Civil War in Transnational Perspective

Project proposal submitted to the ESRC

Kristian Skrede Gleditsch† (principal investigator)
Han Dorussen† (co-principal investigator)
Todd Landman†
Abhinay Muthoo‡
Hugh Ward†

† Department of Government, University of Essex

‡ Department of Economics, University of Essex

The conventional wisdom: Civil wars as domestic conflict

The conventional wisdom treats civil wars as purely domestic phenomena. It is implicitly assumed that the key causes of conflict within sovereign states also must lie within their boundaries. Our project will reorient this "closed polity" approach to civil war. Even a cursory glance suggests many *transnational* dimensions of civil wars; For example, insurgencies often recruit fighters and raise resources among kin and supporters in neighboring states, civil wars are more likely to occur in border areas, civil wars sometime spill over into other states and may escalate to larger regional conflicts, and concerns about the consequences of conflicts can lead other states to intervene. This prominence of transnational characteristics in ongoing civil wars suggests that factors outside the boundaries of individual states may influence the risk of civil war onset; yet, the role of international factors has received little systematic attention in research on civil war. Moreover, "domestic" and "international" factors have often been treated as exclusive categories, disregarding how transnational factors influence key processes within countries, which in turn may increase the risk of civil war.

Problems with the conventional wisdom and analytical approach

In this section, we first describe the established conventional wisdom and the basis for dismissing international factors. We then show why this conclusion is empirically untenable and inconsistent with the theoretical framework guiding these studies. We outline some barriers to analyzing how transnational relations influence civil war, and why we believe that greater systematic attention to transnational and international factors can help advance our understanding of "who" fights in civil wars and "why". We then turn to how we will examine our central research question of how transnational linkages influence the risk of civil war onset and the prospects for peaceful settlement.

We use Fearon and Laitin's (2003) influential study to structure our discussion of the conventional wisdom on civil war. Although there is a vast literature on civil war where many contributors differ in significant respects from Fearon and Laitin, their treatment of civil wars as a purely domestic phenomenon is characteristic of the field. Their theoretical approach emphasize conditions facilitating insurgency against a central government, and avoids some of the problems with not specifying "who fights" in much research on civil war.[1] Fearon and Laitin argue that grievances provide little leverage in understanding violent conflict. Civil war is essentially a problem of "weak states" with low capacity to deter rebellion. Characteristics favoring insurgency such as lootable resources and mountainous terrain are central to their explanation of where we see civil wars. Fearon and Laitin (2003: 86) largely dismiss the role of international factors, based on how adding a variable for neighboring civil war - intended to

[1] Many studies treat civil wars in a non-strategic manner as events that "happen" to countries in ways similar to disease, and then look for factors that indicate susceptibility to the "civil war disease". However, as discussed in greater detail in the core project proposal, by deemphasizing agency, without clarifying "who" fights in civil wars, we ultimately cannot account for "why" we see civil wars.

proxy for the role of international factors – to their model yields a positive, but not statistically significant, coefficient estimate.

a) Finding or artefact?

Upon closer scrutiny, it turns out to be highly questionable whether Fearon and Laitin's conclusions regarding the irrelevance of international factors in any way follows from the empirical record on civil war. Fearon and Laitin's conflict data do not specify the location of fighting in conflicts, but focuses on the identity of the government fighting a civil war. Wars in overseas colonies (e.g., Mozambique) are coded as civil wars in the metropole country (Portugal). This in turn means that Fearon and Laitin test for effects of wars in neighboring countries where would not expect them - i.e., Portuguese wars in Africa influencing prospects for conflict in Spain –and disregards the security implications of the conflict for Mozambique's neighbors. We believe that their reported finding is in part an artefact of their coding. Indeed, other studies find strong evidence that conflict in neighboring countries make civil wars much more likely (e.g., Esty et al. 1995; Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; e.g., Sambanis 2001), and these results hold even when using the exact same model specification as Fearon and Laitin (see Gleditsch 2006).[2] Hence, a re-examination of the empirical evidence casts doubt upon their conclusion and suggests a more important role for international influences.

b) Transnational dimensions of insurgencies

Fearon and Laitin's lack of attention to transnational factors is also inconsistent with their proposed insurgency explanation of civil war. Fearon and Laitin (2003) acknowledge that characteristics of the center of a country are not necessarily representative of the periphery, and that many peripheral groups that seem "weak" in a military sense can mobilize and sustain long rebellions if governments cannot effectively target groups in the periphery (see also Fearon 2004; Gleditsch et al. 2006).[3] However, just as civil wars fought in the periphery or at a greater distances from central cities tend to be more persistent, we also know that there is a strong "border effect" and that fighting often takes place in border areas (e.g., Buhaug and Gates 2002). Rebels often maintain bases in neighboring states, and retreat across borders if pursued by government forces.

