The Ethnic Structure of Civil Conflict

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Ethnic groups can be defined in multiple ways, as ethnic practice varies across countries, reflecting the most salient social cleavage in each society. In addition to the ethnic practice which defines the groups, the underlying ethnic structure creates crosscutting or reinforcing cleavages which affect conflict likelihood. Minority groups that differ in both religion and language from the dominant ethnic group are twice as likely to experience conflict when ethnicity is defined by religion as they are when ethnicity is defined by language. This finding demonstrates that the degree of cultural similarity or difference between ethnic groups is less important than the context in which the groups exist. The salient cleavage, which determines ethnic practice, conditions intergroup relations and determines the effect of secondary cleavages in society.

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Ethnic conflict became a major concern after the Cold War, as the world perceived a surge in conflicts fueled by ethnic divisions in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Rwanda, and Burundi (Fearon and Laitin 2003). More recently there has been a rise in concern regarding religious conflict, with Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, Al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram grabbing headlines. Is the rise in violence by Islamic groups a sign of a new phenomenon, or is it simply ethnic conflict by another name? Many theories suggest that religious diversity is more likely to promote conflict than ethno-linguistic divisions. Other theories argue that whether these social cleavages reinforce or crosscut each other is central to determining the probability of conflict. This paper investigates the relationship between religious and linguistic cleavages, finding that the effect of ethnic structure is conditional on ethnic practice, and that religious differences can increase conflict propensity in some contexts, while reducing conflict likelihood under other conditions.

Individual identity is composed of an array of identity factors. Ethnic groups, however, are usually defined primarily by a single factor (Posner 2005). Ethnic groups are composed of a collection of people who share a particular facet of their personal identities in common. They are therefore necessarily homogenous in terms of their definitional identity, but they are not necessarily homogenous in other identities. A linguistically defined group may be composed of members of a single religion, or its members may belong to several religious communities. Two ethnic groups will therefore differ completely in terms of the cleavage that defines the groups, but that difference may be crosscut or reinforced by other social identities. I theorize that the effect of these secondary identities differs based on the nature of the primary cleavage, which defines the ethnic groups, with linguistically defined groups responding differently to reinforcing cleavages than religiously defined groups do.
Afghanistan and Syria provide useful examples of states that are both linguistically and religiously diverse, but that define ethnicity differently. Afghanistan is divided primarily along linguistic lines, with Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks, among others, while Syria is divided primarily along religious lines, with Alawites, Sunnis, Druze and Christians. In both cases this primary cleavage exists alongside secondary cleavages. Afghanistan includes both Sunnis and Shia, while Syria is populated by both Arabs and Kurds. Although two states may be linguistically and religiously diverse, the effect of defining ethnicity religiously in one and linguistically in another greatly affects the risk of conflict.

The social cleavage that defines ethnicity primes individuals, and society as a whole, to view the relations between groups in different ways. I argue that in societies where ethnic groups are defined by language, these groups bargain with each other as separate communities competing for power in order to maximize their economic wellbeing. Conversely, in societies divided into religious ethnic groups, the dominant group is constrained in its ability to compromise with other ethnic groups over key social issues. Ethnic groups which are defined by their religion possess a ready-made list of behavioral rules and norms which are linked to their identity. Limits on their ability to compromise on these issues limits their ability to reach compromises with other religious groups within the state. These social and moral factors associated with religiously defined ethnic groups create situations that are more likely to provoke conflict, as other groups in society resist the imposition of the dominant group’s moral and behavioral rules.

The primary, definitional cleavage in a country determines the effect of secondary cleavages. In a country with religiously defined ethnic groups, social and moral issues are of primary concern. In this situation crosscutting cleavages decrease the probability of conflict, since the social differences due to religion are alleviated by a shared linguistic identity. When the
primary religious cleavage is reinforced by a secondary linguistic difference, the social differences between groups are maximized, making it difficult for groups to find acceptable negotiated settlements regarding social policy.

