

The Role of Neighboring Ethnic Brethren in Civil Conflict Onset

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Abstract: What is the relationship between ethnic identity, ethnic diversity, and civil conflict? Most attempts to address this question have focused on the domestic composition of ethnic identities. The aim of this paper is to propose a new approach to examining the role that ethnicity plays in domestic conflict. Rather than focusing on the domestic, ethnic composition of a country, I instead shift attention to the external, ethnic composition of neighboring states. Civil conflicts frequently become internationalized by external pressure or direct intervention supporting one side in a conflict or the other. Given these trends, this paper asks: what effect does the ethnic composition of neighboring countries have on the propensity for civil conflict including ethnic conflict? I argue that the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state represents a potential source of support for a domestic group, increasing the probability of civil conflict occurrence. By studying the relationship between the ethnic composition of neighboring states and the occurrence of domestic conflict, this paper adds to the ongoing discussion of ethnicity's effect on civil war.

I. Introduction

“It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”¹

Since Donald Horowitz framed the politics of ethnic violence in his influential text *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, the study of ethnic conflict has been a key preoccupation of social scientists. Recent and ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Afghanistan, and shocking genocides in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have some making the Huntingtonian argument that ethnic conflict is the new face of conflict in the modern era (Roeder 2003). Others have rejected the inherently incendiary role of ethnicity that Huntington’s thesis in “A Clash of Civilizations?” implies.

What is the relationship between ethnic identity, ethnic diversity, and civil conflict? This question has been frequently asked by social scientists interested in ethnicity. Most attempts to address this question have focused attention on the domestic composition of ethnic identities. After Huntington, we might expect nations with greater ethnic heterogeneity to be more conflict-prone. Yet, despite numerous inquiries and empirical tests, (Fearon 1998; Ellingsen 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Fearon 2004; and Blimes 2006) no clear and consistent answer to this question has emerged.

¹ Huntington, Samuel P. (1993) “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993

The aim of this paper is to propose a new approach to examining the role that ethnicity plays in domestic conflict. Rather than focusing on the domestic, ethnic composition of a country, I instead shift attention to the external, ethnic composition of neighboring states. Civil conflicts frequently become internationalized by external pressure or direct intervention supporting one side in a conflict or the other (Carment 1993; Byman et al. 2001; Bercovitch 2003). As the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Afghanistan demonstrate, such internationalization is often along ethnic lines. Given these trends, this paper asks: what effect does the ethnic composition of neighboring countries have on the propensity for civil conflict including ethnic conflict?² I will argue that the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state represents a potential source of support for a domestic group, increasing the probability of civil conflict occurrence.

To evaluate this argument, I examine four potential distributions of neighboring state ethnic identities that may be relevant for domestic conflict. These distributions are: (i) no neighboring state with a coethnic group; (ii) a neighboring state with a group sharing the same ethnicity as either a domestic *majority* or *minority* group; (iii) a neighboring state in which the *largest* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group; and (iv) a neighboring state in which the *majority* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group. Based on these four possible distributions, the key hypotheses I test are: (i) the existence of a neighboring state with a coethnic group makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict; (ii) the existence of a neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a

² As I discuss below, I use Fearon and Laitin's definition of ethnic conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2000; Fearon 2004). As a result, by ethnic conflict I refer to a conflict that cannot be interstate in nature.

domestic minority makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict; and (iii) the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict. I find some evidence for the second hypothesis, and strong evidence for the third hypothesis.

By studying the relationship between the ethnic composition of neighboring states and the occurrence of domestic conflict, this paper adds to the ongoing discussion of ethnicity's effect on civil war. The primary innovation of this paper is to move the focus away from the presence or extent of domestic ethnic heterogeneity to the way in which such ethnic differences become politicized in conflicts (Chandra 2004: 1). In asking what effect the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state has on the propensity for civil conflict, I am less concerned with the domestic structure of ethnic groups than with why ethnic diversity triggers external support, and the effect such support may have on encouraging conflict. Addressing this question is particularly important because it contributes to our understanding of the interaction between actors in conflict broadly, how civil conflicts become internationalized, and the specific role that ethnic identity and ethnic alliances come to play in such conflicts.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a review of the existing literature on ethnic conflict; Section 3 discusses the theory behind why and how the presence of coethnic groups in a neighboring state may affect the propensity for civil conflict, Section 4 sets out the research design including the empirical model and key hypotheses; Section 5 presents the empirical results and analysis; Section 6 provides a brief case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Section 7 concludes.

II. Background and Literature Review

A. Definitions

In discussing ethnic groups in conflict an obvious place to start is with a definition of *ethnic conflict*. According to Horowitz, “in societies where ethnicity suffuses organizational life, virtually all political events have ethnic consequences” (Horowitz 1985: 12). Horowitz is essentially making a claim about the politicization of ethnicity. Ethnicity is politicized when political coalitions are organized along ethnic divisions, or when access to political or economic benefits is dependent upon ethnicity (Fearon 2004: 2). Although the politicization of ethnicity frames much of our questions about ethnic identity including patronage politics and public good provisions, it is particularly instructive for the study of conflict. In fact, the politicization of ethnic differences is presumed to constitute a major threat to democratic stability (Chandra 2004:1).

