How Influential are Political Leaders?[*]

Elites and Ethno-Nationalist Conflict during Democratization

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ABSTRACT. *How much influence do political leaders have on the likelihood of ethnic civil war? Two opposing theoretical positions exist: representatives of the elite manipulation theory argue that leaders incite ethno-nationalism to secure their own hold on power (Snyder 2000, Gagnon 2004). However, political leaders rarely have both the ability and the ideal environment to manipulate identities (Brubaker 1998). Instead, structural forces such as the ethnic security dilemma could be the driving force behind conflict onset (Posen 1993), leaving elites virtually without influence on the probability of civil-war onset.*

The present study uses large-N regression analysis to test these two theories and a hybrid alternative focussing on two problematic factors inherent to democratization settings: the need to settle the demos question and the ongoing competition between incumbent and challenging political leaders. Results confirm that ongoing democratization phases, processes of elite selection and the prior existence of security worries caused by politicized ethnic divisions all have a significant influence on the risk of civil war.

1 Introduction

Democratization is a time of hope, but it is also a time of social upheaval. The old societal order needs to be deconstructed, exclusive networks of interaction and trust within social groups and patron-client relationships with the former regime need to disintegrate. Therefore, it is not surprising that democratizing countries have been shown to bear a greater risk of inter-state war (Mansfield & Snyder 1995a, b, 2002, 2005) and recent studies show that this influence holds for civil wars, too (Cederman, Hug & Krebs 2010 forthcoming).

The risk of civil war during democratization weighs particularly on ethnically heterogeneous countries. The move towards democracy requires an answer to the demos question: should the nation be defined in terms of ethnicity, potentially requiring the redrawing of borders or the displacement of people; or can a supra-ethnic identity attract the loyalty of most current citizens? In countries with a deeply-rooted history of conflict between different ethnic groups, the need to settle the demos question can become the cause for conflict.

Leadership is one factor that has often been associated with the question why ethnic civil war breaks out during democratization in some countries—such as Yugoslavia—but not in others. Two prominent and opposing views on the role of leadership in ethnic conflict are the theories of elite manipulation and ethnic security dilemma. The present study tests these two theories in the framework of ethnically heterogeneous societies undergoing a process of democratization, and proposes a hybrid alternative that applies particularly to democratization cases.

The following section presents the three theories by showing how they interpret the same case: Yugoslavia during the early 1990s. Once testable predictions have been derived, the third section describes the data and methods used. Section four shows how well the theories perform when it comes to the role of democratization, ethnicity and leadership using large-N logistic regression, and section five concludes with an outlook on future research.

2 Three Paths to the Same Conflict: A Literature Review

An investigation into the role of political elites in the onset of civil war always involves a judgement on where to place responsibility: with the individual leader, with situational forces, or somewhere in between. The endpoints of this scale are defined by two prominent theories that illustrate the difference in their approaches clearly.

The theory of elite manipulation[1] (e.g. Gagnon 2004, Snyder 2000) places the blame squarely with elites, which for the purpose of this study are defined as any political figures that hold or compete for political office. These leaders are argued to use the danger of an inter-ethnic conflict as a tool to secure their grip on power, and negligently or willfully accept the onset of violent conflict as a consequence of their own doing.

At the other extreme of the scale, the theory of the ethnic security dilemma (Posen 1993) argues that political leaders are relatively powerless in the face of structural and situational forces. If they work hard to improve the security of their people, they risk being seen by others as an aggressor preparing for attack, potentially inviting a first strike by others. Yet neglecting the security of their people equally puts them at risk. Conflict may be unavoidable regardless of the choices made by elites.

The following two sections illustrate these theories with the Yugoslavian break-up in the early 1990s. A third, hybrid theory that focusses particularly on cases of democratization is then introduced, and testable predictions are derived for all.

2.1 Elite Manipulation

Both Snyder (2000) and Gagnon (2004) see the civil wars in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s as the result of incumbent elites seeking to defend their power in the face of mass mobilization and the threat of regime reformation. Their "goal was to bring an end to political mobilization that represented an immediate threat to the existing structure of power" (ibid.: 181) and to control the "impending democratization [that] threatened the position of the communist elite" (Snyder 2000: 206). Gagnon (2004) argues that both parties that emerged victoriously in the 1990 regional elections in Croatia and Serbia[2] did not succeed by virtue of a strong backing by their respective populations but by legal and

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1 This school of thought is also referred to by the milder, but less common term "elite persuasion".

2 Respectively, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).

electoral trickery. At the same time, they were faced with "parts of the population that were actively mobilizing against the interests of conservative elites and calling for fundamental changes to the structures of economic and political power" (ibid. 180).

The response by both Croat and Serbian leadership was to utilize "their near monopoly control over the news media" (Snyder 2000: 213) to "shift the focus of political discourse away from issues of change toward grave injustices purportedly being inflicted on innocents [...] by evil others defined in ethnic terms" (Gagnon 2004: 180—1). This change of subject served to demobilize any potential opposition: "anyone who questioned these stories or who criticized the president or the ruling party [...] was demonized as being in league with the enemy, of not caring about the innocent victims of the evil others" (ibid.: 179). This clearly included not only opposition politicians and their supporters, but also potential challengers from within. As such, the ethnic discourse is argued to be just a ploy that allowed a restructuring of political (and geographic) space favorable to the incumbents. Since both Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman engaged in such ethnic outbidding to hold on to their jobs, the efforts of each could serve as the best proof of their threatening intentions to the other.