In a society where the ethnic groups are defined by language, and a religious difference reinforces the primary linguistic division, the definition of the groups is particularly clear, facilitating negotiated settlements to political and economic issues. On the other hand, linguistic groups that share a religion have a social connection which can complicate political negotiations. In this situation members of the out-of-power group may attempt to use their religious connection to the dominant group to redefine the politically salient social division, complicating political negotiations between ethnic groups. Therefore, linguistic groups which also differ religiously from the dominant group are less likely to experience conflict, as their social differences from the dominant group allow them to interact solely in the economic and political sphere, avoiding difficult social issues.

These dynamics create a situation where a dyad of ethnic groups which differ in both language and religion can be very conflict prone when their primary social identity is religious, and very unlikely to experience conflict when the primary cleavage in society is linguistic. When the primary social division is religion the risk of conflict from an ethnic group with a reinforcing difference on a secondary cleavage is more than twice as high as when the primary division in society is language. This finding demonstrates that the effect of a given ethnic structure on conflict likelihood is conditional on the ethnic practice of the society in which the groups exist. Religious and linguistic diversity can encourage conflict, but can also produce peaceful societies in different social environments.
The paper proceeds to first review the literature on ethnicity, identity, and conflict, focusing on literature related to the interaction of language and religion in ethnic politics. I then outline my theory of the conditional effect of primary ethnic cleavages on secondary cleavages. This is followed by a description of the data and empirical tests which demonstrate that religiously defined ethnic groups with secondary linguistic differences are significantly more likely to engage in civil conflict than linguistically defined groups with secondary religious differences.

**Ethnic Structure and Civil Conflict**

Ethnic structure consists of all of the identities that exist in a society (Chandra 2009). Religion and language are among the most common elements of this structure. Given a certain ethnic structure, the practice of ethnicity determines which of these identities will be activated in order to guide behavior (Chandra and Wilkinson 2008; Chandra 2009). Which identities are activated is the result of a variety of social and political factors (Posner 2004; 2005; Christia 2012). This ethnic practice results in politically relevant ethnic groups forming around certain social identities in specific places and times.

Much of the literature examining ethnic conflict from a quantitative perspective considers ethnicity in its broadest sense, without distinguishing between linguistic and religious groups. Even studies that measure linguistic and religious diversity separately often theorize that the effect of these differences will be the same (Fearon, and Laitin 2003). One reason for the reliance on unidimensional measures of ethnicity is the lack of available data on ethnic structure. Much of the quantitative literature relies on data derived from the *Atlas Narodov Mira* (Taylor and Hudson 1972; Mauro 1995; Easterly and Levine 1997; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and

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2 EPR-ED data set codes all politically-relevant ethnic groups as having at least one language and religion, although some ethnic groups are coded as having a religion of “Atheist.” For purposes of this paper Atheist is treated as a religious identity when comparing religious similarities between linguistically-defined ethnic groups, despite not being an actual religion.
Hoeffler 2004; see Fearon 2003 for a comparison of this data to other measures). More recently, the data available on ethnic groups has been improved by the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset. This dataset continues the practice of defining groups based on the most salient cleavage in ethnic practice, missing elements of the underlying ethnic structure. Studies that use this data therefore necessarily mix linguistic and religious identities, along with other cleavages, such as race, region, and caste (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Cederman, Buhaug, and Rod 2009; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Cederman, Weidman, and Gleditsch 2011; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Rørbæk and Knudsen 2015). Some recent EPR studies have attempted to address this shortcoming by identifying how the EPR groups are defined (Wimmer 2015), or gathering data on linguistic and religious composition for these groups (Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2015). This paper combines these approaches, by using both the definitional data from Wimmer (2015) with the relational data from Bormann, Cederman and Vogt (2015). This allows for a measurement of both the primary cleavage as practiced in society, which defines what the politically relevant ethnic groups are, as well as a measure of the ethnic structure which consists of secondary identities which either crosscut or reinforce the primary cleavage.

Few studies examine the effect of both religion and language together. One study that does address this issue is Birnir, Satana, and Sawyer (n.d.), who examine the effect of crosscutting religious identities between ethno-linguistic groups. They find that when religious similarities between ethnic groups crosscut linguistic divisions the probability of conflict can either increase or decrease contingent on the relative size of the groups. Their analysis is limited to situations in

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3 Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt (2015) address the issue of overlapping differences in language and religion, and find that when the overlap between linguistic and religious cleavages is accounted for language is the dominant factor in determining conflict likelihood. They do not directly address the effect of crosscutting cleavages.
which the ethnic groups are defined linguistically and therefore cannot compare ethno-religious groups to ethno-linguistic groups. This paper will allow for a comparison of religious and linguistic groups by measuring ethnic differences both in terms of the cleavage that defines the ethnic groups in society as well as the secondary difference between groups, which may crosscut or reinforce the primary cleavage.