There are a number of competing views that attempt to explain the politicization of ethnicity. According to the *primordialist* approach, ethnic groups have homogeneous preferences and fixed boundaries (Chandra 2001: 337). As a result, ethnic groups are naturally political and conflict is rooted in old sources of hatred that make violence difficult to avoid (Sambanis 2001: 260-261; Fearon 2004: 6; Blimes 2006: 537). Huntington’s statement of the inevitable and increasing clash of civilizations falls in line with the primordialist view. Alternatively, the *instrumentalist* view rejects the ancient hatreds argument of the primordialists as oversimplified, and highlights how interethnic cooperation is actually the norm rather than an aberration (Blimes 2006: 537). Instrumentalists suggest instead that ethnicity is a tool that individuals or groups use to

achieve an end (Blimes 2006: 537). Finally, the *constructivist* approach questions the view that ethnic identities are homogeneous and fixed (Chandra 2001: 345). Instead, constructivists see ethnic identities as multiple, fluid, and malleable (Chandra 2001: 337; Kalyvas 2008: 1043).

Because, according to Fearon, the politicization of ethnicity varies markedly by location and over time, when we speak of ethnic conflict we mean a broad range of conflict types (Fearon 2004: 3). For the purposes of this paper, I use Fearon and Laitin's categorization of ethnic violence as my working definition of ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict includes those cases of violence involving members of different ethnic groups and either: (i) it is motivated by hatred or dislike of ethnic others; (ii) the criterion for selecting victims is ethnicity, meaning that members of one's own group are exempted and members of the other group are eligible; or (iii) it is committed with the idea of being *on behalf of or in the name of* an ethnic group, or is committed against those who claim to represent or act on behalf of an ethnic group (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 13; Fearon 2004: 5). Fearon and Laitin further suggest that violence is ethnic only if at least one of the groups involved is not, "fully in possession of an internationally recognized state apparatus" (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 15). This condition rules out conflicts in which both (or all) protagonists are states. According to Fearon and Laitin, by convention when states engage in violence with each other they are judged to be *above* the realm of ethnic violence (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 15).

B. *Existing Theories*

Much of the attention in the field on the role of ethnic identity in civil conflict has focused on whether domestic ethnic heterogeneity increases the propensity for civil war. For instance, in a paper from 1997, William Easterly and Ross Levine analyze how ethnic diversity explains cross-national differences in economic indicators. The authors find that their measure of ethnolinguistic diversity³ is highly significant in a probit regression to predict the occurrence of civil war (Easterly and Levine 1997: 1223). Easterly and Levine's results suggest that greater levels of ethnic fractionalization will be associated with a higher risk of domestic conflict.

In a paper from a year later, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler find results that contradict Easterly and Levine's. Collier and Hoeffler's paper is principally interested in examining whether civil wars have economic causes. The authors argue that coordination costs likely have an effect on the occurrence and duration of civil conflict. Collier and Hoeffler proxy these coordination costs with a variable for cultural distinctness as measured by an index of ethnolinguistic fractionalization⁴ (Collier and Hoeffler 1998: 567). Collier and Hoeffler find the effect of ethnolinguistic fractionalization to be non-monotonic. Accordingly, more fractionalized societies are not more prone to civil war. Instead it is those societies with two polarized ethnic groups that are most at risk (Collier and Hoeffler 1998: 571).

In an influential paper from 2003, Fearon and Laitin reexamine the impact of ethnic diversity on the propensity for civil conflict. In particular, Fearon and Laitin test

³ Easterly and Levine measure ethnolinguistic diversity as the probability that two randomly selected individuals in a country belong to different ethnolinguistic groups. This measure is derived from Soviet data collected in the 1960s and is typically referred to as the ethnolinguistic fractionalization index or "ELF".

⁴ Collier and Hoeffler measure ethnolinguistic fractionalization similarly to Easterly and Levine. Their variable measures the probability that any two citizens will be drawn from a different ethnolinguistic group. Collier and Hoeffler rescale the variable so that complete homogeneity scores zero and maximum fragmentation scores 100 (Collier and Hoeffler 1998: 567).

the following hypotheses relevant to the discussion here: (i) measures of a country's ethnic or religious diversity should be associated with a higher risk of civil war; (ii) the effect of ethnic diversity on the probability of civil war should increase at higher levels of per capita income; and (iii) countries with an ethnic majority and significant ethnic minority are at greater risk for civil war (Fearon Laitin 2003: 78). Countering earlier findings, Fearon and Laitin conclude that it does not appear to be true that a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity by itself makes a country more prone to civil war including ethnic wars (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 75). While still others have continued to examine the relationship between ethnic diversity and civil conflict (Ellingsen 2000; Sambanis 2001; Maksudova 2005; Blimes 2006), the results from Easterly and Levine (1997), Collier and Hoeffler (1998), and Fearon and Laitin (2003) indicate that tests of this relationship have not produced consistent results.

III. Theory

Little attention has been devoted to the potential role that neighboring ethnic brethren have on the onset of civil conflict. A notable exception is a paper by Fearon from 1998, in which he models ethnic conflict as arising out of a commitment problem (Fearon 1998: 116-121). In particular, in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, ethnic majorities were unable to commit themselves not to exploit ethnic minorities in a new state (Fearon 1998: 108). Consequently, ethnic war results from the majority's inability to make a credible commitment to the minority, and the minority's decision to fight now in the hopes of winning secession from a new, weak state (Fearon 1998: 109, 118).