2.2 Ethnic Security Dilemma

In clear opposition to the "elite manipulation" school of thought, the proponents of the "ethnic security dilemma" argue that conflict is not caused by "short-term incentives for new leaders to 'play the nationalist card' to secure their power" (Posen 1993: 29). Instead, structural forces drive society to the brink of conflict, while political leaders have little to no ability to avoid the outbreak of violence.

Posen (1993) argues that the weakening, reform or collapse of the central authority of ethnically heterogeneous states that can happen during periods of democratization (or regime type transitions in general) causes an "emerging anarchy" similar to what exists at the international level. With the break-down of the previous order and the resulting transitional absence of a "Leviathan", the country experiences "special conditions that arise when proximate groups of people suddenly find themselves responsible for their own security" (Posen 1993: 27). In the absence of a credible national authority that can

guarantee the safety of ethnic groups, uncertainty kindles a rational fear for group survival.

"The process of imperial collapse produces conditions that make offensive and defensive capabilities indistinguishable" (ibid.: 29). The resulting ambiguity makes it difficult or impossible for any group to credibly signal their defensive intent. Posen discusses a number of events illustrating the difficulty of distinguishing offensive and defensive actions, including the confiscation of heavy weapons stored on the territory of the Croat Republic by the predominantly Serbian-controlled Yugoslav Army in October 1990. Given the preceding downgrading of the Serbian population on Croat territory from "constituent nation" to "minority" and the associated condition that Serbs living in Croatia swear their loyalty to the Croatian Republic, the impounding can be interpreted as a defensive act: the attempt to control access to weapons that could potentially be used against the Serbian minority. At the same time, the confiscated weapons provided the Yugoslav Army with "a vast military advantage over the nascent armed forces of the [Croat] republic" (Posen 1993: 37). Even with hindsight, it is difficult to say to what extent this action was driven by a purely offensive or defensive intent.

As long as it is impossible to judge an opponent's intent by his actions, the main mechanism that ethnic groups will use to determine offensive implications of another's sense of identity is "history: how did other groups behave the last time they were unconstrained" (ibid.: 30)? Posen points out that "Serbs and Croats have a terrifying oral history of each other's behavior" (ibid.: 36) that goes beyond a history of more intense conflict dating back over 100 years. Given such a history of violent inter-ethnic conflict, any efforts to increase group cohesion by touting shared suffering during conflict is likely to be seen as vilification and saber-rattling by others. Even without a history of conflict, "the 'groupness' of the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic collectives that emerge from collapsed empires gives each of them an inherent offensive military power" (ibid.: 30). The combination of group cohesion and a history of confrontation produces a risk-reward structure that makes it attractive for actors to "choose the offensive if they wish to survive" (ibid.: 28).

2.3 Elite Selection

So far, the discussion has focussed on the two polar cases in the debate on the influence of political leaders. Elite-manipulation theorists place the blame of ethnic civil wars squarely with the leaders of ethnic groups, arguing that they encourage conflict in an attempt to bolster their waning power. Proponents of the ethnic security dilemma see structural or situational forces at work, leaving political elites little or no room to maneuver.

Both schools of thought make convincing arguments. Political leaders cannot reasonably be expected to be an exception to the principal-agent problem. It is rational for them to look out for their personal interest (Brubaker 1998) and fear of democratization provides a powerful motive (Snyder & Ballentine 1996). At the same time, democratization does force ethnic groups to consider the intentions of their neighbors, especially if earlier interactions have been conflict-ridden.

Other parts of both arguments seem less convincing. Gagnon (2004) argues that elites were able to skillfully steer the public discourse away from political change towards ethnic conflict even though ethnicity was initially non-issue for the majority of the population. Still, one needs to ask whether the likes of Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman could have been successful in framing the debate if ethnicity was not already meaningful to their audience. Not only were Milosevic's claims not disproven by ambiguous Croat actions (De Figueiredo & Weingast 1999), they also seemed realistic due to a substantial history of inter-ethnic conflict. While the majority of people may have preferred to work towards increasing the standard of living and economic security —as polls at the turn of the decade indicate (Gagnon 2004: 33; see also Burg & Berbaum 1989)—once the old system with its safe-guards is being dismantled, security considerations would become more urgent and their immediacy would trump longer-term considerations.

Just as the expectation of thorough elite control over public discourse seems too extreme, the assumption of anarchy in the "ethnic security dilemma" is overstated. While institutions will be weakened as the political regime is being reformed, a complete break-down of the apparatus of state power seems rare. And in the case of Yugoslavia, there was

no non-ethnic superior power that disappeared, leaving the ethnic groups to their own devices. Rather, the same elites were at work both before and after the onset of reforms, and they had roughly the same power apparatus at their disposal until the conflict started to escalate.

In the following, an alternative theory is proposed; a hybrid of these two schools of thought that focuses on a characteristic unique to democratization processes: the inherent need to define the demos.

