modernization increased social mobility and created political economies in which advancement depended increasingly on one's cultural capital. When Magyar- or Czech-speaking young men from the countryside found themselves disadvantaged in the German-using Hapsburg bureaucracy or in the new industrial labor markets of Bohemia on account of their first language, they became receptive to political mobilization along ethnic ("national") lines (Deutsch 1953; Gellner 1983). The central idea is that ascriptive barriers to upward mobility – that is, discrimination according to a criterion that an individual acquires more-or-less at birth, such as ethnicity – gives political entrepreneurs an eager constituency.¹¹

Why did states and societies increasingly discriminate along cultural lines in polity and economy, especially if this would provoke separatist nationalisms? Gellner sees cultural discrimination arising from the nature of modern economies. Because these require literate workers able to interpret and manipulate culturally-specific symbols, culture matters in the modern world in a way it never did in the pre-modern, agrarian age. So why not just learn the language and culture of those who control the state or the factories? Gellner, Deutsch, and Anderson all suggest that such assimilation may be possible, but only when pre-existing cultural differences are not too great. France, where various regional dialects were mutually unintelligible into the 19th century (Weber 1976), is the leading example. Where the differences were greater, as in Austria-Hungary, the pace of assimilation may be too slow relative to economic modernization (Deutsch), or psychological biases may lead advanced groups to attribute backwardness to the ethnic differences of less modernized groups (Gellner). Anderson also suggests that the development of biological theories of race contributed to acceptance of ethnicity as a natural criterion for political and economic discrimination.¹²

Because they focus on the slow-moving variable of economic modernization, modernist theories of the rise of nationalism have trouble explaining the rapid politicization of ethnicity after independence in most former British and French colonies. Political coalitions shifted quickly from, for example, Kenyans versus British to Kikuyu versus Luo. Certainly the colonizers often prepared the ground for ethnic politics (Laitin 1986). British colonial rule displayed a remarkable zeal for "racial" classification, enumeration, and discrimination (see Fox 1985, or Prunier 1995 on the Belgians in Rwanda). But why do we sometimes observe *rapid* shifts in politically relevant

¹¹Anderson (1983) observes that the relevant ascriptive barrier for the new world nationalisms of South America was not cultural difference but the Spanish empire's refusal to let creoles (those born in the new world) progress beyond a certain point in the imperial bureaucracy.

¹²Anderson seems to join Deutsch and Gellner in relying on the extent of pre-existing cultural differences to explain the upward barriers to mobility in the old world (see, for example, his explanation for the weakness of Scottish nationalism, p. 90). It is not entirely clear what he thinks is behind the refusal of the *peninsulares* in Spain to allow the upward progress of the new world *creoles*.

ethnic groups when political boundaries or institutions (such as the level of elections) change?

Initiated by Bates (1983), another line of research argues that ethnicity can provide an attractive basis for coalition formation in purely distributional conflicts over political goods. Bates argued that African ethnic groups – as opposed to the much more local, pre-colonial formation of “tribes” – developed as political coalitions for gaining access to the “goods of modernity” dispensed by the colonial and post-colonial states. Drawing on Riker (1962), Bates proposes that “Ethnic groups are, in short, a form of minimum winning coalition, large enough to secure benefits in the competition for spoils but also small enough to maximize the per capita value of these benefits.”

Because changes in political boundaries or the level of elections can change the size of a minimum winning coalition, this approach can help to explain both situational and temporal shifts in ethnic politicization.¹³ Posner (2004) shows that the distinction between Chewas and Tumbukas is sharply politicized in Malawi but not next door in Zambia because these groups are large enough to be political contenders in small Malawi but are too small to form winning coalitions in much larger Zambia. Similarly, Zambians have mobilized in ethnic groups defined in terms of broad language commonalities for multiparty elections where control of the presidency was at issue, while in single-party elections they have identified along tribal lines (Posner forthcoming). Chandra (2004) shows that similar dynamics occur in elections and in the formulation and reformulation of caste categories in India.

To work, such arguments need to explain when and why political coalitions form along ethnic rather than some other lines, such as class, religion, region, district, or political ideology. Bates (1983) made two suggestions. First, shared language and culture make it easier for political entrepreneurs to mobilize “intragroup” rather than across ethnic groups. Second, ethnic and colonial administrative boundaries tended to coincide, and modern goods like schools, electricity, and water projects tend to benefit people in a particular location. Lobbying for these goods along ethnic lines was thus natural.

Surely both arguments are often a part of the story, but neither ties the constitutive feature of ethnic groups – membership by a descent rule – to the reason for ethnic coalition formation. There are many cases of ethnic politicization between groups with a common language and much common culture, and of ethnic politicization behind leaders who could barely speak the ethnic group’s language. And if coalition formation is simply a means to obtain spatially distributed goods, then why should ethnic as opposed to other, possibly arbitrary criteria define the optimal geographic coalition? In fact, we often observe ethnic politicization within administrative districts with highly mixed ethnic populations (Bates (1983) himself gives a number of examples of politicization in

¹³Horowitz (1985) had explained the phenomenon as a result of a perceptual bias – that the perceived extent of cultural difference between two groups decreases with the range of available contrasts. Thus an Ibo and Yoruba might come to see each other as having a shared Nigerian ethnicity/nationality if they live in New York.

ethnically mixed African urban areas).