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[2] Collier and Hoeffler (2004) find that the size of a country's diaspora in the USA has a positive effect on the risk of civil war, which they interpret as a result of opportunities for raising funding overseas. However, their measure is problematic as large diasporas may be a consequence of conflict, and ignores all communities not based in the USA.

[3] Unlike the case of interstate conflicts (see, e.g., Bennett and Stam 1996; Reed 2003), the relationship between power preponderance and peace/shorter conflict duration does not appear to be symmetric between the sides for civil wars; Whereas militarily stronger peripheral groups are more likely to get concessions and are associated with shorter wars, stronger central governments do not generally experience shorter wars in the periphery (see, e.g., Fearon 2004; Gleditsch, Cunningham, and Salehyan 2006). Dorussen (2005b) explores the relationship between development, state strength, and the likelihood of civil war.

Such border effects in themselves challenge the closed polity model, in which borders and neighboring states are seen as irrelevant. Some have argued that the borders of many developing states are highly porous and little more than meaningless lines on a map as states are too weak to effectively police their borders (e.g., Deutsch 1977; Jackson 1990). However, although borders may be too porous to prevent rebels from crossing, dismissing the importance of their legal status misses out on how border areas allow rebels a strategic advantage. For governments to cross borders and violate the sovereignty of other states can create significant costs in terms of inter-state conflict and potentially international interventions, even if it wielding force against insurgents outside territorial boundaries is not necessarily difficult in a military sense.[4]

Furthermore, many peripheral groups are not confined within the boundaries of individual nations, but extend into other states. Groups with a transnational community can often mobilize substantially more resources than one would expect from their characteristics in an individual country. Moreover, excluded minority groups in one state can be politically privileged in other states, making political or military support more likely. Centinyan (2002) and Dorussen (2005a) show that central governments accommodate more to and discriminate less against groups with kin in neighboring countries. These examples attest to how "domestic" and transnational relations often interact, and how transnational relations influence many features presumed "domestic" in existing research on civil war. Rather than treat the "international" and "domestic" level as mutually exclusive sets of explanatory factors, we need to understand how the two influence one another.

c) Intervention and peacekeeping

Outside interventions in civil war is one form of international influence that has received some attention. However, most existing research takes a relatively narrow perspective, limited to military interventions or peacekeeping operations (e.g., Doyle and Sambanis 2000; e.g., Regan 2000). The literature has paid little attention to variation in motives for intervening in civil wars. Although military intervene could be motivated on purely humanitarian grounds (e.g., to end the suffering caused by civil war), countries often have strong preferences for one of the actors or the terms of settlements. Interventions seeking to strengthen one of the parties may prolong conflicts in trying to prevent likely outcomes absent intervention.[5] Motives for intervening must be understood relative to transnational ties and the

[4] Gleditsch and Salehyan (2006) show that many interstate disputes originate from the transnational dimensions of civil wars. This suggests a glaring hole in the interstate conflict literature, which has paid little attention to possible linkages between civil wars and interstate relations.

[5] Indeed, even research that assumes peacemaking motivations actually finds that outside interventions tend to lengthen civil wars (Regan 2000). Dorussen (2004) finds that whereas UN peacekeeping operations significantly

consequences of conflict.[6] Moreover, countries may seek to influence civil wars in ways other than through formal interventions, or by non-military means. Since military intervention in support of rebels would generally be considered a serious violation of another state's sovereignty, states are likely to use less intrusive forms of intervention in conflicts and conceal support for insurgencies. The frequency with which interventions are alleged, but not acknowledged, attests to how outside influences extend to a large variety of means of influence beyond military intervention, not considered in existing studies.