The presence of external guarantors of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state can, however, affect the severity of the commitment problem. If such external guarantors are willing and able to commit to intervene on behalf of the minority if the majority does not respect the political commitments it has made, the commitment problem can be avoided (Fearon 1998: 123). Fearon even suggests that nearby brethren in a powerful state need not directly or physically intervene. Rather the anticipation of intervention may suffice to eliminate the commitment problem (Fearon 1998: 123). Contrary to the hypotheses proposed here, Fearon's model appears to suggest that the presence of coethnic brethren in a neighboring state may reduce the likelihood of the onset of ethnic conflict.

In an extension of Fearon's work, Rupen Cetinyan models peaceful bargaining as an interaction between a domestic ethnic group and the government. Cetinyan argues that a group's strength, which is partially a function of its access to external support, should not affect whether that group is able to reach a successful bargain with its government. Instead, such strength affects only how much a group will demand and receive (Cetinyan 2002: 646). Cetinyan empirically tests this theory by defining "stronger ethnic groups" as those with kin in control of a neighboring state and "weaker ethnic groups" as those without such kin (Cetinyan 2002: 661). He finds evidence that stronger ethnic groups are no more likely to rebel than weaker ethnic groups, but stronger groups will receive better treatment from the state (Cetinyan 2002: 665).

While Fearon and Cetinyan see neighboring ethnic brethren as playing a deterrent or neutral role for civil conflict, others emphasize how external actors may actually encourage conflict. In a paper from 2001, Nicholas Sambanis argues that regional characteristics should influence patterns of civil war (Sambanis 2001: 267). In particular,

Sambanis suggests that neighboring ethnic groups may become involved in ethnic conflicts in other countries (Sambanis 2001: 268). To examine the potential role of neighboring actors on domestic conflict, Sambanis tests two hypotheses: (i) the greater the level of democracy in neighboring countries, the lower the probability of ethnic civil war; and (ii) the presence of war in a neighboring country should increase the risk of more war in the neighborhood (Sambanis 2001: 268). Sambanis' results confirm his hypotheses. In particular, he finds that the level of democracy in neighboring states is negatively and significantly associated with the onset of a domestic ethnic conflict (Sambanis 2001: 275). Furthermore, countries that have land borders with countries at war are significantly more likely to experience their own ethnic war (Sambanis 2001: 275). Sambanis concludes that these regional factors are robust determinants of the onset of ethnic war (Sambanis 2001: 280).

In a recent article, Muzaffer Yilmaz underscores the central role of external support as a catalyst for domestic conflict (Yilmaz 2007). Yilmaz suggests that foreign sympathizers can contribute to an ethnic group's cohesion and mobilization by providing material, political, and moral support (Yilmaz 2007: 23). Yilmaz explains, "in sum, myriad international actors help shape the aspirations, opportunities, and strategies of ethnic groups in conflict" (Yilmaz 2007: 25).

If regional actors do positively affect the onset of civil conflict, why and how do such actors support domestic ethnic groups? In a survey from 2001, Daniel Byman et al. examine the nature and motivations of outside support for insurgency movements in the post-Cold War era (Byman et al. 2001: xiii). According to Byman et al., state support for insurgent groups is primarily motivated by geopolitics including a desire to increase

regional influence or destabilize neighborhood rivals. When ethnic kin or religious brethren do receive support from state actors it is usually a pretext to advance realpolitik ambitions including as a method to boost nationalist credentials with their own electorate (Byman et al. 2001: xiv, 37). The forms of support that are typically provided include: (i) safe havens and transit; (ii) financial resources; (iii) political support and propaganda; (iv) direct military support; (v) training; and (vi) weapons and materials (Byman et al. 2001: 84-95).

In a text from the same year as Byman et al.'s, Stephen Saideman proposes a similar domestic politics argument to explain why states take sides, particularly in ethnic conflicts. Saideman's argument is based on three assumptions: (i) politicians care primarily about gaining and maintaining office; (ii) each politician requires the support of others to gain and maintain office; and (iii) ethnic identities influence the preferences of potential and existing constituents (Saideman 2001: 22-23). Based on these assumptions, Saideman argues that, "the interaction of ethnicity and domestic political competition produce incentives for politicians to support one side or another of ethnic conflicts in other states" (Saideman 2001: 12). As long as politicians care about maintaining the support of their constituents, they will support combatants elsewhere that share ethnic ties with their constituency (Saideman 2001: 8).

This paper sets out to test the implications of Fearon, Cetinyan, Sambanis, Yilmaz, Byman et al., and Saideman, by empirically examining the relationship between the existence of coethnic brethren in a neighboring state and the onset of civil conflict.

IV. Research Design

To test whether the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict, I created a time-series, cross-sectional dataset. The dataset covers 156 countries over the period from 1945 through 1999, with the country year as the unit of analysis. I primarily rely on data previously compiled by Fearon and Laitin for their 2003 paper (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Using this data, I perform a number of empirical tests using logit analysis and based on a modification of Fearon and Laitin's specification. I turn first to a discussion of the data and then to the empirical model I use to test my key hypotheses.

A. Data Description

1. Civil Conflict Onset

For their original dataset from 2003, Fearon and Laitin construct a list of civil conflicts satisfying three criteria: (i) they involved fighting between agents of a state and organized, nonstate groups who sought either to take control of a government, to take power in a region, or to use violence to change government policies; (ii) the conflict killed at least 1,000 over its course, with a yearly average of at least 100; and (iii) at least 100 were killed on both sides (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 76). Based on these criteria, Fearon and Laitin identify 127 conflicts, which took place during the period from 1945 through 1999 (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 77). Using this data, Fearon and Laitin create a binary civil war onset variable. The civil war onset variable takes a value of "0" for those years in which no civil war began and "1" for those years in which a civil war began.

