

Explaining the Decline of Ethnic Conflict: Was Gurr Right and For the Right Reasons?*

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Abstract

In recent years, scholars have detected a decrease of political violence, although these claims have not remained unopposed. As a contribution to this debate, the current study revisits a somewhat older controversy that traces conflict trends after the end of the Cold War. Responding to the many ominous predictions of surging ethnic warfare, Gurr (2000a) presented evidence of a pacifying trend since the mid-1990s and predicted a further decline in ethnic conflict. We leverage more recent data on ethnic groups to evaluate if Gurr was right about the decline of ethnic conflict, and if he was right for the right reasons. Following his explanatory conjecture, we assess whether there has indeed been an increase in governments' accommodative policies toward ethnic groups and whether such changes drove the decline of ethnic civil war. All in all, we find strong evidence for an account of the pacifying trend that stresses the granting of group rights, regional autonomy and inclusion in power sharing, as well as general democratisation and peacekeeping.

In response to pessimistic projections about emerging chaos and conflict around the world, recent studies detect a steady decrease in political violence. In a magisterial survey, Pinker (2011) argues that the current trend toward pacification should be seen as a part of a general “civilizing process” that has its origins in prehistoric times. Focusing on more recent political conflicts, Goldstein (2011) attributes the global decline in armed conflict to the influence of peacekeeping and other more indirect interventions by international organizations. While

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highly publicized and enthusiastically received both inside and outside academia, the decline-of-violence thesis remains controversial. Most of the scholarly criticism concerns whether the measurements of the trend are correct, whether they hold for all types of conflict, and whether the process encompasses the entire globe (e.g., Braumoeller, 2013; Harrison and Wolf, 2012; Fazal, 2014; Thayer, 2013; Levy and Thompson, 2013). Yet, on the whole, the decline-of-violence thesis has so far fared quite well thanks to a spirited defense by the Pinker and others, and has thus started to acquire the status of an established fact (see e.g., Gleditsch and Pickering, 2014).

What is less clear is what particular mechanisms appear to be driving the decline. Because of the sweeping nature of the original claims, the literature has focused mostly on macro-level patterns featuring broad and somewhat diffuse claims about general political violence, rather than tracing the operation of specific causal mechanisms that trigger more precisely defined forms of conflict. For this reason, we limit the scope of our analysis to the recent trend in ethnic civil wars as a particularly important subclass of political violence. Civil wars have arguably caused the worst human suffering since the end of the Cold War. Civil wars furthermore remain an important international security concern; many international crises or wars have arguably emerged out of ethnic civil wars, with World War I as perhaps the most prominent historical example, and the possible escalation of the crisis in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine is a major concern at the time of writing (e.g., Gleditsch, Salehyan and Schultz, 2008). We offer systematic and disaggregated tests of explanatory propositions as a way to come closer to a causal account of the decline-of-conflict thesis for ethnic civil wars.

In order to evaluate the dynamics of ethnic warfare, we rewind the historical tape back to the first few years after the Cold War, since this was a particularly important juncture that puzzled experts on ethnic conflict. Several scholars reacted to the historically pivotal events in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the post-communist world by extrapolating a “coming anarchy” of “tribal” fighting that would engulf the world (Kaplan, 1994; Walzer, 1992). A few years later, but still a good decade before the publication of Pinker and Goldstein’s books, Gurr (2000a) responded to these “doomsday” scenarios by arguing that since the mid-1990s, the frequency of ethnic conflict had actually declined considerably. He explained this declining trend by postulating the existence of a new regime of accommodation and compromise that helps prevent new conflicts and end ongoing ones.

With the benefit of another decade’s worth new data on ethnic civil wars and accommodation, we are now in a position to evaluate whether Gurr was right, and especially whether he was right for the right reasons. In other words, we study whether a new regime of accommodative politics can account for the frequency of ethnic conflict after the Cold War. To answer these questions, we use group-level data on ethnic groups’ power access from the mid-1990s as well as data on peacekeeping operations. As a preview, it can be revealed already at this point that our findings

provide support for the proposition that Gurr was right both about the decline of ethnic civil war and the postulated causes.

Clearly, a lot more than intellectual history of conflict research is at stake, because Gurr's analysis has major implications for our theoretical understanding of civil wars as well as the most appropriate domestic and international policies. In terms of theory, its confirmation would lend support to a more general literature on grievances in civil wars that includes Gurr's own work (e.g., Gurr, 1993, 2000*b*) but also goes well beyond it (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Petersen, 2002; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug, 2013). Furthermore, whether Gurr is right for the right reason is of immediate relevance for policy since such a result underlines the conflict-dampening effect of concessions to, and compromises involving, ethnic groups that have hitherto been generally badly treated and excluded from effective representation and power. This stands in stark contrast to the alternative body of research that sees civil war exclusively as a problem of weak states, dismissing both the role of grievances for conflict as well as the potential for accommodation to help settle conflicts (e.g., Fearon and Laitin, 2003, 2004; Mack, 2002).

In the following, we start by briefly reviewing the relevant literature on ethnic conflict, focusing on Gurr's own writings. The paper proceeds by setting up testable hypotheses directly from Gurr's thesis that are then exposed to systematic tests based on recent data.

Literature review

In this section we review key changes in research on civil war and ethnic conflict at the end of the Cold War. We contrast the highly pessimistic conventional wisdom, which saw the waning of the stable Cold War period as ushering in an explosion of ethnic turmoil and instability, to the more optimistic perspective advocated by Gurr and others, documenting or anticipating a decline of war and ethnic conflict in particular.

There is of course a large literature on possible motives and opportunities that can make groups more likely to resort to armed conflict predating the Cold War (see, e.g., Gurr, 1970; Tilly, 1978; Horowitz, 1985). However, it is also fair to say that most conflict research during the Cold War tended to focus primarily on international conflict. From this perspective, ethnic and post-colonial civil wars were often to a large extent seen as fueled by the rivalry between the superpowers, who contended for control of client states in the third world and supported opposing factions in ongoing civil wars (see, e.g., Buzan, 1991).