Recent empirical studies have clearly shown that periods of democratization are associated not only with a higher risk of international war (Mansfield & Snyder 2005 and earlier studies) and there is initial empirical evidence that the likelihood of civil war also rises (Cederman, Hug & Krebs 2010 forthcoming). What can explain this significant deviation in the conflict risk in comparison with other periods in a country's history? Neither temporary weakness of state institutions nor the threat to personal positions of power make likely candidates: both can occur during other regime-type changes and even during regime changes that do not affect the nature of the political system.[3]

The key difference between democratizations and other changes to the regime is that any move towards democracy requires an answer to the demos question. The issue of who can partake in the government and influence the future of all inhabitants forces citizens to examine their loyalties. Is their allegiance to an ethnically heterogeneous state stronger than their loyalty to a more narrowly defined group of kin? This question is not contingent on the presence of anarchy, and it does not require that ethnic differences were of great concern immediately prior to the onset of the transition.

When debating of the demos question, ethnic identities are one of multiple competing loyalties that inhabitants choose from. Assuming that they choose rationally, they can be expected to assess the utility of each of their identities. A history of ethnicity-based exclusion, discrimination, persecution and conflict will lead them to prefer the loyalty to a smaller, ethnically homogenous group over the potentially risky cohabitation with

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3 N.B. The threat to political leaders is substantially stronger in a non-democratizing context. E.g. the majority of irregular removals from power and punishments at the end of a leader's reign (incl. imprisonment, exile and death) occur in autocracies, independent of whether these regimes are moving towards democracy or not.

members of other ethnicities. This can be an alternative origin for an ethnic security dilemma: even if there is no anarchy yet, the potential of drastic consequences such as an attack by another ethnic group—even when very improbable—may lead risk-averse people to place their faith only in their own group. Such considerations also explain why the population of Yugoslavia shifted their focus from the issues of economic prosperity to ethnic divisions: physiological needs and safety considerations receive the highest priority (Maslow 1943). The desire to avoid the worst-case scenario of a violent attack then leads to a spiral or mistrust and suspicion similar to the one described in the ethnic security dilemma.

In essence, the nature of democratization processes allows us to extend the theory of the ethnic security dilemma in two ways. Firstly, it allows us to relax the assumption that a previous, protective authority has ceased to exist. Instead, it is the necessity to reflect on potential future behavior that causes the same dynamic. Moreover, democratization provides the reason why ethnicity suddenly becomes meaningful, even when—as critics of the ethnic security dilemma have pointed out[4]—it did not play a major role in public discourse before. The choice among different identities is at the heart of the democratization process, and this choice will be guided both by lived experience and expectations of future behavior.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that political leaders have no role to play in this dynamic: "it is scarcely controversial to point out the opportunism and cynicism of political elites, or to underscore the crucial role of elites" (Brubaker 1998: 289), and the intuition behind the theory of elite manipulation is reasonable. Yet, here too, the democratization process is at the heart of the matter. The first democratic elections will create winners and losers, and they force political elites—both incumbents and challengers—to compete for votes. The politician that realizes and most effectively addresses the dominant issue for voters has the highest chance of being elected. But this is not a re-framing of public discourse away from topics that the population actually values more, i.e. a process of top-down manipulation in the sense of Kaufman (2001).

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4   See for example Gagnon (2004), who reports that less than 20% of the population of the Croatian part of Yugoslavia perceived other ethnic groups as threatening prior to initiation of democratization at the sub-federal level.

Instead, it is an accurate assessment of the subject that will influence voters most, a realistic assessment of the public's concerns. If fears for group survival resonate with the public at all, they will trump other concerns and they will lead the public to back the leader that most credibly promises to deal with this threat. Unless they have been removed from power at the start of the democratization process, incumbents often still possess preferential access to news media as well as control over the power apparatus of the state. This implies that they have better means to position themselves as a non-diplomatic "defender of the people", and the impending loss of office would motivate them to do so. In turn, this reaffirms the security dynamic made possible by the onset of democratization: now the potential safety threat posed by other ethnic groups becomes bigger with any leader arguing for the need of protection.

In essence, the ongoing, newly democratic process of elite selection provides an ideal means to capture public attention—the "fear" for their safety—and an obvious motivation for using it by any leader or challenger. This also shows the synthesis between ethnic security dilemma and elite manipulation theory: leaders are aware of the security problem and they do take advantage of it. However, the origin of the safety worries is not a skillful manipulation by cunning leaders, it is the necessity to answer the demos question that is caused by the movement towards democracy.

2.4 Comparing the Three Causal Paths

The discussion has proposed three different theories explaining the onset of ethnic civil war in settings of democratization (or even in regime-type change in general). In order to test the three competing causal paths, testable hypotheses for these theories along three crucial dimensions will now be derived: democratization, ethnicity and leadership. Table 1 summarizes the different arguments and the resulting predictions by these three schools of thought.

Democratization

Both the elite manipulation and ethnic security dilemma require a weakness of or a change in the apparatus of state power that either threatens leaders or ethnic groups. Transitions to democracy satisfy both conditions since regime-type change often

involves regime change and since there is likely a gap between the dismantling of old institutions and the construction of their successors.