Barriers to analyzing transnational relations and civil war

We have argued that theories of civil war, properly understood, suggest that transnational relations can influences the risk of civil war in important ways. However, the empirical evidence reviewed is either based on casual evidence, or rather ambiguous and indirect proxies that do not allow discriminating between the specific transnational mechanisms that may operate. In particular, wars in neighboring countries could reflect a variety of different phenomena; Conflict in a neighboring state could simply facilitate mobilization through increasing the availability of arms. However, conflicts in two states may also be linked more directly, through transnational peripheral groups or combatants from other states (e.g., Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; e.g., Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989). Since neighboring conflicts have been used to proxy many and quite different things, we neither know what sorts of mechanisms actually underlie the observed effect nor their relative importance. Moreover, many of the postulated mechanisms are not necessarily captured by looking at cases of ongoing conflicts only – for example, recruitment among ethnic kin in neighboring states can clearly happen even in the absence of violent conflict in the neighboring state (especially if a group is politically advantaged in the neighboring states).

In our previous work we have tried to identify specific transnational mechanisms likely to affect the risk of civil war, including refugees (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006) as well as the presence of transnational groups (Gleditsch 2006). However, research on transnational dimensions – including our own – has suffered from working exclusively with data at the national level. For example, tests of diffusion propositions with national level data are problematic, since conflicts typically take place in specific parts of a state's territory. The prospects for diffusion and spill-over effects must be assessed relative to location; For large countries such as Russia, civil war in a specific area such as Chechnya is unlikely to increase the risk of conflict neighbors far from the conflict zone such as Finland and Norway, but is likely to have a substantial impact on neighboring states in the Caucasus region. Likewise, without additional information about the actors involved in the conflict, it is difficult to say whether insurgencies involve

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reduce economic discrimination against peripheral groups, non-UN peacekeeping actually tend to increase economic discrimination.

[6] Austvoll (2005) find that third parties with ethnic ties to one of the sides in a civil war are much more likely to intervene. Likewise, refugees and economic externalities of conflicts in neighboring states can shape incentives of states to intervene (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006).

transnational groups and whether these draw upon resources outside the country where conflict takes place.

Similar problems apply in studies of intervention and peacekeeping. Existing studies have considered only national level data, even though interventions and peacekeeping operations typically are targeted at specific areas and groups. Moreover, the likely effectiveness of interventions in terms of providing peace and stable settlements must be assessed relative to the characteristics of conflicts and targets of intervention. Doing this requires dyadic and geographically disaggregated data, which we have started collecting in the PKOLED project (Dorussen 2005c).

Advancing research on the transnational dimensions of civil war

In the previous section, we provided many examples to support how transnational dimensions of civil war merit more attention than they have received in research on civil war. In this section, we describe how we propose to advance research on transnational influences on civil war.

Theory: Dyadic interactions and third party linkages in a bargaining perspective

The role of transnational factors in civil war has generally been examined in an ad-hoc fashion, without an underlying theory of conflict interaction. In this project, we wish to extend out previous research on transnational dimensions of civil war by theorizing such linkages within the Extended Center-Periphery configuration outline in the core application to study how third parties may influence interactions between center and periphery groups within a bargaining framework.[7] We will extend dyadic bargaining models to consider how third parties influence interactions among conflict antagonists by changing central parameters. We intend to relate the insights from simplified formal models to speak to interesting varieties of transnational mechanisms thought to influence conflict. In many cases, one can imagine third party influences working in opposite directions. We intend to use the formal models to develop more specific propositions on the group and actor constellations that can give rise to particular outcomes and dynamics, and clarify the conditions that can make these possible. In particular, we are interested in how third parties may influence *uncertainty* (e.g., settlements may become more difficult with additional parties and increase noise, but third parties may also facilitate settlements by providing information and monitoring), *commitment problems* (e.g., third parties can constrain the risk that changes in the future balance of power undermine agreements and provide guarantees to assuage conflict antagonists), and *onset/expansion* (e.g., prospects of third party support can embolden groups to rebel in order to get outside intervention, but third parties can also deter violence and prevent escalation).

Empirics: Analyzing dyadic interactions and third party linkages

[7] See Muthoo (2004) for a survey of bargaining theory.