Given the amount of attention to the dangers of superpower competition during the Cold War one should expect that the end of the Cold War would have been heralded as a very good thing indeed. However, the initial enthusiasm for the potential end to the confrontation between the superpowers quickly gave way to a new pessimism about alternative security concerns. This

included very prominently the idea that we were witnessing a dangerous increase in domestic and especially ethnic conflict, which would tend to further exacerbate global insecurity.

A number of contributions emerged in the early 1990s, claiming that the stable and largely peaceful world of nuclear deterrence under the superpowers was being replaced by a new and more dangerous world with ethnic and tribal warfare. In perhaps the most prominent contribution, Kaplan (1994, 45)—based on his reporting from the ongoing conflict in Sierra Leone—claimed to see a premonition of the future, and warned of a coming anarchy where we would see “the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war.”

While Kaplan saw environmental scarcity and degradation as well as their impact on survival as the ultimate cause that would lead to an inescapable rise in conflict over the next 50 years, others gave cultural and ethnic factors a much more prominent role. For example, Huntington (1993, 71) argued that after the end of the Cold War “conflicts among nations and ethnic groups are escalating,” as the end of the East-West ideological conflict would give rise to greater conflict along cultural lines, including more ethnic conflicts within countries. According to Huntington, cultural differences are essential distinctions that cannot be transcended; these would only be exacerbated by greater interaction and globalization in a world where their role is left unchecked after the end of superpower rivalry. Similar sentiments about the rise of ethnic conflict were echoed also by less hawkish commentators. Ignatieff (1994), for example argued that whereas ethnics strife and civil war had been limited during the Cold War, “with the collapse of Communist regimes across Europe and the loosening of the Cold War clamp on East-West relations, a surge of nationalism has swept the world stage” (see also Holmes, 1994).

This extreme pessimism about the inexorable increase of ethnic conflict also became widespread among politicians and policymakers. Bill Clinton for example noted in his 1993 inaugural address that “the new world is more free but less stable. Communism’s collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers.”¹ Former CIA director Gates (1993) likewise argued stridently against the temptation to disarm after the end of the Cold War, highlighting how “the events of the last two years have led to a far more unstable, turbulent, unpredictable and violent world.”

Given the current emphasis on the decline of war, these statements may seem excessively pessimistic in retrospect, but they accurately represent the conventional wisdom at the time. Indeed, the premise that wars were becoming more common, and especially ethnic strife, was so commonly accepted that very few even bothered to present any empirical evidence to corroborate the claim.

To our knowledge, the first statement in print suggesting that war may be declining rather than increasing after the Cold War is an early analysis of the Uppsala Armed Conflict Data (Wal-

¹See <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=46366>.

lensteen and Sollenberg, 1995). However, this was limited to an analysis of a six year period 1989-1994, and primarily discussed whether there was a trend rather than possible causes. It received relatively limited attention, and has to date (April 2014) only been cited 18 times in the Social Science Citation Index. Moreover, the authors themselves may have downplayed the significance of the finding by choosing to emphasize how it was premature to dismiss interstate war as obsolescent in a follow-up article published the subsequent year (Wallenstein and Sollenberg, 1996).

An op-ed piece on a decline in warfare in the Los Angeles Times by Gurr and Wilson in 1999 received more attention (Wilson and Gurr, 1999), including some attention from policymakers and the United Nations.² However, this contribution also primarily noted the phenomenon itself, without much discussion of the specific causes, as did a similar later op-ed piece by Goldstein (2002). Thus, we consider Gurr (2000a) to be the first effort to both comment on the declining frequency of ethnic conflict and attempt to explain the causes of this trend. Moreover, although many of the arguments invoked about accommodation as a solution to conflict are not necessarily new, Gurr (2000a) appears to be the first to note the increase in accommodation and explicitly state its importance for the future of ethnic conflict.

Gurr (2000a) based his evidence primarily on the Minorities at Risk Data, an effort to document the political status and conflicts involving ethnic minority groups (for extended discussions of the MAR project, see Gurr, 1993, 2000b; Hug, 2013). Noting that the perceived eruption of ethnic violence in the 1990s actually was part of a longer-term trend that started in the 1950, Gurr explicitly took issue with “the conventional wisdom ... that tribal and nationalist fighting is still rising frighteningly” (p. 52). Over the 1990s, the absolute number of active violence conflicts had fallen from the peak level, and a much larger number of conflicts had deescalated rather than escalated in severity. Gurr also noted that wars of self-determination, which tend to be particularly destructive, were increasingly solved by peace agreements. More generally, Gurr (2000a, 52) pointed to a new regime of accommodation, “where threats to divide a country should be managed by the devolution of state power and that communal fighting about access to the state’s power and resources should be restrained by recognizing group rights and sharing power.” Political tactics had become more widespread relative to violent tactics. Since mobilization tends to precede violent ethnic rebellion by several years, Gurr (2000a) furthermore noted that “[t]he decline in new protest movements foreshadows a continued decline in armed conflict.”

According to Gurr (2000a, 55), the decline of ethnic war was neither the result of “an invisible hand” nor unintended developments and trends, but rather a causal outcome of concerted efforts by individuals, groups, and organizations. Many of the important features stressed by

²According to Mack (personal communication), this op-ed piece eventually reached the desk of Kofi Annan.

Gurr pertained to changes in the attitudes or behavior of governments, notably an increasing emphasis on the protection of minority rights, manifested in a decrease of active discrimination, an increase in political autonomy, and greater accommodation of groups through power sharing. Although many of these changes were linked to the general increase in political democracy in the third wave of democratization, underfoot since the 1970s (see, e.g., Huntington, 1991), Gurr noted that even autocratic states had made efforts to accommodate minority groups, even if restricting general political rights or resisting open political competition.