Because Fearon and Laitin are interested in the role of ethnic fractionalization for conflict onset, they also create a variable for "ethnic" civil war. Fearon and Laitin code as "ethnic" those conflicts in which fighters were mobilized primarily along ethnic lines

(Fearon and Laitin 2003: 79). According to this coding, 58 of the 127 conflicts (or 51%) are ethnic, 20 of the conflicts (or 18%) are mixed or ambiguous in nature, and 36 of the conflicts (or 32%) are not ethnic (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 79). Using this data, Fearon and Laitin create a binary ethnic conflict onset variable. The ethnic conflict onset variable takes values of “0” for those years in which no ethnic conflict began and “1” for those years in which an ethnic conflict or an ambiguous conflict began.

In addition to Fearon and Laitin’s data, I also use civil war data compiled by Sambanis. Sambanis collected a list of civil wars for the period from 1945 through 1999 using alternative coding rules than those employed by Fearon and Laitin. In particular, Sambanis defines an armed conflict as a civil war if: (i) the war takes place within the territory of a state that is a member of the international system with a population of 500,000 or greater; (ii) the parties are politically and militarily organized and they have publicly stated political objectives; (iii) the government must be a principal combatant; (iv) the main insurgent organization(s) must be locally represented and recruit locally; (v) the start year of the war is the first year the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths; (vi) throughout the duration the conflict must be characterized by sustained violence; (vii) throughout the war the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party; (viii) a peace treaty that produces at least six months of peace marks the end of a civil war; and (ix) a decisive military victory by the rebels that produces a new regime should mark the end of the war (Sambanis 2004a: 829-830). Using this methodology, Sambanis creates a binary civil war onset variable. Like Fearon and Laitin’s onset variable, this variable takes a value of “0” for

those years in which no civil war began and “1” for those years in which a civil war began.

Using Sambanis’ coding notes, I also created an ethnic conflict onset variable (Sambanis 2004b). To do so, I applied Fearon and Laitin’s standard to code ethnic conflicts as those in which fighters were mobilized primarily along ethnic lines (Fearon 2003: 79). As with Fearon and Laitin’s variable, the ethnic conflict onset variable is coded “1” for those years in which an ethnic conflict began (based on Sambanis’ civil war criteria and the detailed descriptions of each conflict provided in his coding notes) and “0” for all other years.⁵

2. *Neighboring Coethnic*

To determine whether there are ethnic brethren in a neighboring country⁶, I use a dataset created by Fearon for the article, “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country” (Fearon 2003). That dataset contains a cross-national list of ethnic groups (Fearon 2003: 195). Fearon restricts his attention to those ethnic groups that held at least one percent of a country’s population in the 1990s. The result of Fearon’s efforts is a list of 160 countries that identifies 822 ethnic and “ethnoreligious” groups (Fearon 2003: 195). Fearon’s article has a detailed discussion of the sources used for identification purposes, which include the Central Intelligence Agency’s *World Factbook*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and *Library of Congress Country Study* (LCCS). Fearon also cross-referenced these resources with country-specific sources (Fearon 2003: 202). Based on

⁵ Fearon and Laitin’s ethnic conflict onset variable and the ethnic conflict onset variable I coded based on Sambanis’ civil war list have a correlation of 0.49.

⁶ I define countries as “neighbors” if they share a border. See Sambanis 2001 for a similar definition. If a country is an island nation then its neighbors are those countries in closest proximity.

Fearon's estimates, the average country has approximately five ethnic groups with a share of the population greater than 1% (Fearon 2004: 3).

Using Fearon's data, I create three coethnic neighbor binary variables: (i) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state with a group sharing the same ethnicity as either a domestic *majority* or *minority* group; (ii) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state in which the *largest* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group; and (iii) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state in which the *majority* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group. Each variable is coded "0" for country years in which there is no such neighboring state and "1" for country years in which there is a neighboring state satisfying the coethnicity requirement. These three variables are my key independent variables.

3. *Additional Variables*

As I will discuss below, to test my hypotheses regarding the effect of coethnic neighbors on the onset of civil conflict, I use a model specification from Fearon and Laitin's 2003 paper. As a result, there are a number of variables included in the empirical model in addition to the key coethnic neighbor independent variables. In particular, Fearon and Laitin assert, test, and find that the main factors determining civil violence during the period from 1945 through 1999 are those conditions that favor insurgency. Consequently, there are a number of variables included in the model that Fearon and Laitin expect will affect the strength of an insurgency. These "insurgency" variables are: (i) prior war in the previous year; (ii) per capita income; (iii) population size; (iv) the

proportion of mountainous terrain; (v) a noncontiguous state; (vi) a state whose revenues are derived primarily from oil exports; (vii) states in their first or second year of independence; (viii) political instability; and (ix) the level of democracy (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 81). In addition, Fearon and Laitin are interested in examining the effect of certain domestic ethnicity variables on the onset of violence. These ethnicity variables are: (i) the level of ethnic fractionalization; and (ii) the level of religious fractionalization (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 78). Although these variables are central to Fearon and Laitin's argument, for my purposes they are control variables that help to determine what work is being done by the coethnic neighbor independent variables.