Rather than relying on proxies based on national averages or country level attributes, we will analyze civil war and transnational influences as dyadic interactions using actor specific information and local level data. We will continue our existing data collection efforts expanding the Uppsala armed conflict data with additional information on the non-state actors (the NSA data, see Cunningham et al. 2006) and conflict antagonists' relationship to external actors (the EXDIM data, see Gleditsch et al. 2006), as well as gathering event and location data on peacekeeping operations (the PKOLED data, see Dorussen 2005c). The Oslo node of the project has developed geo-referenced information for Uppsala conflict data, and the new ACLED data project disaggregates individual conflicts into particular events or battles, with references to their geographical location (see Raleigh and Hegre 2005).

The geographically disaggregated conflict data allows us to consider how variation in geographical terrain or transnational features influences strategies. For example, we can study how behavior evolves in cases where rebels can retreat into "rough" terrain or safe havens in neighboring states that governments cannot easily monitor or target. The collaborative project will systematize disaggregated data sources collected by geographical cells or grid, including terrain, population, and infrastructures, which allows us to relate temporal and geographical evolution of conflicts with the characteristics of individual geographical cells. The new Nordhaus (2005) data on Gross Domestic Product by geographical cells, for example, will allow us to assess the controversy surrounding whether the negative relationship between GDP per capita and civil war frequency reflects primarily the opportunity costs of rebellion (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler) or state strength (e.g., Fearon and Laitin) by considering variation in income and other factors influencing state strength.

We will tests our propositions using a combination of longitudinal analysis of individual conflicts and spatial event data analyses, based on the appropriate research design for each specific question of interest. Some questions of interested can be examined by looking at over time interaction with particular conflicts and how conflict duration and intensity varies as function of transnational relations and changes in these. We intend to build upon our existing work on estimating the impact of third parties in Gleditsch and Beardsley (2004), and examine how action-reaction patterns and conflict outcomes vary depending on dyadic characteristics and the transnational relations of the actors.

Looking only at ongoing conflicts would lead us to ignore all center-periphery groups where conflict was possible, but where we do not observe resort to violence between the parties. Although we believe that conflict dynamics and how conflicts end must be related to the causes of their initial onset, we are skeptical about whether the direct symmetry between the causes of war onset and war duration assumed in much of the formal literature on conflict is likely to hold empirically (see, e.g., Blainey 1988; Filson and Werner 2002). However, we can compare evidence from patterns in ongoing conflict to propositions on how particular actor constellations and transnational features influence onset by comparing conflict

situations to a set of centre-periphery dyads where we do not observe violence. We will draw upon the new geo-referenced data on center and periphery groups collected by the Zurich node to generate a comparison set of non-conflict dyads, gather comparable information on actor attributes and third-party linkages for these dyads, and then use statistical matching methods to isolate and estimate the causal effects of transnational relations (e.g., Rubin 1990). Moreover, we will consider variation in conflict and interaction patterns in two larger regional systems in greater detail – the Great Lakes region of Africa and the Balkans – which contains a large number of linked dyads and variation in actor constellations.

Our interest here is not just to understand individual dyads, but the networks characteristics implied by the relationship between different actors and how particular interventions are likely to affect behavior and evolution of larger regional systems. Third party influences makes it questionable to treat individual conflict dyads as independent of one another. Spatial statistical methods - where individual observations are taken as conditional on the values and outcomes on connected observations - provide helpful ways to model and estimate third party influences on conflict antagonists.[8] We will use our empirical results to study the implied network and dependence structures, and examine how shocks to individual dyads or changes in transnational configurations can influence conflict and its intensity within a system, and asses how interventions can modify the prospects for settlements through changing actor relationships and modifying third party influences. Geographically disaggregated data will allow us to evaluate contending hypothesis on the linkages that give rise to observed contagion and diffusion patterns. In system of dependent actors, we must consider not just the short term impact of a change in an independent variable for a single observation, but the long-run equilibrium impact stemming from the effects that these changes will have on other connected observations (that eventually can feed back onto the observation itself). For example, if we see an increase in the risk of conflict through a change in the income or strength of an actor in one individual conflict dyad, then this change will also influence the risk of conflict in other connected dyad and propagate through the system. Beck et al. (2006) demonstrate how the implied equilibrium effects can be considerably larger than the short term effects indicated by its individual coefficient.