Another important reason underlying the decrease of ethnic conflict was the realization that conflicts over self-determination were costly and thus best solved through negotiations and efforts to reach agreements to prevent violence. Although it can be difficult for the antagonist to settle conflicts alone, for example due to commitment problems (see, e.g., Walter, 1997), the scope for assistance from and engagement by regional and international organizations had expanded with the end of the Cold War and the superpower rivalry.

Beyond commentary, the pessimism about the coming anarchy prompted a new wave of research on the causes of civil war, often informed by the notion that ethnic civil war essentially was a security dilemma comparable to interstate conflict under anarchy (see, e.g., Posen, 1993; Melander, 2000). This may have seem superficially compelling in the case of the former Yugoslavia, where the federal government disappeared and left the ethnic federal units in a position to confront one another. This is a questionable interpretation of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. In particular, it understates how the Serbia dominated remained of Yugoslavia inherited many of the old federal institutions, including the Yugoslav National Army. More fundamentally, Yugoslavia is in many ways an atypical case where a federal state dissolves. The more typical scenario in a civil war of course involves the state as an actor, normally fighting much weaker challengers.

The image of the former Yugoslavia as a canonical case of ethnic conflict became much less prominent as the wars in the region eventually came to an end. Much of the subsequent research on civil war came to dispute the validity of civil war as a distinct category and reject the relevance of ethnicity and grievances for civil war altogether, instead highlighting how civil war fundamentally was a problem of weak states (see, e.g., Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). In addition, the MAR Dataset, the main data source used by Gurr (2000a), was subjected to a great deal of criticism for problems of selection bias. More specifically, since the dataset primarily covers disadvantaged minorities, it may be poorly suited to provide answers to many questions about the general relationship between ethnic relations and conflict (see, e.g., Hug, 2013). Consequently, the majority of empirical studies conducted during the early 2000s moved away from ethnic groups as the unit of analysis, focusing on country-level analyses instead (see, e.g., Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

More recently, however, a new wave of research has challenged the alleged irrelevance of ethnicity and grievances for conflict (see, e.g., Cederman and Girardin, 2007; Cederman and Gleditsch, 2009; Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug, 2013). These studies revived the case for grievances as a central cause of conflict, and argued that the previous empirical studies claiming to find no relationship owed primarily to the lack of appropriate specifications and atheoretical measures. Returning to dyadic analysis at the group level with new data reflecting political exclusion in terms of access to state power, they have been able to demonstrate a plausible relationship between grievances and the outbreak of conflict, similar to the linkages previously highlighted by Gurr. However, while this research makes a clear case for grievances being relevant to conflict, it has so far not examined trends in conflict per se or whether changes in ethnic exclusion have led to a decline in ethnic conflict.

Thus, in the following three sections, we extend this line of research to derive testable propositions based on Gurr's projections. What would have to hold if Gurr was right for the right reasons? First, there would have to be a decline in ethnic civil wars since the mid-1990s. Second, there would have to be evidence of an emerging regime of accommodation guaranteeing ethnic groups increased access to power and decreasing discrimination and exclusion. Third, and most importantly, we would expect the latter trend to cause the first trend, rather than being spuriously related or simply coinciding but unrelated trends.

Has ethnic conflict declined since the mid-1990s?

Our first task is to establish to what extent ethnic conflict has actually declined since the mid-1990s. We do so by tracing the conflict trends at the group level, both with respect to conflict incidence, onset and termination. In short, we evaluate the following proposition:

H1. There has been a decline of ethnic conflict since the mid-1990s.

Our empirical evaluation of ethno-nationalist civil conflict is based on a group-level coding of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) (Gleditsch et al., 2002), with supplementary information from the Non-State Actors dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2009). This dataset, called ACD2EPR, maps each organization in the ACD data set to the corresponding ethnic group in the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data, if the rebel organization expresses an aim to support the ethnic group and members of the group in question participate in combat (Wucherpfennig et al., 2012). This means that there can be more than one organization claiming to represent an ethnic group.

Figure 1 displays the historical development of the number of ethnic groups in conflict during a given year. With a small spike during the mid to late 1970s—following the final phase of

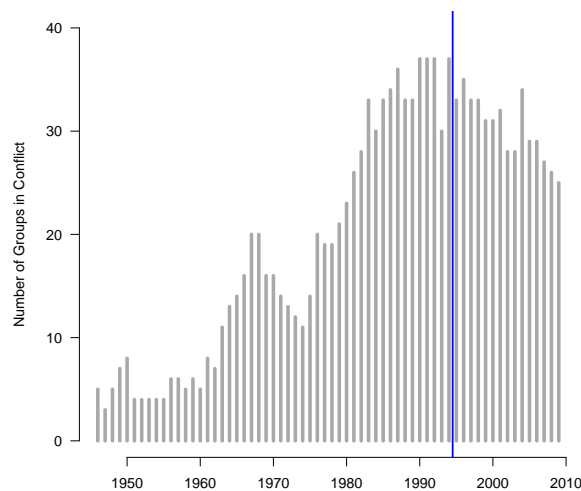


Figure 1: Incidence of ethnic conflict

decolonization—there has been an increase in ethnic conflict until the mid-1990s very much in line with the observations made by many scholars at that time. However, this increasing trend has not continued past the mid-1990s. Instead, there has indeed been a declining trend in the incidence of ethnic conflict that started around 1994 – precisely the turning point that Gurr (2000a) pinpointed (indicated here by the blue vertical line). Moreover, as anticipated by Gurr, this declining has generally continued until our most recent data point in 2009.