In contrast, the theory of elite selection *requires* a movement towards democracy, since it posits the need to address the demos question as the cause of a spiral of rising suspicion that eventually leads groups to favor taking the offensive.

In summary, all three theories predict democratizations to be troublesome times.

> *H1.   Democratization increases the risk of civil war.*

Ethnicity

Likewise, all three theories require the presence of ethnic identities: to be skillfully manipulated by self-serving leaders (elite manipulation), to serve as one potential level of loyalty competing with others as an answer to the demos question (elite selection), or to act as the primary level of loyalty for inhabitants in the absence of a protective, overarching state authority (ethnic security dilemma).

> *H2a.   The presence of relevant ethnic dimensions increases the risk of civil war.*

However, the requirements posed by the elite selection theory are more stringent: only ethnic identities that have been politicized through exclusion, discrimination or even prior conflict should cause any realistic security worries during democratization periods.

> *H2b.   The presence of politicized ethnic dimensions increases the risk of civil war.*

Leadership

The ethnic security dilemma differs from the two other theories in predicting that elite actions do not play a decisive role: not working to defend your group leaves it at the mercy of others, working to defend your group is perceived as preparation for an offensive and invites attack. Once the dilemma has formed, the actions of an individual leader would not matter.

	Elite manipulation	Elite selection	Ethnic security dilemma
Democratization	Democratization threatens incumbents who seek to defend their power.	Democratization requires an answer to the demos question. The population is forced to weigh their loyalty to state and ethnic kin based on the potential threat from others.	The absence of a stabilizing force engenders safety concerns at the level of ethnic groups.
	Prediction: H1 holds, democratization increases the risk of civil war.		
Ethnicity	Ethnicity is a mobilization tool, with political leaders defining or choosing ethnic boundaries suitable to their goals and escalating conflict along this identity dimension.	Ethnic identities are one of several potential answer to the demos question. Loyalty to ethnic kin will be preferred if ethnic divisions have previously been politicized through exclusion, discrimination or conflict.	Given anarchy at the state level, ethnic groups are the most relevant organizations for inhabitants. Threats to personal safety are perceived along ethnic divisions.
	Prediction: H2a holds, the presence of relevant ethnic dimensions increases the risk of civil war.	*Prediction*: H2b holds, the presence of *politicized* ethnic dimensions increases the risk of civil war.	*Prediction*: H2a holds, the presence of relevant ethnic dimensions increases the risk of civil war.
Leadership	Political leaders compete for public support by positioning themselves on the most relevant issues. Realizing that safety trumps more abstract economic and political issues, maverick politicians manipulate the public to create such fears, then portray selves as undiplomatic defenders of one ethnic group, increasing/securing personal power.	Political leaders compete for public support by positioning themselves on the most relevant issues. Given politicized ethnic divisions, personal safety trumps more abstract economic and political issues, leading elites to portray themselves as undiplomatic defenders to an ethnic group, and being selected for this trait.	Political leaders are by default aligned with an ethnic group and are trapped in a situation where any action makes their group less safe.
	Prediction: H3 holds, threats to the incumbent are associated with a higher risk of civil war.		*Prediction*: H3 does not hold, threats to the incumbent are not associated with a higher risk of civil war.

Table 1: Predictions by the theories of elite manipulation, elite selection and ethnic security dilemma

On the other hand, both elite manipulation and elite selection argue that a threat to the power of the incumbent is associated with a higher risk for conflict. Proponents of the elite manipulation theory go furthest in arguing that conflict is the direct result of an active reframing of the public discourse. The elite selection theory argues that while competing political leaders add momentum to the security worries (e.g. through a

process such as ethnic outbidding), the initial cause is the democratization process, i.e. reducing the link from causation to correlation.

> H3.　　*A threat to the power of the incumbent leader is associated with a*
> *higher risk of civil war.*

The following section presents the data and methods that will be used to test these hypotheses.

3　Methodology

The previous section has provided an overview of three competing theories that attempt to explain the onset of civil war, and has offered hypotheses regarding the role of democratization, ethnicity and political leaders. In this section, the operationalization of the relevant concepts is discussed, starting with the onset of civil war as the dependent variable and then covering democratization, presence and politicization of ethnic divisions, and threats to the incumbent. Finally, the applied regression techniques will be presented.

3.1　Operationalizing Civil-war Onset

The onset of civil war is the dependent variable for this analysis and an appropriate dummy variable indicating the onset of civil war is conveniently provided by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflicts data-set (ACD; Gleditsch et al. 2002 , Version 4/2008). The ACD indicator is preferred over other data-sets due to its extensive coverage and its sensitivity to low-intensity conflict.[5] Years of ongoing conflict are excluded from the analysis and a dummy variable controls for prior episodes of civil war.