Expected outcomes

The members of the project team have extensive publication records, and we expect that the project will lead to several publications in peer-reviewed journals. Cederman and Gleditsch have submitted a proposal for a special issue of *Journal of Peace Research* on "Disaggregating the study of violence", based on a workshop to be held in 2007. The project meetings and workshops will also bring in researchers outside the network who work on related issues, and provide a head start on the external review process that can help move projects more quickly towards publication. Research presented at previous meetings has

[8] For overviews of the implications of spatial dependence and methods to address this in a regression framework, see Beck et al. (2005) and Schaenberger and Gotway (2005).

already resulted in publications forthcoming in the *American Political Science Review* and *International Organization*.

The data generated as part of this project are likely to be of interest to other researchers, and will be made publicly available both through a web-based interface that allows for integration of all data collected by the project nodes, as well as through the UK data archive. These data are also likely to be useful for researchers interested in consequences of conflict for other phenomena such as health and economic performance rather than causes of war *per se*.

Our larger project is an integrated collaborative effort where the sum will be much greater than the sum of the individual parts. Just as our project will benefit from data collection and theory development of other nodes, the analyses and results from our project will contribute to other nodes. For example, the observed empirical patterns and information about the distribution of particular configurations will be used to set parameters in the computational modeling efforts carried out by the Zurich node. We intend to continue our previous successful collaboration on modeling the spread of democracy in the international system (Cederman and Gleditsch 2004), based on combining prior work on the diffusion of democracy in Gleditsch (2002) with the GEOSIM computational model of interaction in the international system developed by Cederman (2003), in particular, by exploring the potential for peacekeeping operations and the robustness of strategies under variation in conflict characteristics.

Finally, the research team has a good record in generating outside funding, and we expect that the current project will provide a basis for future grant applications.

Full justification for resources requested

a) Efforts of project staff: The principal investigators (Gleditsch and Dorussen) will have responsibility for data management, data analysis and research design, writing research papers, and supervise and coordinate all other project staff. They will each devote eight hours a week to these tasks for the full duration of the project. Landman will devote 1 h.p.w. for 3 years, focusing on theory development, in particular understanding state resort to repression and conflict dynamics. Muthoo will devote 1 h.p.w. for 3 years, focusing on formal modeling of third party influences in dynamic bargaining models. Ward will devote 1 h.p.w. for 3 years, focusing on peacekeeping in civil wars and network characteristics in multiparty conflicts.

b) Efforts and costs of research assistants: We apply for a post-doctoral research fellow for the full three years of the project. She/he will assist in the above tasks, under the guidance of the principal investigators. The full costs for a post-doctoral research fellow is budgeted at 80% of a full time position, grade scale RA1A. We will employ various postgraduate student research fellows at the University of

Essex to assist in data collection. We apply for 20 hours of research fellow work for 40 weeks for each of the three years of the project (i.e., 2400 hours in total). The budgeted hourly rate for postgraduate student research fellows is £13.75. We have budgeted £1,400 for recruitment costs.

c) Photocopying, stationary, telephone calls: We budget a total of £5,400 (£1,800 per annum) for consumables including photocopying, stationary, and telephone calls. These are essential items, as conferences, journal, and book submission often require multiple copies, and we will need to interact frequently with project nodes in other countries.

d) Computing: We have included £1,000 to cover the costs of a computer for the postdoctoral fellow.

e) Annual ECRP project meetings/conferences: Periodic meetings will be essential to this collaborative project, since the partners cannot interact face-to-face on a daily basis. We plan three annual meetings over the course of the ECRP project. These will include both the core participants as well as additional invited external participants. We plan to host a 2008 meeting at in Colchester, and have budgeted total costs of £18,232. We have included meals for 35 participants, accommodation for 22 non-UK participants, and travel costs for other invited participants (7 US and 3 Europe). Note that travel costs for other project participants are included in individual node budgets. We have budget £3,150 for travel for Essex project participants to other annual project meetings/conferences.

f) Other conference travel: Dissemination will be an important part of the project. We include funds for travel to three conferences in the USA (notably the International Studies Association, the American Political Science Association, and the North American Meeting of the Peace Science Society), plus three European conferences (including the European Consortium for Political Research workshops and general conferences. Project staff has recently organized related panels and sections at all of these conferences. We understand that the ESRC will only allow for covering the costs of attendance for up to two people. As a result, the travel money will be allocated among the principal investigators, project associates, affiliated students, and the post-doctoral research fellow, depending on need and the availability of other funds.

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