Conflict incidence combines both the outbreak of new conflicts as well as the continuation of ongoing ones. Thus, in order to see the relative contributions of new conflict, we decompose conflict incidence by assessing the number of conflict onset per year (Figure 2), as well as the rate by which ongoing ones terminate during a given year (Figure 3).³ Figure 2 confirms the explosion of ethnic conflict around the end of the Cold War, but as foreseen by Gurr, fewer conflicts erupted every following year. Finally Figure 3 considers the rate at which groups in conflict have terminated fighting. Thus, higher values indicate a higher probability of conflict termination. It is more difficult to infer straightforward trends from this graph, in part because, as shown in Figure 1, the number of ongoing conflicts varies, and so individual cases will carry more weight the fewer ongoing conflicts there are during a given year. In any case, we find that until the 1980s, many years saw no groups terminating fighting at all, while the rate of

³We display the rate of termination, rather than a count, because conflict termination can only occur in an ongoing conflict and is thus theoretically applicable only to groups in conflict.

termination has been more or less consistently high since the 1990s, again broadly in line with Gurr's conjectures.

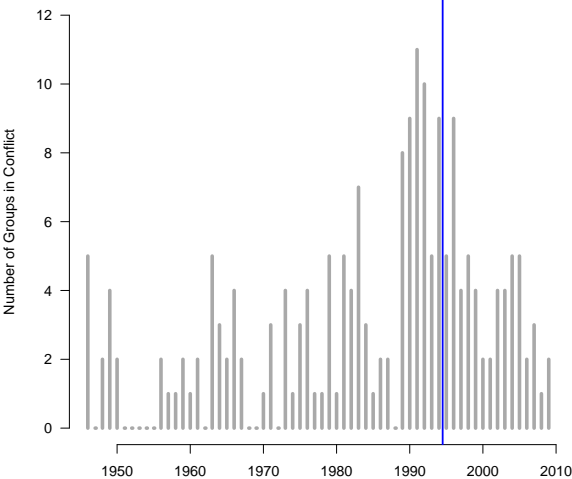


Figure 2: Onset of ethnic conflict

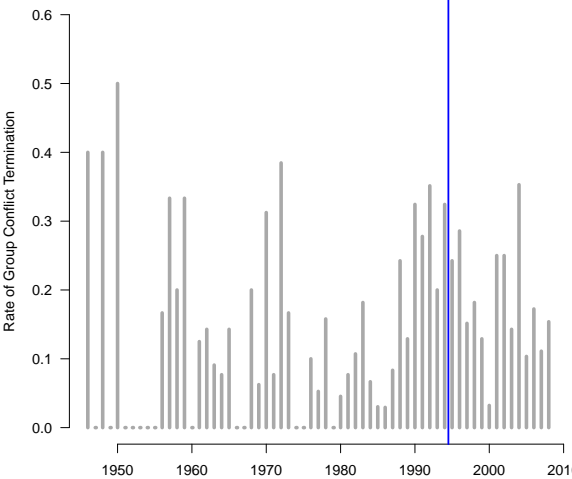


Figure 3: Termination of ethnic conflict

In sum, the empirical record offers an unambiguously affirmative answer to our first question: the conflict trend since the mid-1990s has been clearly negative, both in terms of outbreak and ending of conflicts. With the first piece of Gurr's thesis in place, we now turn to the second question concerning trends of accommodation.

Has accommodation increased since the mid-1990s?

The optimistic scenario sketched by Gurr hinges on several changes toward more cooperative and inclusive behavior. This section evaluates this emerging regime of accommodation favoring previously excluded or discriminated ethnic groups.

H2. There has been an increase of accommodation since the mid-1990s.

To facilitate precise empirical evaluation, we break up the overall claim into several-sub hypotheses, all of which concern the period since the mid-1990s:

- H2a. Group rights have improved through the discontinuation of discrimination.
- H2b. Governments have been more likely to grant territorially based autonomy to previously powerless groups.
- H2c. Governments have been more likely to include previously excluded groups in power-sharing regimes.
- H2d. There has been a trend toward democratization.
- H2e. There has been a trend toward more frequent peacekeeping operations

We evaluate the first three of these claims about accommodation by using group-level data on ethnic groups' access to executive power. The information is provided by the most recent version of the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (EPR-ETH), which is based on a global sample of politically relevant ethnic groups from 1946 through 2009, including those that are dominant within their states.⁴ Political relevance applies to those groups that are active in national politics and/or directly discriminated against by the government.

The EPR-ETH dataset is especially suitable for our analytical purposes because it offers a series of power-access categories that include theoretically relevant types of power sharing. The

⁴The can data can be found at <http://www.icr.ethz.ch/data/growup/epr-eth>. See Cederman, Wimmer and Min (2010) for the original version of EPR. As indicated above, the EPR data are better suited for examining the relationship between ethnic relations and conflict than the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset used by Gurr (1993, 2000*b*) as the latter does not systematically consider majority or non-discriminated groups.

power access variable is divided into three main groups based on whether the group in question rules alone, shares power or is excluded from executive power.

- The first set of cases is subdivided into monopoly and dominant groups, depending on whether the government is composed entirely of members of the same group (e.g., the Sunnis in Iraq under Saddam Hussein) or whether some token members of other groups participate in the executive (e.g., the Javanese in Indonesia or the Alawi in Baathist Syria).
- The second set of power configurations entails power sharing arrangements, whether of formal or informal nature. Included groups that share power play either a senior or junior role measured by their absolute influence over the cabinet, as illustrated by the Swiss Germans and the Swiss French respectively. In principle, this means that the groups' representatives would need to defend the groups' interests in the cabinet in a meaningful way rather than being a token member who is fully assimilated to the dominant ethnic identity.
- The third main class of power configurations features groups that have no regular representation within the executive, and can therefore be labeled as excluded. If the group in question is denied regional autonomy without being systematically and openly discriminated against, it is considered to be powerless. EPR-ETH reserves the category discriminated for groups whose members are subjected to explicit and targeted discrimination that effectively blocks their access to executive power. Discrimination can be implemented through denial of political rights, including citizenship, but may also be carried out through a systematic ban of parties that represent the ethnic group. The Kurds have been systematically discriminated by the Turkish regime at least since 1946. Similarly, the governments of Estonia and Latvia discriminate against their Russian populations by denying them citizenship, or at least severely restricting their opportunities for becoming citizens through language proficiency requirements.⁵