3.2　Operationalizing Democratization

Cederman, Hug & Krebs (2010 forthcoming) provide a mechanism for identifying democratization periods in governance indicators that is more flexible than lag structures. The period-finding process distinguishes between stable periods of little or no

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5　ACD uses a minimum of 25 annual battle-related fatalities, while others such as the Correlates of War
　　data-set operate with a substantially higher threshold of 1'000 deaths. Cederman, Hug & Krebs (2010
　　forthcoming) show that this high threshold makes it difficult to establish the effect of democratization
　　periods.

variability in the governance indicator and transition periods during which the governance indicator deviates more than a set limit from the average of the stable period. The resulting dummy codes '1' whenever a transition period has resulted in a new stable period that is substantially more democratic than the previous stable state.
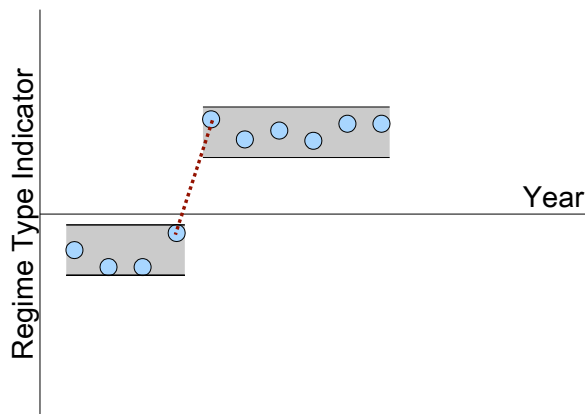

Figure 1: A completed democratization is coded when the regime stabilizes at a more democratic level.
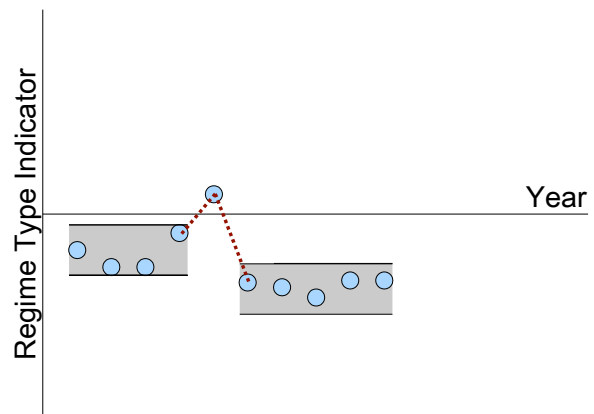
Figure 2: An attempted democratization is coded when the regime made a substantial move towards democracy, but the changes were reversed almost immediately.

For the purpose of this study, the democratization dummy demonstrated in Cederman, Hug & Krebs (ibid.) and originally based on the Polity IV indicator (Marshall et al. 2002) is adjusted in three ways. Firstly, the democratization indicator is extended to include not only democratization efforts that result in a new, more democratic stable period, but to also include *attempts* at democratization. Such democratization attempts are coded when the governance indicator registers a substantially higher level of democracy for a short while, but these changes to the regime type are reversed so quickly that no new, more democratic stable period could be established. (Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the difference.) The reasoning for this adjustment is that hypothesis H1a does not require democratization to be successful. The direction of causality runs both ways: an attempted democratization can lead to conflict, but the outbreak of conflict will likely diminish the chances of successfully completing the democratization process. Cases of attempted democratization are theoretically relevant and their explicit inclusion seems prudent.

Secondly, Cederman, Hug & Krebs (2010) show empirically that conflict processes triggered by democratization take more than one year to unfold. For this reason, the

democratization dummy is modified to include any attempted move towards democracy in the current or the preceding three years, as was done in the original study.

Finally, the democratization dummy used here is calculated on the basis of the Scalar Index of Polities (SIP) indicator (Gates et al. 2006).[6] As shown by Vreeland (2008), Polity IV suffers from an explicit inclusion of violent conflict in the operationalization of its participation components. These elements are partially removed in Cederman, Hug & Krebs (2010), but the solution offered by the SIP indicator avoids the loss of the important participation component.

3.3 Operationalizing Ethnic Relevance & Politicization

The relevance and politicization of ethnicity is coded using the novel Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data-set introduced in Wimmer, Cederman & Min (2009) and Cederman, Wimmer & Min (2010). The data-set relies on an extensive expert coding of all relevant ethnic groups and the extent to which they partook in government power in the post-WW2 period. This study uses two variables from version 1.04 of the EPR data-set

Firstly, the coding whether ethnic distinctions were at all relevant will be used to operationalize the presence of ethnic dimensions required by hypothesis H2a. This dummy variable distinguishes between cases where ethnic distinctions play a role in the country's political life (the majority of countries and 79.64% of all country-years under analysis), and cases where it does not (both Koreas are examples for this category).

Secondly, the EPR data-set provides country-level summaries of the share of ethnic groups that are actively excluded from political power on the basis of their ethnicity. This variable counts the share of excluded groups out of the total of politically relevant ethnic groups in the county and is directly based on the experts' assessments of each group. This variable presupposes the existence of relevant ethnic identities and therefore is missing for all countries without ethnic distinctions.

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6   $\Delta\nu$ is set equal to one standard deviation of the SIP indicator, since this approx. corresponds to the length of the SIP scale occupied by democracies. This is equivalent to Cederman, Hug & Krebs' (2010) approach when using Polity IV, since it prevents a low-score democracy from being coded as democratizing (again) when it improves its score.

3.4 Operationalizing Threats to the Incumbent

According to hypothesis H3 (based on the theories of elite manipulation and elite selection) a threat against the incumbent should be positively correlated with the onset of civil war. However, no useful indicator for threats against political leaders exists until now. Fortunately, the new Archigos data-set (Goemans, Gleditsch & Chiozza 2009, version 2.9) enables the estimation of such a variable. Archigos provides personal information for political leaders, as well as the beginning and end dates of each leader's reign(s). This data can be used in a logistic regression to assess factors that may present a threat to the incumbent, and to estimate the probability of a threat based on these factors.