Two new additions to the EPR dataset allow for measurement of both the cleavage used to define an ethnic group (Wimmer 2015), as well as the underlying linguistic and religious composition of those groups (Vogt et al. 2015; Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2015). Combining these measures allows us to account for the degree to which the primary cleavage which defines the ethnic groups is crosscut or reinforced by secondary cleavages.

Scholars have theorized that crosscutting cleavages in society will reduce the likelihood of conflict (Lipset 1960; Taylor 1970; Horowitz 1985). Recent country-level analysis has found that countries in which ethno-linguistic identity is crosscut by religion have a lower probability of civil war onset (Selway 2011; Gubler and Selway 2012). This finding does not however account for group-level dynamics, as the country-level measures used in this study subsume group-level ethnic structures, and therefore cannot account for why individual groups within a country may be more or less likely to experience conflict. Adapting the concept of crosscutting cleavages to the group-level allows for predictions about individual ethnic groups, based on their ethnic identity while also controlling for their access to political power, past history of war, and the size of the ethnic group.

*Differential Effects of Language and Religion*

Crosscutting cleavages are theorized to reduce conflict by increasing social cohesion and dividing the loyalties of individuals, reducing their attachment to any particular identity.
However, it is not clear that different types of cleavages will have the same effect. Language and religion, while both important social identities, play different roles in society. Many have identified religion as being more likely to provoke civil war (Juergensmeyer 1993; Seul 1999; Laitin 2000; Reynal-Querol 2002), but others have found language to be the more influential factor (Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2015).

Religious groups, unlike language groups, are, at least notionally, based on voluntary membership (Laitin 2000). Although in practice religion often takes on an ethnic aspect in which an individual is born into a group with little ability to change their affiliation, the concept of voluntary membership remains. Individuals are required, or at least expected, to actively participate in the religious community in order to remain a part of that community.

Religious groups usually are structured with a formal organization, including a hierarchical leadership and a set of rules. Religions supply their members with cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, and traditions that unify the religious group and influence the way that community views other groups which do not subscribe to the same beliefs (Seul 1999). This provides members with a structure and doctrine which allows them to rank the religious communities in their society, under the assumption that their religious tradition is superior to the other groups they contend with for political power (Seul 1999; Laitin 2000). In addition, Juergensmeyer (1993) argues that in virtually all religions violence occupies a central place, allowing believers to wage ‘cosmic war’ against perceived enemies.

In contrast, linguistic groups are unorganized collections of individuals who happen to speak the same language. They often share a common culture and tradition but do not possess any clearly defined doctrine. When linguistic groups do come together to organize for political purposes, their goals are usually more limited and relate to economic issues. Despite this,
language has been found to be more influential than religion in provoking civil conflict, due to its omnipresence in daily life (Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2015).

Experimental evidence shows that individuals express different political preferences depending on whether issues are framed in linguistic or religious terms. Ethno-linguistic prompts encourage individuals to prioritize local club goods affecting economic development. Religious prompts encourage individuals to prioritize behavioral issues and morality (McCauley 2014). This finding, based on individual level experimental manipulation, suggests that in societies where ethnic groups are defined by religious affiliation, individuals will be conditioned to prioritize behavioral goods, while in societies where ethnicity is defined by language, economic competition between groups will be of greater concern. These different political priorities will influence the political relations between ethnic groups and will affect which grievances are likely to motivate ethnic groups to engage in violence.