In assessing trends in access to power, we here focus on the type of behavior that is most in line with the theoretical conjectures made by Gurr, as described in Hypotheses 2a-2c. Figure 4 distinguish broadly between included groups and excluded groups. Clearly, there has been a marked trend towards more inclusion. Moreover, as visualized by the shaded areas, the subset of

⁵There is a third type of excluded groups that is labeled separatist autonomy, not to be confused with regional autonomy. This condition applies if the group's representatives declared de facto independence from, and against the will of, the central government. Here the group has chosen to exclude itself rather than having been excluded. Examples include the Bosnian Serbs walking out of the central government of Bosnia Herzegovina or the Abkhazians declaring independence from Georgia when the country became independent in 1991.

groups suffering from the most severe form of exclusion – discrimination – has radically shrunk, while groups benefiting at least from regional autonomy have become more frequent.

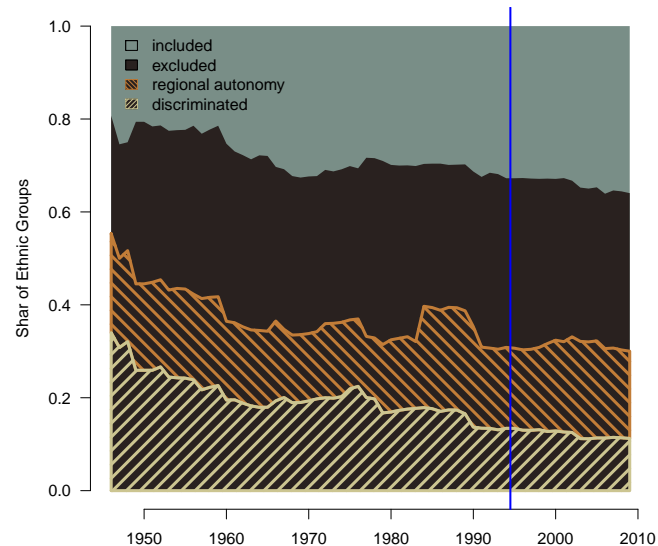


Figure 4: Trends in accommodation and ethnic groups' power access

To study trends in democratization, we rely on the well-known Polity IV data. We here follow a conventional distinction between countries whose value lies above 6 (democracies), versus those whose value lies beneath. As is well-known, there has been a steady increase in the share of democratic countries, especially since the end of the Cold War.

To identify trends in peacekeeping operations we use Beardsley's suggested approach to extract the relevant missions from the International Military Intervention (IMI) data (Pickering and Kisangani, 2009). More specifically, we consider the deployment of military personnel to state by the UN, a regional security organization or a coalition of states. We exclude humanitarian interventions without the consent of the host countries and collective security actions with offensive aims such as the U.S.-led UN force in the Korean War.⁶ Figure 6 displays the evolution of peace keeping operations over time. As can be clearly seen, there is a qualitative shift in the number of peacekeeping missions around the end of the Cold War, when the reduction of tensions between the superpower expanded the room for international and regional organizations to provide assistance to parties in civil wars. Doyle and Sambanis (2006) also note that many post-

⁶The online appendix to Beardsley (2011a) provides a full list of the missions included.

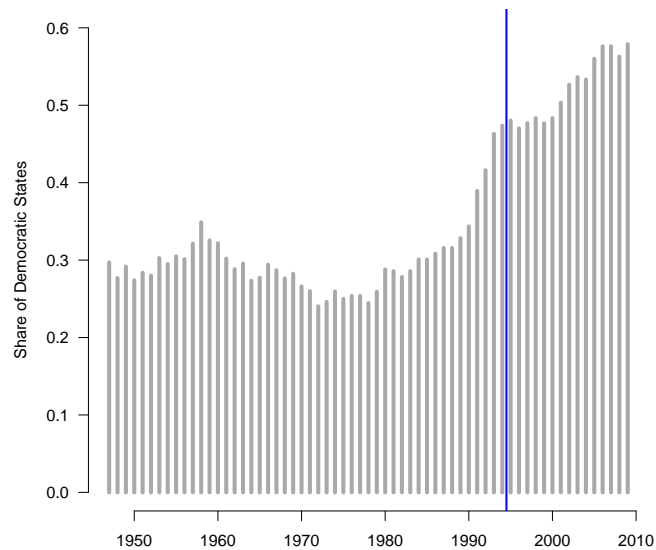


Figure 5: Democracy

Cold War peacekeeping missions include provisions for greater accommodation, powersharing, and democratization as part of peace agreements.

Again, the empirical record vindicates Gurr's benign scenario. Indeed, the trends toward more accommodative behavior that were already visible a decade after the end of the Cold War are still intact and possibly even stronger. We are now ready to address the final question that connects the two trends into a causal statement.

Has increasing accommodation caused a decline of ethnic conflict?

We divide this subsection into two parts. First, we conduct a counterfactual evaluation of the link between ethnic power access and conflict outcomes at the level of individual ethnic groups. In a second step, we compare the projected conflict trends of Kaplan and Gurr to each other and to the empirical record up to 2009.