Fearon (1999) argues that distributive politics on a mass scale favors coalitions based on individual characteristics that are difficult to change, because changeable characteristics would allow the expansion of the winning coalition so that it becomes less close to “minimum winning.” For example, if “pork” in an American city is dispensed solely to precincts that voted Democratic in the last mayoral election, then there are strong incentives for all precincts to vote Democratic, and thus less pork per winner. Ethnicity is almost by definition unchangeable for an individual (since it is defined by a descent rule), and “passing” can be very difficult. Thus ethnicity may be favored as a basis for coalitions in distributive politics because it makes excluding losers from the winning coalition relatively easy.¹⁴ It follows that in countries or jurisdictions where politics is mainly about the distribution of “pork” rather than choosing the type of public policy from a continuum (like a tax rate or policy on abortion), we might expect to see more ethnic and less ideological politics.

Caselli and Coleman (2002) formally investigate how the ability to “pass” affects incentives for coalition formation in a distributive politics problem. They consider a model in which individuals choose whether to mobilize for conflict along a particular cleavage, anticipating that in the second stage they will have the opportunity to switch identities at a utility cost of $c \geq 0$. Zero cost might be a case like party identification. A large (or infinite) cost might represent an ethnic cleavage across which there is no possibility of passing. They show that mobilization and conflict does not occur when switching identities is easy since it is anticipated that the winning coalition would expand. Caselli and Coleman suggest that higher switching costs obtain for members of groups that are distinguished by skin color or other somatic features. There are a great many counterexamples, cases of intense ethnic conflict between groups whose members can’t be reliably distinguished by physical features or even language alone. But it is unclear what a systematic empirical investigation would reveal on this point.

Chandra (2004) argues that ethnic coalitions are favored in the electoral politics of “patronage democracies” (that is, democracies with large, pork-ridden state sectors) because voters find it easier to code the beneficiaries of patronage by ethnicity than by other social categories, as the information is more readily available. She suggests that as a result politicians can most easily develop a reputation as a provider by distributing patronage goods along ethnic lines.

Somewhat relatedly, Cornell and Welch (1997) explain ethnic favoritism in labor markets as a consequence of individuals being better able to judge the quality of job applicants from their own ethnic group.

¹⁴In most societies the sex ratio among adults is slightly skewed in favor of males, which implies that a coalition of males against females would be almost perfectly minimum winning under pure majority rule. This has the downside of dividing families. Various other characteristics acquired at birth, like hair and eye color, suffer from the same problem.

5 Explanations for Ethnic Violence

Horowitz (1985) maintains that conflicts along ethnic lines are more likely to turn violent than are conflicts along ideological and other political cleavages. He suggests that because ethnic brethren are understood as metaphorical family members, ethnic conflicts engage intense emotions and a sense of existential threat. Killing may then appear a more a reasonable and justified reaction.

While many authors have proposed explanations for ethnic violence, Horowitz's argument is one of relatively few in which ethnicity *per se* does explanatory work. For example, consider a country in which two or more ethnic groups are already mobilized and can be treated as "unitary actors" because they have leaderships acting for them. Then the usual rationalist explanations for violent conflict are potentially available – bargaining failure due to private information, and problems of credible commitment (Fearon 1995). In these cases the only thing "ethnic" about the explanation is the type of actors and possibly what they are bargaining over.

Thus, Cetinyan (2001, 2002) models ethnic groups as represented by unitary actors who bargain over the terms of the minority's treatment in the state. If the minority group has private information about its willingness to fight, the majority group may demand too much, leading to a violent fight. Cetinyan stresses that this implies that while observable measures of the balance of power between two ethnic groups might predict the *terms* of a bargain they reach, they should not predict the probability of violence (since a weaker minority will simply face tougher demands).¹⁵

Fearon (1994, 1998, 2004) considers models in which a majority ethnic group may not be able to credibly commit to a regional autonomy deal or constitution that would protect minority rights in the future. Ethnic war may occur when the minority anticipates that its ability to fight for a better deal will decline in the future. It might be argued that ethnicity *per se* appears here in the implicit assumption that political coalitions and preferences over public policies will, in the future, continue to divide along ethnic lines. If there were salient cross-cutting cleavages, then being in the minority today would not imply being in the minority next year. Still, in some countries party affiliations can be practically "ethnic" in their intensity and durability through time (e.g., Colombia).