Communal grievances can emerge from economic inequalities between groups, which have been shown to increase the risk of ethnic conflict (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann 2015). Grievances can also be based on social issues and disagreements over social policies. The cleavage that defines an ethnic group is likely to impact the type of grievance that will be most salient to that group. Thinking in religious terms encourages people to be concerned with moral issues, while people primed to consider linguistic groups are more likely to be concerned with economic issues (McCauley 2014). By extension to the group level, groups that are defined by their religion will consider moral issues as the primary political issue in contention between ethnic groups, while linguistic groups will be more likely to vie for economic and material goods.
Reinforcing Cleavages and Civil Conflict

Ethnic difference by themselves should not prevent two clearly defined groups in society from finding a mutually acceptable arrangement which both sides prefer to conflict. We observe however that ethnic conflict occurs frequently, with several new ethnic conflicts breaking out in the average year. This can be explained by the effect of ethnic practice and structure on the relationships between ethnic groups. Under certain circumstances, socially diverse groups will be capable of resolving the differences between them and coexisting peacefully. Under other structural conditions, the differences between the groups will be more difficult to resolve, encouraging them to resort to violence.

When one ethnic group controls the government and faces a potential challenge from another group, there are two possible strategies that group can adopt. They can work with the potential challengers to find a way to live together within one state, or they can impose their preferred policies and attempt to repress the challenger group in order to avoid rebellion against those policies. Religious groups derive their policies from a religious source, leaving less possibility for compromise between groups and encouraging them to choose the strategy of repression. Out-of-power groups in a society with religiously defined ethnic groups are then presented with the possibility of attempting to get by within a repressive society as best as they can, or resorting to violence to redress their grievances. In a linguistically defined society, the government will likely be more willing to compromise on policy in order to reduce the likelihood of armed rebellion. In these states the dominant group will compromise with the potential challengers in order to ensure the out-of-power groups are unwilling to rebel.

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4 There have been 235 ethnic conflicts from 1946 to 2013, averaging 3.46 conflict onsets per year.
This theory accounts for both greed and grievance. Ethnic groups experience varying degrees of grievance, and the more aggrieved a particular group, the more likely it will be to resort to violence to alleviate its grievance. Similarly, opportunity and capability will vary between groups, with some ethnic groups being more capable of effectively fighting the state than others. Groups which are highly aggrieved and also highly capable of launching an effective rebellion against the state are likely to do so. Groups which are aggrieved but face little chance of succeeding in a civil war, or groups which could successfully rebel but have little grievance, are less likely to rebel.

The government is expected to take action to alter these levels of grievance and opportunity. It can alter policies in order to alleviate grievances, and it can take security precautions to ensure a group is unable to successfully rebel. I argue that states dominated by linguistically defined ethnic groups adopt a strategy focused on balancing grievance and opportunity, while states dominated by religiously defined groups are less willing to compromise on policy, reducing their ability to prevent rebellion by alleviating grievances.

*Conditional Effects of Secondary Cleavages*

In addition to the primary ethnic division within a society which determines what the ethnic groups are and what policy issues are most important, secondary identity factors also affect interactions between ethnic groups. The nature of the primary cleavage conditions the effect of the secondary cleavage. In a society where the primary cleavage is religious, secondary differences in language will increase the likelihood of conflict, as a religious group which speaks a different language than the dominant group will experience more grievance than a religious group that shares a language with the dominant group. Conversely, linguistically defined ethnic groups which differ from the dominant group in religion will be able to coexist peacefully with
the dominant group as two separate communities within the same state, unburdened by social and cultural ties that can complicate inter-group relations.

The relationship between the group which controls the government and a potential challenger group will differ based on two factors: the ethnic structure of society, and the way that structure manifests itself as ethnic practice. The theory of ethnic practice states that the ethnic division that is used in practice in a society is the primary politically salient social division. This identity is one of the many identities which make up ethnic structure, which is composed of the full set of identities held by individuals. The linguistic group and religious group to which an individual belongs are both important elements of ethnic structure. In many societies there is little diversity along one cleavage, with everyone in society either speaking the same language or practicing the same religion. In these cases the ethnic structure and ethnic practice, at least in terms of language and religion, are identical. However, in countries with both religious and linguistic diversity there are numerous ethnic structures that can arise, and societies with similar structures may differ in practice.