Disaggregating the link between increasing accommodation and decreasing conflict

In this section we unpack the aggregate trends by considering the behavior of individual ethnic groups. If Gurr is right, we would expect those groups that were granted improved access to

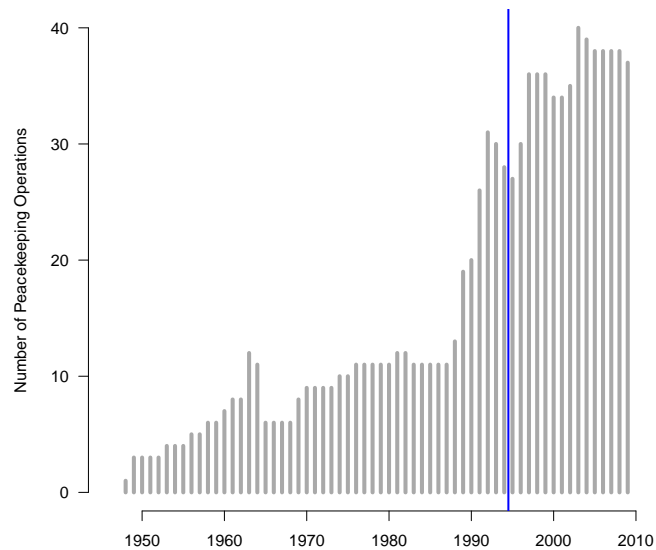


Figure 6: Peacekeeping

power, or at least improved group rights, to be less likely to experience violence compared to those that were not. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following hypotheses for the period after 1993:

- H3a. Improved group rights through interrupted discrimination caused a decline of ethnic conflict
- H3b. Granting of territorially based autonomy to previously powerless groups caused a decline of ethnic conflict.
- H3c. Inclusion in power-sharing regimes of previously excluded groups caused a decline of ethnic conflict.
- H3d. Democratization caused a decline of ethnic conflict.
- H3e. Peacekeeping operations caused a decline of ethnic conflict.

Note that the mechanisms referred to in these hypotheses could operate through either a decline in the probability of a conflict outbreak or an increased likelihood that conflicts will terminate.

Our research design is explicitly counterfactual in that we identify changes to a higher group status as the treatment while restricting the sample to those groups that can enjoy such an upgrade, rather than comparing static levels of power access across groups based on the full sample. Apart from offering a sounder basis for causal inference than static comparisons, this approach elucidates the consequences of increasing accommodation, which is precisely the gist of Gurr's reasoning. In keeping with this logic, we operationalize H3a, H3b, H3c and H3d as all group years following the accommodative event, while assuming there is no reversal and limiting the scope to the period after 1993. To be precise, H3a is tested with a dummy variable that captures the granting of more extensive group rights by referring group years following an upgrade from discriminated status. We count all years following such events as long as the group does not get exposed to discrimination again. Likewise, our operationalization of H3b focuses on those groups that were previously completely excluded but were subsequently granted regional autonomy after 1993. Analogously, we test H3c by restricting the sample to all excluded groups, or previously excluded ones, while measuring conflict proneness of those groups that experienced an upgrade to included status. Finally, we construct a similar group-level indicator based on country-level information about democracy, where the democratization indicator denotes those cases where groups were living in a country that underwent a transition to full democracy since 1993. In the case of peacekeeping, we rely on the country-level variable that we introduced in the previous section.

In addition, we introduce a number of variables to control for important group-level and country-level properties:

- Relative group size based on the demographic estimates of EPR-ETH.⁷
- Number of previous conflicts indicates a count of the conflicts that the group has experienced since 1946 or the independence of the country.
- Logged GDP per capita of the country as a whole, lagged (Penn World Table 7.0, see Heston, Summers and Aten, 2011).
- Logged population size of the country, lagged (Penn World Table 7.0, see Heston, Summers and Aten, 2011).
- Dummy variable for ongoing conflict based on the ACD2EPR conflict data indicating if there was an ongoing conflict involving any other group in the country during the preceding year.

⁷Relative group size $g \in [0, 1)$ comparing the population of the group G to the population of the incumbent I is defined as $\frac{G}{G+I}$ if the group is excluded and as G/I if the group is included (since the rebelling group left the incumbent coalition and would otherwise be counted twice).

- Number of years since the previous conflict for onset analysis, and number of years since the last peace spell, both entered as nonlinear functions, based on natural cubic splines with three knots (Beck, Katz and Tucker, 1998).

The empirical analyses feature a series of group-level models. The samples encompass all politically relevant EPR-ETH groups that can receive the treatment from 1946 through 2009. Relying on robust country-clustered standard errors, we conducted all analyses with logit models using the onset or termination of ethnonationalist conflict at the group level as the dependent variable. Ongoing conflict years were dropped from the analysis. The main results are presented in Table 1 for onset and Table 2 for conflict termination.

We start by considering the findings in Table 1. In keeping with Gurr’s projections, the granting of group rights dampens the risk of conflict, although this effect is only weakly significant at the level of $p = 0.074$ (see Model 1a). In contrast, regional autonomy arrangements do not seem to affect this probability in any clear direction, although the coefficient is positive (see Model 1b). Yet, groups included in power sharing benefit from a lower conflict propensity, an affect that is statistically significant at the $p = 0.039$ level (see Model 1c). Democratization also appears to operate as anticipated by Gurr, albeit at a level that corresponds to weak significance (see Model 1d). Finally, the coefficient of the peacekeeping indicator is positive, but this estimate is too imprecise to be safely separated from zero (see Model 1e).

With the exception for autonomy rights and peacekeeping, these findings offer considerable support for Gurr’s conjectures. However, so far, we have not investigated changes in the probability of conflicts ending. We therefore turn to Table 2, which shows that analysis of conflict termination fills in the “missing links” left open in the onset models. More specifically, we detect no statistically clear impact of either group rights or ethnic inclusion through power sharing on conflict termination (see Models 2a and 2c). Interestingly, however, the granting of autonomy appears to tilt the balance in favor of conflict termination (see Model 2b).⁸ The same thing applies to democratization, which has a weakly significant influence, thus mirroring the corresponding conflict-deducing effect of democracy on onset (cf. Model 1d above). Finally, Model 1e reveals that peacekeeping operations make conflict ending more likely, a finding that is confirmed as significant at the $p = 0.05$ level.

In general, these findings lend considerable support to those studies that argue in favor of the pacifying influence of accommodation and ethnic inclusion. For example, powerful arguments have been made in support of power-sharing arrangements, including regional autonomy (see e.g., McGarry and O’Leary, 2009) and governmental power sharing (see e.g., Lijphart, 1977;

⁸This is a very strong effect that becomes even more powerful and precise if the dependent variable is restricted to territorial conflict and the sample of groups to those that are territorially concentrated.