Another set of rationalist explanations for ethnic violence drops the unitary actor assumption, focusing instead on how interethnic violence may emerge as a consequence of *intraethnic* politics (see Fearon and Laitin 2000 for a general discussion). These develop the common claim that ethnic violence is a tool by which political elites maintain or increase their public support (e.g., Gagnon 1994/95). The central theoretical puzzle for such "diversionary" arguments is why publics would increase their support for a leader who takes actions, such as provoking ethnic violence, that by

¹⁵As Cetinyan notes, this argument also appears in the game-theoretic literature on interstate conflict (Wittman 1979; Wagner 1994; Powell 1996).

hypothesis make them worse off.¹⁶

Sociological and social psychological arguments invoke biases or nonrational human tendencies, such as a tendency for external threat to increase in-group cohesion (Coser 1956) or a tendency to discount negative news about those in one's in-group (Tajfel 1982). DeFigueiredo and Weingast (1999) show that if members of an ethnic group are unsure about which side is to blame for an escalation of ethnic conflict, then they may rationally increase their support for the leadership out of increased fear of the other group. Thus the leadership may find it rational to provoke ethnic violence if it can do so without clear attribution.¹⁷ Somewhat similarly, Kydd and Walter (2002) analyze the conditions in which extremists in group B can use ethnic violence so that group A will come to doubt the commitment of moderates in group B to a peace process. In their model, group A cannot observe whether extremist violence occurred because moderates in group B lacked the capability or the will to prevent it. One implication is that terrorist attacks undermine trust to a greater extent when the moderates of group B were seen as strong relative to extremists. Kydd and Walter show evidence that Palestinian terrorist attacks in the 1990s were timed in a manner consistent with the implications of their model.

Laitin (1995) and Fearon and Laitin (2000, 2003) observe that would-be insurgent groups often hope that their attacks on the state will provoke harsh, indiscriminate retaliation that will increase anger against the state and thus support for their cause. Moreover, this expectation often appears justified. The Bush administration's response to Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, especially in Iraq, may be a case in point; if so, it is one of many. While various arguments can be made (including those just sketched), it remains a puzzle why people do not more consistently blame the insurgents for bringing the government down on their heads. Kalyvas (1999a, 1999b) suggests that rebel and government attacks politicize highly local, often personal grievances and feuds that are unconnected to the larger ethnic or ideological struggle. In his analysis, what may appear as "ethnic" or "ideological" violence mislabels what is better understood as the arming and escalation of village-level feuds and grudges (see also Brass 1997).

As noted above, apart from Horowitz's psychological conjecture none of these arguments use ethnicity per se to explain ethnic violence. Instead, they adapt develop more general explanations for violent conflict for cases where combatants are organized (or would like to promote organization) along ethnic lines. This is not necessarily a problem. It may be that as an empirical matter such theories can do a good job of revealing the conditions under which ethnic violence is most likely. Still, many have the intuition that there is something different about ethnic violence – that its unspeakable cruelties imply that it springs from distinct roots. Horowitz (1985, 140)

¹⁶If the public is made better off by the ethnic violence, then it makes no sense to blame the "manipulative" elites for doing what publics would want.

¹⁷An observable implication of their argument that differs from those of the psychological tradition is that on seeing an escalation of violence or failure of negotiations, the public should increase their belief that their *own* leadership is aggressive and the cause of the trouble as well.

famously wrote that “A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (referring to rationalist and economic theories of ethnic conflict). Kalyvas’ research raises questions about this supposition as well. The patterns of extreme violence and cruelty found in ethnic conflict are characteristic of guerrilla warfare in general, whether or not a society is ethnically divided (Kalyvas 1999*a*).

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Ethnic Groups larger than 1% of country population, by Region

	World	West ^a	NA/ME	LA/Ca	Asia	EE/FSU	SSA ^b
# countries	160	21	19	23	23	31	43
% total		.13	.12	.14	.14	.19	.27
# groups	822	68	70	84	108	141	351
% total		.08	.09	.10	.13	.17	.43
Groups/country	5.14	3.24	3.68	3.65	4.70	4.55	8.16
Avg. pop. share of largest group	.65	.85	.68	.69	.72	.73	.41
% countries with a group \geq 50%	.71	1.00	.84	.78	.78	.90	.28
% countries with a group \geq 90%	.21	.62	.21	.17	.22	.19	.02

^a Includes Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

^b Includes Sudan.

Source: Fearon (2003).

Table 2. Ethnic minorities involved in significant violence with the state since 1945 and 1990

Region	# minorities	% with signif. violence in 1945-98	% with signif. violence in 1990-98
West	47	0.0	0.0
LAm/Carib.	66	6.1	4.6
SSA	339	11.8	8.4
EEur/FSU	113	12.4	11.8
N.Afr/M.E.	54	27.8	13.0
Asia	90	30.0	20.0
World	709	14.1	9.8

“Significant violence” means that Gurr (1996) codes the group as having been involved in a small-scale guerrilla war or greater with the state at some point in the relevant period.