Ethnic practice shapes the issues in society which are of primary political importance to ethnic groups. When ethnicity is defined by language, negotiations between ethnic groups will largely be over economic and material goods. Linguistic groups tend to be geographically concentrated, inclining them to be concerned with local issues. Their linguistic identity does not impose moral codes and belief structures, reducing the number of social policies over which they will have difficulty bargaining. When ethnicity is defined by religion relations between ethnic groups will deal not only with economic issues, but also with social and behavioral issues. The clearly delineated moral values possessed by religious groups will make it more difficult for religious groups to compromise on social policies.
In linguistically defined societies, group dynamics are not based on moral judgments. Socially diverse ethnic communities can negotiate with each other over political power and the distribution of economic benefits. In these cases violent conflict should be unnecessary, as ethnic groups should be able to find a solution that both groups prefer to conflict. When conflicts do occur, one possible explanation for conflict is that the groups may not be clearly defined. When crosscutting cleavages connect two ethnic groups on secondary identity factors, negotiations can be hampered by spoilers who wish to define their identity along a different cleavage. Linguistic groups that share a religion can suffer from this phenomenon if political negotiations between the ethnic groups are complicated by some factions from the challenger group aligning with the dominant group based on religion, weakening the challenger group’s ability to demand concessions. The government will need to address the issues of the linguistic minority, as well as one or more religious communities which exist within its own group and the out-of-power group. The crosscutting cleavages create sub-ethnic groups composed of the religious factions within linguistic groups. The loyalties of the members of these sub-groups are divided between their language group and their religious group, which includes people from different language groups. This complicated social structure creates more room for the government to miscalculate the degree of grievance various sub-groups are experiencing, as well as the opportunity various groups have to rebel.

When the ethnic groups are linguistic and a religious cleavage reinforces the linguistic division the ethnic groups will be clearly divided, and the simplified ethnic structure will allow for relatively straightforward and uncomplicated relations between the groups. In a situation of reinforcing cleavages the government will be able to clearly identify the out-of-power group as a
potential source of rebellion and take measures to prevent them from rebelling either by alleviating grievances or reducing opportunity.

In societies defined by religion, the issues of concern to the ethnic groups are more likely to be social issues that are difficult to negotiate. Religious groups will have little common ground on issues where their religious doctrines differ. When the issues in dispute are actual religious territory issue indivisibility becomes particularly relevant (Hassner 2003). The government must make social policy for the entire country, and in some cases it will be impossible to satisfy all religious communities with one set of laws. Creating separate legislation for people of different religions is possible, but is limited to issues which are entirely contained within one religious community, such as family law. Laws governing the interactions of individuals of different ethnicity force the government to find a way to rectify differing group preferences for social policy.

Additionally, the cost of conflict is lower for groups that are concerned with social issues. When negotiations are over material goods, the economic costs of war are high, creating a large bargaining range. When the issue over which groups are bargaining is a matter of social policy, the economic costs are of less concern. In some cases individuals even value self-sacrifice in the name of a religious cause (Toft 2007). A smaller bargaining range, combined with the difficulty arising from issue indivisibility, increases the chance that there will be no bargain that is better than conflict. This will lead to societies with religious ethnic practice having higher probabilities of conflict.

Empirical Implications

When a challenger group differs from the dominant group either linguistically or religiously, without a difference on a secondary cleavage, the conflict likelihood for these two types of
groups will be similar. A secondary difference which reinforces the primary cleavage can increase or decrease the probability of conflict, conditional on the primary cleavage. If the challenger group differs from the dominant group in both language and religion, the cleavage that represents ethnic practice will condition the effect of the secondary cleavage. When the primary ethnic identity is religious, a secondary linguistic difference between the groups will lead to increased social pressure on the out-of-power group due to their social differences. When the primary ethnic identity is linguistic, a secondary difference in religion will reinforce the dividing line between ethnic communities, allowing for the groups to more easily live separate economic and social lives within the borders of one state.

**H1:** When ethnic groups differ in both language and religion, groups that are defined by their religion will have higher conflict likelihoods than groups which are defined by their language.