Table 1: The effect of accommodation on ethnic conflict onset

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 1c	Model 1d	Model 1e
group rights	-0.759 ⁺ (0.425)				
autonomy		0.369 (0.683)			
inclusion			-1.065* (0.516)		
democratization				-2.002 ⁺ (1.022)	
peacekeeping					0.214 (0.340)
relative group size	2.054 (1.461)	1.845** (0.708)	1.433* (0.681)	0.614 (0.558)	0.479 (0.531)
no. past wars	0.710*** (0.177)	0.574*** (0.110)	0.548*** (0.106)	0.481*** (0.115)	0.527*** (0.101)
log gdp lag	-0.659** (0.249)	-0.441** (0.157)	-0.460*** (0.109)	-0.302* (0.127)	-0.442*** (0.108)
log population	0.311 (0.194)	0.235 ⁺ (0.122)	0.133 (0.129)	0.0472 (0.139)	0.141 (0.0993)
ongoing conflict	-0.577 (0.501)	-0.198 (0.467)	0.156 (0.489)	0.0820 (0.508)	-0.0889 (0.460)
peace years	0.147 (0.100)	-0.0203 (0.112)	0.0632 (0.0936)	0.0103 (0.0943)	-0.0237 (0.0838)
Constant	-3.602 ⁺ (2.115)	-3.279 (1.996)	-2.185 (1.619)	-2.069 (1.646)	-2.029 ⁺ (1.233)
Observations	1208	4097	6206	5645	8968

Standard errors in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2: The effect of accommodation on ethnic conflict termination

	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c	Model 2d	Model 2e
group rights	-0.212 (0.949)				
autonomy		3.646* (1.515)			
inclusion			-0.243 (0.795)		
democratization				1.497+ (0.796)	
peacekeeping					0.924* (0.361)
relative group size	-0.347 (1.909)	-2.474* (1.221)	-1.332+ (0.709)	-1.640* (0.733)	-1.728* (0.706)
no. past wars	0.270 (0.249)	0.227 (0.196)	0.178 (0.163)	0.175 (0.146)	0.0947 (0.176)
log gdp lag	-0.539* (0.230)	-0.438* (0.205)	-0.139 (0.145)	0.00222 (0.178)	-0.150 (0.176)
log population	-0.963+ (0.570)	-0.936** (0.329)	-0.363* (0.183)	-0.994*** (0.196)	-0.577*** (0.142)
war years	-1.384+ (0.742)	-1.374** (0.499)	-1.501*** (0.394)	-1.160* (0.457)	-1.316** (0.444)
Constant	12.54+ (6.804)	12.41** (4.170)	4.613* (2.341)	9.913*** (2.438)	6.770*** (1.961)
Observations	140	286	395	302	450

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Mattes and Savun, 2009). Because all these institutions cannot as a rule be treated as random shocks or externally imposed factors, endogeneity remains a major challenge in this literature. While the current study does not offer a fool-proof way of circumventing these difficulties, it seems reasonable to assume that power sharing and similar concessions are primarily offered groups that are potentially threatening and thus more likely to engage in armed conflict (e.g., Wucherpfennig, Hunziker and Cederman, 2012; Cederman et al., 2013). Indeed, if this is the case, then inclusive moves are likely to be more effective than indicated by naive modeling on observed data. Moreover, our focus on upgrades rather than static group status should also contribute to making the measures less vulnerable to reverse causation. The same applies to peacekeeping operations, which are known to have been invoked in more difficult rather than easy cases (e.g., Fortna and Howard, 2008; Beardsley, 2011*b*).

The result showing that full democratization reduces conflict is also of considerable theoretical interest. While previous studies link democratization episodes to the outbreak of civil war, these have typically focused on more limited liberalization processes leading to semi-democracy rather than full democracy (e.g., Mansfield and Snyder, 2005; Cederman, Hug and Krebs, 2010). In this sense, the current study is compatible with earlier findings, especially since incomplete democratization is not associated with any pacifying effect (results not shown).

Up to this point, our counterfactual regression analysis has been limited to the period after 1993. Yet, a more profound treatment of the decline-of-war thesis would have to consider the entire post-WWII era as well. Preliminary analysis shows that we get similar results, and in some cases even stronger ones, if we extend the sample to the period from 1946. Yet, this raises a puzzle: if the mechanisms have been operating until the mid-1990s as well, how could we account for the increase of conflict propensity during that period? To capture this level of change one would have to rely on more comprehensive models that take geopolitical factors into account, such as state formation and dissolution.

Predicting conflict trends: Gurr vs. Kaplan

Having illustrated trends in accommodation, as well as ethnic conflict, our final step is to evaluate the predictions put forward by Gurr and others during the late 1990s against more recent data on conflict and ethnic inclusion. While we have already shown that ethnic conflict has declined since the mid-1990s, there has been much less attention to the causes of this decline and whether changes in the factors emphasized in research on ethnic civil war onset allow us to actually predict a decline in ethnic conflict. Thus, we here evaluate Gurr's theoretical arguments about the role of accommodation by assessing its ability to generate predictions.

We proceed as follows. First, we turn back the clock by putting ourselves in the shoes of

Kaplan and other doomsayers at the beginning of the 1990s, as well as Gurr's position based on his research in the early 1990s. Aiming to reflect the respective causal stories, we then set up simple statistical models that represent these two logics. While the first model focuses merely on time trends in keeping with Kaplan's predictions and extrapolations, and the second model that captures Gurr's logic of accommodation. We then estimate these models drawing solely on the historical data that was observable to these authors back then, i.e., data reaching until the early/late 1990s. We then use the estimated coefficient from the observed historical data to project conflict scenarios for future, using updated data for the post Cold War period. In other words, we seek to evaluate the predictive capabilities of Kaplan's and Gurr's claims against recent trends in ethnic conflict.