Two types of events can be understood as a threat to the incumbent: the loss of political power, and more drastically, the punishment of the leader. Archigos provides relevant information for both categories. Removals from power are divided into four categories: regular and irregular removals, death by natural causes and removals by another state. For the purpose of this study, irregular removals seem to be the best indicator for a threat against a political leaders power.[7] Archigos also provides data on punishments meted out to leaders after their reign, including imprisonment, exile and death.[8] For the purpose of simplicity, all punishments are included in our analysis. This yields two dependent variables capturing threats to political leaders: irregular removal from power and punishment in any form.

Causes of such threats to incumbents can be grouped into three categories. Firstly, there are factors related to the reign, particularly its length and the regime type. It can be hypothesized that rulers remaining in office for uncommonly long periods may only be removable through extraordinary means. Archigos allows the length of reign to be calculated. Similarly, it can be hypothesized that incumbents ruling without any

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7   Loss of power in a regular manner leaves the political leader with many open options, including regaining power through equally regular means. It is therefore unlikely to cause the drastic reactions expected by the "elite manipulation" theory. Death by natural causes and removals by another state are unlikely to be remedied by internal agitation and therefore also need to be discarded.

8   It should be noted that death as a post-tenure fate is coded to include not just death sentences handed down by the judiciary or new government after the removal from power, but also any case where the leader is killed while in office (e.g. during a coup, assassination etc.).

constraints on the executive may rule in a self-serving way that attracts attempts to unseat and punish them. While this information is not included in Archigos, it can be obtained by matching the assessment of executive constraints from the Polity IV data-set to the reign of each leader (Marshall et al. 2002).

Secondly, a country's history of threats against its leaders can be used to estimate the threat level. Political actors will reasonably forecast the likelihood of threatening future events using prior occurrences. This is operationalized as a continuous variable measuring the years since the last occurrence, since recent events are more comparable to the current situation and should influence leader's actions more than older cases.[9]

Thirdly, the current situation can be a threat. In particular, a regime-type transition can indicate an imminent threat to the leader. A dummy for such transition periods can be constructed using the Polity IV governance indicator (ibid.), coding '1' for every country-year in which a change in the indicator value or a missing value due to foreign intervention, anarchy or regime-type transitions is recorded.[10]

Finally, personal factors such as age and gender, which should not have any influence on the threat to the incumbent, are included in the analysis as controls.

Table 2 shows the results of leader-year logistic regression models assessing the likelihood of these two types of threats as a function of the six independent variables derived above. The individual units of analysis are years of leadership tenure.

As the results show, none of the personal characteristics of the leader and her reign play a significant role. In the case the control variables for age and gender, this was to be

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9   In country-years where there has been no prior recorded case in the post-WW2 period, 1946 is used as the date of the last instance to avoid the loss of a large number of cases. All analyses were repeated with a dummy recording merely the existence of of a prior case of irregular removal or punishment to ensure that this recoding does not produce misleading results. The regression results remain equivalent to those presented here.

10 Despite the limitations of the Polity IV data-set discussed before, this indicator is used here due its provision of transition onset information that is precise to the day. This information is required to avoid cases in which transformations follow the end of the leader's reign but occur in the same year. To avoid cases in which transitions are coded based on a heightened likelihood or the actual occurrence of conflict (Vreeland 2008), any transition involving the problematic codes of the PARCOMP and PARREG components were removed the data-set

expected. And while both an extraordinary time in office and a lack of executive constraints could reasonably be expected to attract attempts to unseat the incumbent in an irregular fashion and to punish her afterwards, this does not appear to occur frequently in practice. Of course, a lack of executive constraints also gives any leader extraordinary powers to secure her position, and only leaders who succeeded at securing their power will be able to hold on to it for abnormally long periods.

	Irregular Removal	*Punishment*
Time in office	0.009	0.013
	(0.77)	(1.17)
No executive constraints[11]	0.193	0.020
	(1.19)	(0.12)
Prior occurrence[12]	-0.056 ***	-0.040 ***
	(-7.18)	(-6.28)
Transition Period[13]	1.733 ***	1.602 ***
	(12.04)	(11.27)
Age	0.004	0.001
	(0.69)	(0.16)
Gender	0.007	0.206
	(0.01)	(0.48)
Constant	-3.256 ***	-2.563 ***
	(-9.85)	(-6.96)
N	7'750	7'750
-2LL	-1054.8 ***	-999.0 ***

*Table 2: Threats to incumbents (t-score in brackets; * p < 0.05   ** p < 0.01   *** p < 0.001)*

The second and third category of causes of potential threats—prior history of such threats and ongoing regime-type transformations—have sizable and highly significant effects in the right direction. Recent cases of irregular removal from power and or punishment after removal increase the likelihood of future recurrences substantially—an effect that fades with time. An irregular removal in the immediate past leads to a 5.53% higher probability of a future irregular removal when compared to no case of irregular removal for the entire 58-year period of observation. (The corresponding value for punishments is 8.44%.)