Figure 1 summarizes the predictions of this theory. For religious groups the secondary cleavage is linguistic, while for linguistic groups the secondary cleavage is religious. Religious groups with a linguistic crosscutting cleavage will share a language with the dominant group, and are therefore expected to have a medium probability of conflict. Similarly, linguistically-defined groups that share a religion with the dominant group have a medium conflict likelihood. In the case of reinforcing secondary cleavages the likelihood of conflict is high for religious groups and low for language groups. Religious groups have a high conflict likelihood due to the grievances that result from their substantial cultural differences and the inability of the state to compromise on social issues. The probability of conflict for groups which are linguistically defined is low due to efficient bargaining between the state and the potentially-rebellious ethnic community which ensures that grievances are balanced with the ability of the group to rebel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cleavage That Defines Ethnicity</th>
<th>Secondary Cleavage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crosscutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sunnis in Syria</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Hindus in Bangladesh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kurds in Turkey</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tuareg in Mali</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Expected Conflict Likelihood by Primary and Secondary Cleavage (Examples of out-of-power groups in italics).

**Data and Methodology**

In a comparative study of ethnic groups there are two separate factors that must be considered. First, the social identity marker which defines what an ethnic group is must be determined. Second, measures of similarity on other issues can be measured between the groups. For example, a society might be divided into several groups based on the languages spoken by those groups. Each individual can then be identified with one single group, based on their primary language. These discrete groups can then be compared to each other across another cleavage, such as religion. Whereas these groups would by definition not overlap each other in terms of language, the members of these groups may practice the same religion, different religions, or there may be some portion of the groups that share a religion while others do not. This allows for the creation of a measure of similarity between two groups representing the probability that a member of one ethnic group shares a secondary characteristic with a member of the other group. This produces a variable measuring the difference between ethnic groups along a secondary cleavage which takes a value between zero, meaning everyone in the two groups is identical on the secondary cleavage, to one, meaning the two groups are completely different on the secondary cleavage.
The Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset defines all politically relevant ethnic groups as well as their level of representation in government for every country from 1946 to 2013 (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010). For each country-year the ethnic group with the highest level of representation in government is identified. This in turn allows for the creation of ethnic group dyads. Each dyad represents the relationship between the group with the highest level of political representation and one of the less-represented groups. Under the assumption that ethnic conflict occurs when one ethnic group controls the state and another group with less representation rebels against that group, these dyads represent all of the possible pairings of ethnic groups which could engage in conflict.

The EPR data defines discrete groups within society. These groups were identified by country experts who determined on a case-by-case basis which cleavages are most relevant for each country, in each year. Various groups are defined by religion, language, race, culture, region, or caste (Wimmer 2015). In some cases, a combination of categories is used to define a group. The variation in the how ethnic groups are defined across countries can create problems in some studies, however for this paper it provides a useful means of identifying the primary social cleavage. This analysis limits the data to cases where the dominant ethnic group in society is defined either linguistically or religiously, allowing for a comparison of conflict dynamics in these different societies.

The newest version of the dataset, EPR 2014, also includes the Ethnic Power Relations-Ethnic Dimensions (EPR-ED) data, which measures the linguistic and religious composition of the EPR ethnic groups (Vogt et al. 2015; Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2015). The three primary religions and languages for each ethnic group are identified, along with the proportion of the group that practices that religion or speaks that language as a primary language. This data
allows for the creation of a relational measure of similarity between groups for religion and language. These relational measures are used for measuring the secondary cleavage in society.

Combining the coding of the primary cleavage that defines the ethnic groups from Wimmer (2015), with the measure of linguistic and religious difference between groups from Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt (2015), allows for an analysis that includes both the primary cleavage, which defines what a group is, and the secondary cleavage, measured as a relational measure of similarity. In this way the relative importance of the cleavages is maintained in the analysis.

By examining both the cleavage used to define a particular group, and the relational measure of difference for a secondary cleavage, it is possible to evaluate the effect of both linguistic and religious divisions in society together. These two sources allow for an ordering of the cleavages, identifying one as the primary social identity which defines what an ethnic group is, and the other as a secondary cleavage over which the groups may range from completely different to completely similar.