As stated above, Kaplan's reasoning was primarily based on an extrapolation of recent trends, in particular the observation that an "explosion" of ethnic conflicts occurred around the end of the Cold War, a trend he confidently predicted to continue into the future. Consequently, we estimate a model that merely incorporates a (cubic) time trend of calendar year, including observations until 1994, which was Kaplan's time of writing.

Gurr's key argument, by contrast, holds that ethnic inclusion can prevent ethnic conflict. Moreover, Gurr anticipated that such behavior would become widespread in the post Cold War period, thereby generating a decline in ethnic conflict. Thus, we set up a model that features the power access of ethnic groups as the main independent variable. This is identical to Model 1c in terms of specification, although the estimation is limited to observations until 1999, the year before the publication of Gurr's 2000 article.

In a second step, we then use the estimated coefficients from the models together with out-of-sample data to generate predicted probabilities for all groups during the period 1995-2009 (for Kaplan), and 1999-2009 (for Gurr), respectively. Finally, in order to assess global trends, we sum over these predicted probabilities by year. This yields a yearly predicted count of the number of ethnic groups engaging in conflict, which is visualized in Figure 7.

The results are striking. Whereas the model that extrapolates the Cold War trend predicts a massive increase in ethnic conflict (see the blue line), the theoretically driven specification focusing on ethnic exclusion correctly predicts a decline that started during the late 1990s and is mirrored by the empirical trend (gray histogram). We emphasize that these predictions are theory-driven, thus allowing us to evaluate the causal mechanisms behind the decline in ethnic conflict. In short, Figure 7 suggests that not only was Gurr right in anticipating a decline in frequency of ethnic conflict, but by pointing to the role of accommodation, he appears to have been right for the right theoretical reasons.

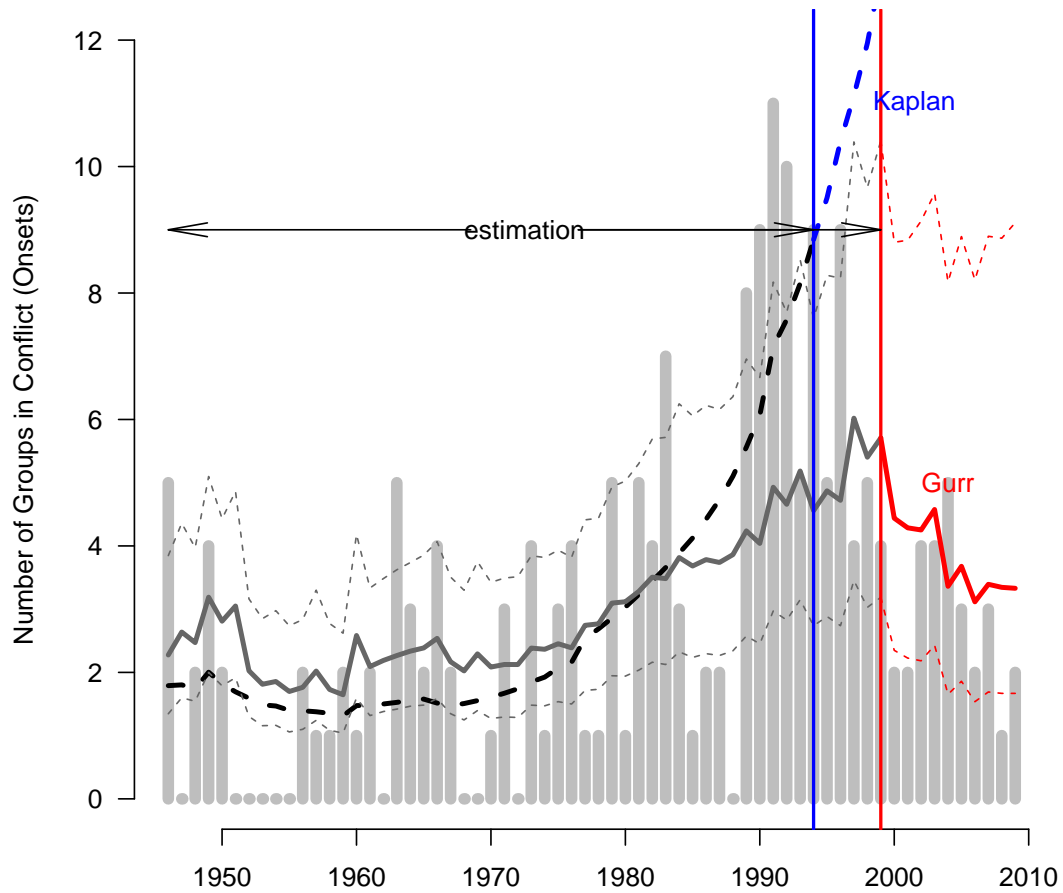


Figure 7: Comparing Gurr's and Kaplan's conflict predictions

Conclusion

By restricting the scope to a particular form of political violence during a relatively limited time period, this paper contributes to the recent literature on the decline-of-conflict hypothesis. Not only are our findings entirely compatible with the most general writings on this topic, they also correspond closely to Gurr's observations about "ethnic warfare on the wane," that stand in stark contrast to various pessimistic projections that were made in the early post-Cold War period. Along a number of empirical dimensions, we have found that this relatively optimistic

perspective holds up well. Ethnic conflicts appear to have subsided after the mid-1990s, and this decline is at least partially attributable to an increase in governments' accommodative policies toward ethnic groups.

We have presented evidence that connects the end of discrimination, the granting of regional autonomy, the inclusion in power sharing agreements, democratization and peacekeeping operations with lower conflict risk. In this very sense, we conclude that Gurr is right for the right reasons. Given the controversy surrounding inequality-based accounts of civil war, these are important findings. In contrast to interpretations that highlight "greed" or "opportunities" at the expense of grievances, such approaches lead to the conclusion that ethnic inclusive policies, whether based on group rights, autonomy, inclusion or democracy, constitute the safest path to peace.

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