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11 The lack of executive constraints is lagged by one year to avoid reverse causality.

12 The occurrence variables are based on the same event as the dependent variable.

13 Transition periods are discarded if they occurred in the same year as, but after the removal of a leader, yielding only transitions that occurred during the reign of the incumbent.

Ongoing regime-type transformations yield an even bigger risk to incumbents. In such years, the risk of irregular removal from power increases by 8.65%, with the risk of punishment increasing by 12.25%.

Based on this preliminary analysis, two factors will be used to estimate the threat to incumbents in the following models on the risk of civil-war onset: regime-type transformations and prior occurrences of threatening events. Since the two types of threat obviously share a large amount of cases,[14] only the risk of irregular removal is taken into consideration in the following analysis to avoid multicollinearity.

The indicator values for the risk to any leader are based on the predicted impact for these two variables derived from the first regression model in Table 2. Since both the indicator for previous irregular removals and the dummy for an ongoing transition period vary only over time and by country, but not by leader, the resulting estimate for the risk to incumbents can safely be used in the country-level analyses to follow.

3.5 Modeling Approach

The hypotheses regarding the role of democratization, ethnicity and leadership on civil-war onset can now be tested empirically. For this purpose, a binomial logit model with country-year observations as units of analysis is used. Temporal autocorrelation is compensated by including a dummy for prior civil war and the year in linear, squared and cubed form (Carter and Signorino 2009). Observations are clustered by country to account for correlation among the observations of each country. Additionally, controls for population size and GDP per capita are included (lagged and on a logarithmic scale; Gleditsch 2002b, Version 4.1) since both factors have shown a robust influence on the onset of conflict (Hegre & Sambanis 2006). The absolute and squared value of SIP are included to allow for effects that the regime type may have on the likelihood of conflict.[15] Finally, any years of ongoing civil war are excluded from the data-set

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14 Over 20% of all reigns ended with both irregular removal and punishment, while only 9.4% ended with one, but not the other.

15 Hegre et al. 2001 and Gleditsch 2002a find a substantial effect for mixed regime types or anocracies.

4 Results

The empirical analysis proceeds in three steps that correspond to the three components theorized to drive conflict: firstly, the role of democratization (as opposed to lack of state strength) is assessed. Secondly, information on the relevance and politicization of ethnicity is included. Finally, information on the threat to political leaders is added to the model. Table 3 presents the results.

Model 1 provides an initial test of the influence that democratization has on the likelihood of civil war. The effect is both significant and oriented in the right direction: as predicted in hypothesis H1, democratization increases the risk of civil-war onset substantially, by 5.16%. This confirms the earlier finding (Cederman, Hug & Krebs 2010) that democratization phases are also riskier at the intra-state level. The control variables behave roughly as expected. There seems to be no general time trend and the influence of prior conflicts on the risk of future onsets is only significant at the 10% level. Both GDP per capita and population size behave as expected: increases in average income reduce the probability of civil-war onset while increases in population size make conflict more likely. A curvilinear effect of regime type that corresponds to a heightened conflict risk in mixed-type regimes cannot be detected.

Model 2a adds the indicator for the presence of politically relevant ethnic divisions. Indeed, ethnic divisions seem to increase the likelihood of civil war without influencing the effect of the other explanatory terms, strengthening hypothesis H2a. Countries in which multiple ethnic groups are politically relevant are saddled with a 1.49% higher risk of civil conflict.

Model 2b then takes the presence of relevant ethnic groups as a precondition, since the indicator for exclusion along ethnic lines requires the existence of such lines. Here, too, ethnicity has a noticeable effect: when comparing the extreme cases of virtually complete exclusion of ethnic groups and no exclusion whatsoever along ethnic lines, the former country faces a 2.11% higher risk of an outbreak of civil war. Despite the fact that the political relevance of ethnicity is already accounted for (by the exclusion of all other observations), this coefficient still achieves some significance. This risk is also clearly separate from the history of prior conflict, which remains insignificant.

	Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3
Democratization	1.449 ***	1.394 ***	1.448 ***	1.339 ***
	(5.66)	(5.51)	(5.49)	(4.94)
Relevant ethnicity		1.068 **		
		(2.86)		
Politicized ethnicity			0.878 *	0.885 *
			(2.53)	(2.54)
Threat to incumbent				13.201 *
				(2.06)
SIP	-0.415	-0.687	-0.735	-0.769
	(-0.30)	(-0.45)	(-0.46)	(-0.48)
SIP²	-0.288	0.122	0.311	0.372
	(-0.20)	(0.08)	(0.19)	(0.23)
Population size	0.161 *	0.163 *	0.125	0.125
	(2.08)	(1.98)	(1.41)	(1.43)
GDP per capita	-0.330 ***	-0.331 **	-0.366 **	-0.363 **
	(-3.40)	(-3.22)	(-3.20)	(-3.20)
Prior onset	0.458	0.325	0.256	0.254
	(1.86)	(1.29)	(0.95)	(0.95)
t	0.094	0.101	0.133	0.130
	(1.02)	(1.06)	(1.34)	(1.31)
t²	-0.003	-0.003	-0.004	-0.004
	(-0.83)	(-0.82)	(-1.14)	(-1.11)
t³	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.99)	(0.96)
Constant	-4.600 **	-5.610 ***	-4.359 **	-4.393 **
	(-2.91)	(-3.36)	(-2.66)	(-2.71)
N	5'288	4'881	3'887	3'887
-2LL	-573.1 ***	-543.5 ***	-495.4 ***	-494.0 ***