Maintaining a differentiation between the definitional cleavage and the secondary, relational, difference between groups also corrects for the fact that linguistic differences are the most common means of defining ethnic groups in the EPR data. Treating the relational measures of linguistic and religious difference as equals, without accounting for the definitions, threatens to distort the data. When most ethnic groups in the EPR data are defined by their language, calculating a relational measure for linguistic difference necessarily finds that linguistic differences are common, and are only absent when religion, or another cleavage, defines the ethnic groups. Using only relational measures also includes groups which are defined by their race, culture, region, or caste, and attributes the ethnic conflict for those observations to language or religion, as those are the only ethnic variables measured.
Empirical Results

When ethnic conflict is viewed only in terms of primary ethnic identity, conflict onset appears to be almost twice as common for dyads of religiously defined ethnic groups as for dyads defined by their language. Linguistic groups rebel against the state in slightly more than half a percent of the dyad-years, while religiously defined groups experienced conflict onset in one percent of the dyad-years. At first glance this appears to show that religious divisions in society are more likely to provoke conflict than linguistic differences. However, this view misses the fact that many ethnic groups differ in terms of both language and religion. When the secondary cleavages are accounted for, the conflict likelihoods change considerably. Dyads that differ in both language and religion have drastically different outcomes based on what the primary cleavage in society is. Linguistically defined groups that also differ from the dominant group in terms of religion have conflict onset in only half of one percent of dyad-years, while groups that are defined by their religion, which also differ from the dominant group in language, have conflict onsets more than twice as often.

The distribution of secondary cleavages for cases of groups defined by language are such that when the ethnic groups are defined by their language there is often a religious connection between them, with a portion of both groups practicing the same religion. In 36% of the linguistically defined dyads the two groups are composed entirely of different religions. Only six percent of linguistic dyads are composed of two groups with perfect similarity in their religious composition. The remainder of the cases consist of dyads in which there is partial religious similarity between the two groups, with some, but not all, members of the out-of-power group sharing a religion with members of the dominant group. When the ethnic groups are

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5 See Table 1 in the appendix for summary statistics of conflict onset and primary ethnic identity.
6 See Table 2 in the appendix.
7 Histograms showing the distribution of the measures of secondary cleavage are included in the appendix.
defined by religion a different pattern is observed. Most cases consist of dyads where the two
groups either speak the same language, or speak different languages, with relatively few cases
where part of both the dominant group and the marginalized group speak the same language.

The conditionality of conflict propensity for ethnic dyads is modeled as an interaction
between the primary cleavage that defines the dominant ethnic group and the degree of
difference between the dominant group and the out-of-power group on the secondary cleavage.
This interaction allows for measurement of the effect of linguistic differences between groups
that are defined by their religion, and the effect of religious differences between groups that are
defined by their language.

### Table 3. Logit Model of Ethnic Cleavages and Civil Conflict Onset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Conflict Onset</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Cleavage</td>
<td>0.613**</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
<td>(0.360)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Cleavage</td>
<td>-0.210</td>
<td>-0.547*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.246)</td>
<td>(0.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary*Secondary</td>
<td>1.007*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.453)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>0.489*</td>
<td>0.547*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.227)</td>
<td>(0.234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downgraded</td>
<td>1.084**</td>
<td>1.080**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.362)</td>
<td>(0.358)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Size</td>
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<td>1.876***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.484)</td>
<td>(0.532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War History</td>
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<td>0.520***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0655)</td>
<td>(0.0602)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(GDP p.c.)</td>
<td>-0.340***</td>
<td>-0.337***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0819)</td>
<td>(0.0827)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(population)</td>
<td>0.0432</td>
<td>0.0551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0971)</td>
<td>(0.0913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years</td>
<td>-0.00582</td>
<td>-0.00495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00667)</td>
<td>(0.00673)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.962*</td>
<td>-4.051*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.761)</td>
<td>(1.747)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 22452

Country-clustered standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
In Model 1, without the interaction term, primary cleavages appear to have a significant effect on conflict onset, with religious dyads experiencing more conflict. Secondary cleavages are not significant in this model. When the interaction term is added, the significance of the primary cleavage variable disappears and the interaction term becomes significant. This indicates that what appeared to be an increased risk of conflict for religious groups in Model 1 is in fact the result of many religious dyads also having linguistic differences, which are increasing the conflict risk.