B. Empirical Model and Hypotheses

Using the time-series cross-sectional dataset for the period from 1945 through 1999, the empirical model I test is:

$$\text{CIVIL CONFLICT ONSET}_{it} = B_0 + B_1(\text{Coethnic Neighbor Variable}_{it}) + B_2(\text{Fearon and Laitin Control Variables}_{it}) + E_{it}$$

The dependent variable is the onset of a civil conflict (including an ethnic conflict) in a given country year. I run tests with four versions of the dependent variable: (i) Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable; (ii) Sambanis' civil war onset variable; (iii) Fearon and Laitin's ethnic conflict onset variable; and (iv) Sambanis' data to code my own ethnic conflict onset variable.⁷

⁷ For simplicity, I will refer to this variable as "Sambanis' ethnic conflict onset variable," although I coded the variable based on data from Sambanis.

The key independent variables in the model measure whether there is a neighboring state with ethnic brethren. As discussed above, I test separately three variables measuring coethnic brethren: (i) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state with a group sharing the same ethnicity as either a domestic *majority* or *minority* group; (ii) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state in which the *largest* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group; and (iii) a variable indicating whether there is a neighboring state in which the *majority* ethnic group shares the same ethnicity as a domestic *minority* group. As control variables, I include Fearon and Laitin's variables capturing the strength of insurgency: (i) prior war in the previous year; (ii) per capita income; (iii) population size; (iv) the proportion of mountainous terrain; (v) a noncontiguous state; (vi) a state whose revenues are derived primarily from oil exports; (vii) states in their first or second year of independence; (viii) political instability; and (ix) the level of democracy. In addition, I include Fearon and Laitin's ethnicity variables: (i) level of ethnic fractionalization; and (ii) level of religious fractionalization.⁸

Based on the theory set forth above, I expect the presence of neighboring coethnic brethren to serve as a potential source of support for a domestic group, increasing the probability of civil conflict occurrence. If this expectation is correct, the following hypotheses should hold:

Hypothesis 1: The existence of a neighboring state with a coethnic group makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict;

⁸ Neither of these variables is highly correlated with my key coethnic neighbor independent variables.

Hypothesis 2: The existence of a neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict; and

Hypothesis 3: The existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group makes a country more prone to civil conflict including ethnic conflict.

V. Empirical Results and Analysis

The results of testing the empirical model lend no support for the first hypothesis, some support for the second hypothesis, and strong support for the third. I will consider each in turn.

A. *Hypothesis 1*

I first test the effect of the presence of a coethnic group in a neighboring state on the onset of a civil conflict using Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 1 of Table 1. The coethnic variable is positive but insignificant. Likewise, when I estimate the model using Sambanis' civil war onset variable, the coethnic variable remains positive but insignificant. The results are presented below as Model 2 of Table 1.

What about the impact of coethnic neighbors on the onset of ethnic conflict in particular? Again, I first test the effect of the presence of a neighboring coethnic group now on the onset of an ethnic conflict using Fearon and Laitin's ethnic conflict onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 3 of Table 1. Once again, the

coethnic variable is positive but insignificant. Finally, I estimate the model using Sambanis' ethnic conflict onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 4 of Table 1. The coethnic variable remains positive but insignificant.

Taken together, these results suggest that the existence of a neighboring state with a group that is coethnic with a domestic minority or majority does not appear to affect the onset of civil conflict including ethnic conflict.

B. Hypothesis II

As above, I first test the effect of the existence of a neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority on the onset of a civil conflict using Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 1 of Table 2. The largest neighbor variable is positive and significant at the 5% level with a coefficient of 0.41. These results indicate that the predicted probability of the onset of a civil war in a given year is .007 if there is no neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .01 if there is. In other words, the existence of a neighboring state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of a civil conflict during a given year by almost one-and-a-half times. When I estimate the model using Sambanis' civil war onset variable the largest neighbor variable remains positive but is insignificant. The results are presented below as Model 2 of Table 2.

I next look at the effect of the existence of a neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority on the onset of ethnic conflict. Again, I first test the effect using Fearon and Laitin's ethnic conflict onset variable. The results

are presented below as Model 3 of Table 2. The largest neighbor variable is positive but insignificant. Likewise, when I estimate the model using Sambanis' ethnic conflict onset variable the largest neighbor variable remains positive but insignificant. The results are presented below as Model 4 of Table 2.

Thus, in each case the largest neighbor variable demonstrates a positive relationship with the onset of civil conflict including ethnic conflict. When the model is estimated using Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable this relationship is also significant.

C. Hypothesis III

Once again, I first test the effect of the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority on the onset of civil conflict using Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 1 of Table 3. The majority neighbor variable is positive and significant at the 1% level with a coefficient of 0.56. These results indicate that the predicted probability of the onset of a civil war in a given year is .006 if there is no neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .01 if there is. Therefore, the existence of a neighboring state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of civil conflict during a given year by more than one-and-a-half times.

When I estimate the model using Sambanis' civil war onset variable, the majority neighbor variable remains positive and significant at the 5% level with a coefficient of 0.37. The results are presented below as Model 2 of Table 3. These results indicate that

the predicted probability of the onset of a civil war in a given year is .01 if there is no neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .02 if there is. The existence of a neighboring state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of civil conflict during a given year by two times.

As a robustness check for these results, I also tested to see if the results remained consistent using the Correlates of War coding of civil war onset (Sarkees 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2003: 88). When I estimate the model using the Correlates of War civil war onset variable, the majority neighbor variable is once again positive and significant at the 8% level with a coefficient of 0.40. The results are presented below as Model 3 of Table 3. These results indicate that the predicted probability of the onset of a civil war in a given year is .007 if there is no neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .01 if there is. The existence of a neighboring state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of a civil conflict during a given year by almost one-and-a-half times.