*Table 3: Onset of civil war (t-score in brackets; * p < 0.05   ** p < 0.01   *** p < 0.001)*

Finally, model 3 introduces the indicator for the risk to the incumbent developed in section 3.4. As argued by hypothesis H3, the presence of a threat to the incumbent leader increases the risk of an outbreak of civil war significantly. In the absence of any risk factors, the likelihood of civil war is 2.86% lower than in a case where both risk factors—a history of prior irregular removal and an ongoing transition period—are both present. It should be noted that this second component of the leadership risk indicator, the transition period, weakly correlates with the democratization indicator. Therefore it is not surprising that the democratization indicator loses a little of its value between models 2b

and 3. However, the coefficient for democratization significant at the 1‰ level and with 5.52%, the estimated effect remains of roughly the same value as in preceding models.

5 Conclusion

This paper aimed to test three different theories regarding the influence of political leaders on the onset of civil war in ethnically heterogeneous countries. The two polar positions in the literature argue either that political leaders cause the outbreak of ethno-nationalist conflict by manipulating the public for self-serving reasons (elite manipulation), or that political leaders have little to no influence on the onset of civil war due to the structural forces of an ethnic security dilemma.

The present results suggest that a combination of factors characteristic of democratization phases have a relevant role to play. The elite selection theory is based on two pillars explaining the onset of conflict. Firstly, democratization forces citizens to consider the demos question: how and among which ethnic groups should the access to political power be distributed? The question whether citizens trust members of other groups will strongly be influenced by prior politicization of ethnic divisions through political exclusion, discrimination or even violent conflict. At the same time, people are tasked with selecting their leaders, either during elections or in the preparation thereof, when candidates position themselves to be nominated by their ethnic group or political party. It is this concurrence of elite selection with the presence of an ideal subject for voter mobilization—safety worries regarding the potential behavior of other ethnic groups—that can lead a country towards conflict.

The present study sought to test these three theories using large-N regression analysis. Three levels of conflict factors were introduced to distinguish the different theories.

Firstly, an indicator of an ongoing democratization phase was used to verify the joint prediction by all three theories that democratization increases the risk of violent conflict. The democratization indicator achieved a high level of significance and a substantial influence on the likelihood of civil war throughout the analysis, strengthening H1 and adding to the evidence of prior studies (Cederman, Hug & Krebs 2010) that Mansfield & Snyder's result (1995 and following) can be transferred to the intra-state level.

Secondly, the relevance of ethnicity was contrasted with the more narrowly defined presence of politicized ethnic divisions. Both indicators had the hypothesized effect, with the existence of politicized divisions adding to the risk of conflict even after the relevance of ethnicity had been accounted for. While this conforms with the predictions of the elite selection theory, it does not weaken the competing theory of ethnic security dilemmas. A pre-existing conflict could be argued to strengthen the structural forces leading to such a dilemma. On the other hand, this result highlights the distinction between the elite manipulation and elite selection theories. Can one speak of elites reframing public debate if the concerns are already present in the population and conflict onset appears more likely when the population has substantial, justified concerns about the behavior of other ethnic groups? Does this not rather indicate that political leaders respond to the worries of their constituents? The actions of Slobodan Milosevic in April 1987 can serve as an example. At that time, Milosevic was sent to Kosovo to prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions after continued discrimination and instances of violence directed at Serbian inhabitants of the province. In local council sessions, he was arguing strongly for national unity: "we must draw the line that divides the honest and progressive people, who struggle for brotherhood and unity and national equality from the counterrevolutionaries and nationalists on the other side" (Auerswald and Auerswald, 2000: 11). Only when confronted by crowds of worried Serbs outside the meeting place did he react by stating "no one should dare beat you" (ibid.: 10).

Thirdly and finally, an indicator for the threat to the incumbent was developed in order to differentiate between the ethnic security dilemma, which assumes no influence of the risk to the incumbent on the likelihood of civil war, and the theories of elite selection and elite manipulation, which both assume a correlation and which are both strengthened by the results.

The outcome of the empirical analysis supports the proposed theory of elite selection. Democratization periods do appear substantially more risky and the presence of previously politicized ethnic divisions suggests that the population is already concerned about the potential risks of "ethnic cohabitation". Finally, the fact that the risk to incumbent leaders has a significant influence on the outbreak of violent conflict suggests

that the competition between the present leader and potential challengers does play an important role in the dynamic of conflict onset.

However, the tools of large-N regression analysis only serve to test the correlation between factors and both the theories of elite manipulation and (to a lesser extent) ethnic security dilemma are supported by the evidence as well. The resulting challenge is therefore to establish the causal chain leading up to civil war. For this reason, follow-up research will focus on tracing the event history of a number of pathway cases to be selected on the basis of this regression study to differentiate between the theories of elite manipulation and elite selection that are both supported by the importance of leadership threats in this study.

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