Figure 2 depicts the predicted probability of conflict for religious dyads at different levels of linguistic difference. As the amount of linguistic difference between religiously defined groups increases, the probability of civil conflict increases as well, although not significantly so. Figure 3 shows the effect of religious difference on linguistically defined groups. Here the effect is reversed, with the probability of conflict decreasing with increased levels of religious differences. At high levels of secondary differences, the probability of conflict for linguistic dyads is significantly below the probability for religious dyads.

When a dyad of ethnic groups on a secondary cleavage is small, it is impossible to discern a difference between the conflict likelihood for religious and linguistic groups. The effect of religious and linguistic ethnic identity does not begin to appear until the secondary differences increase to 0.7. At that point there is a statistically significant difference between the linguistic dyads and the religious dyads. Almost 65% of all dyads have a value for secondary cleavage greater than 0.7, indicating that the majority of all cases are affected by the interaction of primary and secondary cleavages.
Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities for Religious Dyads

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities for Linguistic Dyads
The dyads most likely to experience conflict and the dyads least likely to experience conflict are both dyads in which the ethnic groups speak different languages and practice different religions. The relative importance of language and religion within a society is the determining factor in whether a situation of complete difference in language and religion results in a scenario with a high conflict propensity or a low conflict propensity. This supports the theory that the effect of ethnic structure is conditional on ethnic practice, which determines what the primary cleavage in society is.

**Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates that both ethnic structure and ethnic practice play a role in determining the probability of ethnic conflict. This challenges the theory that religious differences necessarily increase the risk of conflict between ethnic groups. The role of religion in ethnic conflict is more complex and relies on the relative importance of religion in a particular context. Religion can increase the probability of conflict when it is the most important factor in ethnic practice, however religious differences between ethnic groups can also reduce conflict likelihood in societies where language is the most salient ethnic identity.

Additionally, the findings challenge the theory that crosscutting cleavages decrease the risk of conflict. Reinforcing cleavages are usually thought to create social divisions between groups which in turn increase the probability of conflict. Instead, this paper shows that reinforcing cleavages of religion and language can increase or decrease the risk of conflict, contingent on the relative salience of religion and language. Theories of crosscutting cleavages give primacy to ethnic structure, based on the concept that social differences between two groups increase the risk of conflict, and a shared identity on a different cleavage is necessary for the groups to find common ground and avoid conflict. The finding that linguistically defined ethnic groups which
also have a reinforcing religious difference have low conflict likelihood suggests that social and cultural differences may under some circumstances reduce the probability of conflict.

Social differences between groups can allow for efficient bargaining between groups, allowing groups with significant cultural differences to live peacefully within the same borders, or they can create fuel for conflict. The differentiating factor is the primary social identity in ethnic practice, which determines the issues in contention between the groups. Previous research on ethnicity and conflict has often combined linguistic and religious differences to measure ethnicity. This broad measure of ethnicity misses the fact that these cleavages have different effects on society, as well as the fact that when ethnicity is disaggregated into two separate cleavages the interactions between groups can be modeled in more detail. How the ethnic groups are defined, and whether secondary cleavages reinforce the primary cleavage or crosscut it, can have drastic effects on the probability of ethnic conflict.
References


Appendix

Table 1 shows that when only looking at the primary cleavage in society, religiously-defined ethnic groups appear to be almost twice as likely as linguistically-defined groups to engage in civil conflict. Table two divides the cases into categories for primary and secondary cleavages, revealing that the relationship only holds for cases which have secondary cleavages. If the primary cleavage is not supported by a secondary cleavage then religious and linguistic cases appear to have similar conflict likelihoods.

Table 1. Conflict Onset by Primary Cleavage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Onset</th>
<th>Primary Cleavage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23,861</td>
<td>99.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,610</td>
<td>98.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23,995</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,657</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Conflict Onset by Primary and Secondary Cleavage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Onset</th>
<th>Primary Cleavage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary Religious Cleavage</td>
<td>Secondary Linguistic Cleavage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5,421</td>
<td>18,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,463</td>
<td>18,532</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this table the secondary cleavage is labelled as ‘No’ if the relational measure of difference between the two groups has a value of less than 0.5, and ‘Yes’ if its value is greater than 0.5.
The following histograms show the distribution of secondary differences. For linguistic dyads the relevant secondary difference is religious, and for religious dyads secondary difference is measured as the linguistic difference between the groups.