I next look at the effect of the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority on the onset of ethnic conflict. As before, I first test the effect using Fearon and Laitin's ethnic conflict onset variable. The results are presented below as Model 4 of Table 3. The majority neighbor variable is positive and significant at the 5% level with a coefficient of 0.53. These results indicate that the predicted probability of the onset of an ethnic conflict in a given year is .004 if there is no neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .006 if there is. Therefore, the existence of a neighboring

state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of an ethnic conflict during a given year by one-and-a-half times.

Finally, when I estimate the model using Sambanis' ethnic conflict onset variable instead, the majority neighbor variable is once again positive and significant at the 9% level with a coefficient of 0.37. The results are presented below as Model 5 of Table 3. These results indicate that the predicted probability of the onset of an ethnic conflict in a given year is .007 if there is no neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group, and .01 if there is. The existence of a neighboring state with such brethren increases the probability of the onset of an ethnic conflict during a given year by almost one-and-a-half times.

The results from testing the third hypothesis are consistent regardless of the specification. The findings strongly indicate that the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group shares the same ethnic identity as a domestic minority group increases the probability of a civil or ethnic conflict during a given year.

D. Additional Variables

Although I am not principally interested in how Fearon and Laitin's additional variables performed, for comparison purposes I will review the results briefly. For each model I test, the following variables behave as they did for Fearon and Laitin: (i) per capita income; (ii) population size; (iii) portion of the country with mountainous terrain; (iv) a state whose revenues are derived primarily from oil exports; (v) states in their first or second year of independence; (vi) political instability; (vii) the level of democracy; (viii) level of ethnic fractionalization; and (ix) level of religious fractionalization. In

some instances these variables varied in significance levels. The prior war variable and the noncontiguous country variables do not perform as they did for Fearon and Laitin in all specifications. For instance, when run with the majority neighbor variable and Sambanis' civil war onset variable the noncontiguous state variable is negative and insignificant. The results are presented below in Tables 1 through 3.

VI. Brief Case Study

The multiple and on-going conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been extremely complex and deadly. Examining briefly the Congolese conflict during 1996 and 1997 demonstrates how the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state may provide support and motivation to mobilize domestic ethnic conflict.

According to Paul S. Orogun, to understand this phase of conflict we have to look further back to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Orogun 2002: 28). After the deadly conflict between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis in 1994, almost two million Hutus left Rwanda. Many of the escaping Hutus fled across the border to what was then Zaire. Once there, the Hutu refugees, and particularly the genocide-perpetrating Interahamwe, began attacking the Banyamulenge (ethnic Congolese Tutsis) (Orogun 2002: 29; Sambanis 2004b: 60).

The activities of the Interahamwe posed a security threat to post-genocide Rwanda, including by increasing fears that Hutus would cross back over the border and reignite the genocide (Orogun 2002: 29). In response, Rwanda supported Laurent Kabila's insurgent movement to overthrow Mobutu Sese Seko, the long-standing leader

of Zaire who had supported the genocide in Rwanda (Byman et al. 2001: 18). Congolese Tutsis also joined to help Kabila's movement. Kabila's forces ousted Mobutu in May 1997 (Orogun 2002: 29). Kabila's assumption to the presidency of the DRC marked the end of this phase of conflict (Sambanis 2004b: 61).

What we see from this period of domestic conflict is how the presence of a majority coethnic Hutu group in Rwanda as well as the ruling ethnic minority Tutsi group served to mobilize the conflict in Zaire. The refugee Hutus brought the ethnic conflict from Rwanda to Zaire, knowing there was still a Hutu majority left to draw support from in Rwanda. Likewise, the Banyamulenge joined Kabila's insurgency to fight back, also knowing that they had the support of the minority Tutsi regime in neighboring Rwanda. From the Rwandan leadership's perspective, the ethnic conflict in Zaire fueled the decision to intervene in order to protect their ethnic brethren and maintain control at home. This pattern of conflict mobilization encouraged by neighboring coethnics falls in line with the central argument made in this paper.

VII. Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to reexamine the role of ethnicity on the onset of civil conflict including ethnic conflict. Rather than focusing on the domestic, ethnic composition of a country, I instead moved attention to the external, ethnic composition of neighboring states. In particular, I argued that the presence of ethnic brethren in a neighboring state serves as a potential source of support for a domestic group, increasing the probability of conflict onset. The findings from my empirical tests support this argument. The empirical results were particularly supportive of two hypotheses: (i) the

existence of a neighboring state in which the largest ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority makes a country more prone to conflict; and (ii) the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group makes a country more prone to conflict. Whether motivated by geopolitical considerations, realpolitik ambitions, or otherwise, as I illustrated with the case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the presence of neighboring ethnic brethren mobilizes domestic ethnic groups.

What about Fearon's influential model explaining ethnic conflict in the newly-established countries of post-Soviet Eastern Europe (Fearon 2008)? When I restrict the dataset to include only those country years that Fearon and Laitin code as new state years, the results of running simple logit regressions of the conflict onset variables on the key coethnic variables do not support Fearon's model. If anything, restricting the data in this way provides further evidence of the positive effect that coethnic neighbors has on the onset of domestic conflict.

In particular, the only significant findings result from comparing the civil and ethnic conflict onset variables (using either Fearon and Laitin's onset variables or Sambanis' onset variables) and the majority neighbor variable. Testing the effect of the majority neighbor variable on the onset of conflict is positive and significant at the 6% level with a coefficient of 1.04 using Fearon and Laitin's civil war onset variable, and at the 9% level with a coefficient of 0.89 using Sambanis'. These results indicate that the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group increases the probability of the onset of a civil conflict during a given year by more than two times. Similarly, testing the effect of the majority neighbor

variable on the onset of an ethnic conflict is positive and significant at the 12% level with a coefficient of 0.95 using Fearon and Laitin's ethnic conflict onset variable, and at the 6% level with a coefficient of 1.11 using Sambanis'. These results indicate that the existence of a neighboring state in which the majority ethnic group is coethnic with a domestic minority group increases the probability of the onset of an ethnic conflict during a given year by two-and-a-half to three times. Thus, it seems that rather than deterring ethnic conflict in newly-established states as Fearon's model predicts, the presence of (majority) ethnic brethren in a neighboring state encourages the onset of civil conflict.

Much empirical work on the onset of civil conflict has focused on testing and re-examining the role of domestic ethnic diversity on conflict occurrence. By shifting the focus to the role of neighboring ethnic brethren, I intended to contribute to the field by expanding the questions we ask. There is much future work that can be done building on this paper's findings. One area of particular further interest could be a closer analysis of the different coethnicity standards. Why does the majority coethnic variable consistently demonstrate a positive and significant effect on conflict onset whereas the coethnic and largest variables do not? Another topic to consider is the role of neighboring brethren and coethnic interventions on the *intensity* of civil war once conflict is underway. The work here should provide a theoretical and empirical framework for addressing these questions.

Table 1 – Coethnic Models

Variable	Model 1 – F&L Civil Onset	Model 2 – Sambanis Civil Onset	Model 3 – F&L Ethnic Onset	Model 4 – Sambanis Ethnic Onset
Prior war	-.94*** (-2.97)	.45** (2.04)	-.90*** (-2.45)	.59*** (2.43)
Per capita income	-.34*** (-4.58)	-.23*** (-3.94)	-.33*** (-3.62)	-.22*** (-3.36)
Log(population)	.25*** (3.41)	.16*** (2.48)	.37*** (4.24)	.20*** (2.73)
Log(% mountainous)	.23*** (2.65)	.19*** (2.47)	.17* (1.61)	.12 (1.42)
Noncontiguous State	.43 (1.50)	-.09 (-0.33)	.36 (1.06)	-.08 (-0.25)
Oil exporter	.84*** (2.97)	1.05*** (4.36)	1.02*** (3.11)	1.16*** (4.34)
New state	1.74*** (5.12)	1.69*** (5.28)	1.84*** (4.67)	1.68*** (4.67)
Instability	.62*** (2.66)	.64*** (3.08)	.49* (1.63)	.54*** (2.27)
Democracy	.02 (1.23)	.01 (0.69)	.02 (1.00)	.01 (0.73)
Ethnic Fractionalization	.13 (0.34)	.17 (0.50)	.69 (1.44)	.51 (1.27)
Religious Fractionalization	.28 (0.54)	1.18*** (2.53)	1.44** (2.15)	1.63*** (3.00)
Coethnic	.38 (1.20)	.26 (0.89)	.62 (1.40)	.36 (1.03)
Constant	-7.00*** (-8.92)	-6.46*** (-9.13)	-9.38*** (-9.27)	-7.44*** (-9.00)
Observations	6301	6236	6301	6236

***Denotes statistical significance at the 1% level.

** Denotes statistical significance at the 5% level.

* Denote statistical significance at the 10% level.

z-statistics are in parentheses.

Descriptive Statistics: Conflict Onset Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
F&L Onset	6609	.02	.13	0	1
Sambanis Onset	6531	.02	.15	0	1
F&L Ethnic Onset	6609	.01	.11	0	1
Sambanis Ethnic Onset	6531	.02	.13	0	1
Prior war	6609	.13	.34	0	1
Per capita income	6372	3.65	4.54	.048	66.74
Log(population)	6584	9.05	1.46	5.40	14.03
Log(% mountainous)	6609	2.18	1.40	0	4.56
Noncontiguous state	6609	.17	.38	0	1
Oil Exporter	6609	.13	.34	0	1
New state	6609	.03	.17	0	1
Instability	6595	.15	.35	0	1
Democracy	6540	-.48	7.51	-10	10
Ethnic Fractionalization	6609	.39	.29	.001	.93
Religious Fractionalization	6609	.37	.22	0	.78
Coethnic	6584	.80	.40	0	1

Table 2 – Largest Models

Variable	Model 1 – F&L Civil Onset	Model 2 – Sambanis Civil Onset	Model 3 – F&L Ethnic Onset	Model 4 – Sambanis Ethnic Onset
Prior war	-.98*** (-3.06)	.44** (1.99)	-.92*** (-2.48)	.59*** (2.41)
Per capita income	-.35*** (-4.79)	-.24*** (-4.08)	-.35*** (-3.87)	-.23*** (-3.51)
Log(population)	.26*** (3.49)	.17*** (2.56)	.38*** (4.31)	.21*** (2.78)
Log(% mountainous)	.21*** (2.44)	.17*** (2.30)	.15 (1.41)	.11 (1.24)
Noncontiguous State	.34 (1.17)	-.15 (-0.54)	.24 (0.70)	-.14 (-0.46)
Oil exporter	.92*** (3.25)	1.11*** (4.60)	1.13*** (3.43)	1.23*** (4.60)
New state	1.75*** (5.14)	1.70*** (5.31)	1.85*** (4.70)	1.69*** (4.69)
Instability	.62*** (2.64)	.64*** (3.10)	.48* (1.59)	.54*** (2.28)
Democracy	.02 (1.23)	.01 (0.66)	.02 (1.04)	.01 (0.71)
Ethnic Fractionalization	.10 (0.25)	.17 (0.48)	.65 (1.35)	.51 (1.25)
Religious Fractionalization	.42 (0.79)	1.23*** (2.62)	1.59*** (2.32)	1.67*** (3.05)
Largest	.41** (1.98)	.25 (1.35)	.38 (1.47)	.23 (1.07)
Constant	-6.92*** (-9.14)	-6.39*** (-9.40)	-9.08*** (-9.48)	-7.25*** (-9.26)
Observations	6301	6236	6301	6236

***Denotes statistical significance at the 1% level.

** Denotes statistical significance at the 5% level.

* Denote statistical significance at the 10% level.

z-statistics are in parentheses.

Descriptive Statistics: Conflict Onset Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
F&L Onset	6609	.02	.13	0	1
Sambanis Onset	6531	.02	.15	0	1
F&L Ethnic Onset	6609	.01	.11	0	1
Sambanis Ethnic Onset	6531	.02	.13	0	1
Prior war	6609	.13	.34	0	1
Per capita income	6372	3.65	4.54	.048	66.74
Log(population	6584	9.05	1.46	5.40	14.03
Log(% mountainous)	6609	2.18	1.40	0	4.56
Noncontiguous state	6609	.17	.38	0	1
Oil Exporter	6609	.13	.34	0	1
New state	6609	.03	.17	0	1
Instability	6595	.15	.35	0	1
Democracy	6540	-.48	7.51	-10	10
Ethnic Fractionalization	6609	.39	.29	.001	.93
Religious Fractionalization	6609	.37	.22	0	.78
Largest	6584	.44	.50	0	1

Table 3 – Majority Models

Variable	Model 1 – F&L Civil Onset	Model 2 – Sambanis Civil Onset	Model 3 – COW Civil Onset	Model 4 – F&L Ethnic Onset	Model 5 – Sambanis Ethnic Onset
Prior war	-1.05*** (3.23)	.40** (1.80)	-.56 (-1.48)	-1.01*** (-2.65)	.54** (2.20)
Per capita income	-.37*** (-4.92)	-.25*** (-4.17)	-.33*** (-4.19)	-.36*** (-3.97)	-.24*** (-3.60)
Log(population)	.26*** (3.41)	.17*** (2.50)	.20*** (2.47)	.38*** (4.24)	.21*** (2.72)
Log(% mountainous)	.20*** (2.31)	.17** (2.17)	.45*** (4.19)	.14 (1.26)	.10 (1.11)
Noncontiguous State	.40 (1.38)	-.12 (-0.45)	-.15 (-0.43)	.29 (0.83)	-.13 (-0.42)
Oil exporter	.86*** (3.03)	1.09*** (4.52)	1.37*** (4.55)	1.07*** (3.25)	1.21*** (4.55)
New state	1.74*** (5.12)	1.69*** (5.29)	1.26*** (3.08)	1.84*** (4.67)	1.68*** (4.67)
Instability	.65*** (2.77)	.66*** (3.17)	.68*** (2.57)	.52* (1.73)	.56*** (2.35)
Democracy	.02 (1.21)	.01 (0.65)	.02 (0.93)	.02 (0.97)	.01 (0.68)
Ethnic Fractionalization	.15 (0.38)	.18 (0.53)	-.21 (-0.52)	.69 (1.42)	.52 (1.26)
Religious Fractionalization	.47 (0.89)	1.26*** (2.69)	1.36*** (2.33)	1.64*** (2.40)	1.71*** (3.12)
Majority	.56*** (2.64)	.37** (1.99)	.40* (1.76)	.53** (1.96)	.37* (1.70)
Constant	-6.91*** (-9.08)	-6.37*** (-9.39)	-7.26*** (-8.54)	-9.07*** (-9.46)	-7.24*** (-9.25)
Observations	6301	6236	5358	6301	6236

***Denotes statistical significance at the 1% level.

** Denotes statistical significance at the 5% level.

* Denote statistical significance at the 10% level.

z-statistics are in parentheses.

Descriptive Statistics: Conflict Onset Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
F&L Onset	6609	.02	.13	0	1
Sambanis Onset	6531	.02	.15	0	1
COW Onset	5516	.02	.13	0	1
F&L Ethnic Onset	6609	.01	.11	0	1
Sambanis Ethnic Onset	6531	.02	.13	0	1
F&L Prior war	6609	.13	.34	0	1
COW Prior war	5516	.08	.27	0	1
Per capita income	6372	3.65	4.54	.048	66.74
Log(population)	6584	9.05	1.46	5.40	14.03
Log(% mountainous)	6609	2.18	1.40	0	4.56
Noncontiguous state	6609	.17	.38	0	1
Oil Exporter	6609	.13	.34	0	1
New state	6609	.03	.17	0	1
Instability	6595	.15	.35	0	1
Democracy	6540	-.48	7.51	-10	10
Ethnic Fractionalization	6609	.39	.29	.001	.93
Religious Fractionalization	6609	.37	.22	0	.78
Majority	6584	.38	.48	0	1

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