THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that much of recent terror is ethnically based, little attention has been paid to systematically explaining ethnic violence. We built on the work done by the Minorities at Risk Project (MAR) to the issue of ethnic terror using systems dynamics. While there has been important work done using MAR to explore ethnic violence as a base using statistics and qualitative analysis (Gurr 2000), there has been little work exploring ethnic terrorism specifically and none that has exploited systems dynamics as an analytical tool. The application of a systems dynamics approach is expected to help us go beyond some of the limitations of statistical analysis to explore how government policy and ethnonationalist terrorism feed of each other in a cycle of violence, discrimination and repression. This work has three broad goals. First, it is targeted at understanding the causes of ethnic terror and second examining the way the relation between the ethnic policies of governments and the behavior of ethnic groups - particularly their choice to use or not use terrorism relate systematically. Third, this work sees to apply for the first time the tools of systems dynamics to political violence.

Keywords: Ethnic Terrorism Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that much of recent terror is ethno-nationally based, little attention has been paid to systematically explaining ethnic violence. We built on the work done by the Minorities at Risk Project (MAR) and apply the model and the data to the issue of ethnic terror using systems dynamics. While there has been important work done using MAR to explore ethnic violence as a base using statistics and qualitative analysis (for examples of both see Gurr 2000), there has been no work exploring ethnic terrorism specifically and none that has exploited systems dynamics as an analytical tool.

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This work has three broad goals. First, it is targeted at understanding the causes of ethnic terror and second examining the way the relation between the ethnic policies of governments and the behavior of ethnic groups – particularly their choice to use or not use terrorism relate systematically. Third, this work sees to apply the tools of systems dynamics to political violence which has yet to be explored using this methodology.

Theoretically, this project draws on the literatures of ethnic conflict to shed light on the causes of ethnic terror. Based on the literature on ethnic conflict, we seek to examine how group capacity, repression, group's perception of rebellion activity, salience of ethnic identity, comparative disadvantages, opportunity structure (Tarrow 1998), political-economic-cultural discrimination (Gurr 1970, Staub 2002), authenticity of leadership, international support, territorial concentration, government's decision structure and political-economic-cultural differences impact the likelihood of rebellion and how rebellion in turn impacts government's discrimination policies.[1]

We believe that this effort has important theoretical and policy implications. From a theoretical perspective we draw on the strengths of the existing conflict analysis literature and the tools of systems dynamics to empirically analyze the causes of terrorism. Besides deepening our understanding of terrorism, this effort will also enrich the broader comparative understanding by testing conflict theories in a new and important context using an underutilized methodology. From a policy perspective, given the threat that ethnic terror presents, the identification of causal factors of terrorism that are susceptible to change through policy initiatives has taken on added importance.

DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC TERRORISM

Gurr (2000) sketches a theoretical framework for understanding the causes of ethnopolitical conflict. In Figure 1, he describes the etiology of ethnopolitical conflict by showing the relationships between a set of propositions. In these propositions, he identifies four general factors (variables) to answer theoretical questions on ethnic terrorism. These factors are the salience of ethnocultural identity for members and leaders of the group, the extend to which the group has collective incentives for political action, the extend of the group's capacities for collective action, and the availability of opportunities in the group's political environment that increase its chances of attaining group objectives through political action.

The Ethnic Terrorism Model is built based on his propositions and explanations of relationships between these propositions.

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[1] Recent work by Fearon and Laitin (2003), Goodwin (2001), Gurr (2000), Sambanis (2001) and others have identified these as key factors in explaining conflict.
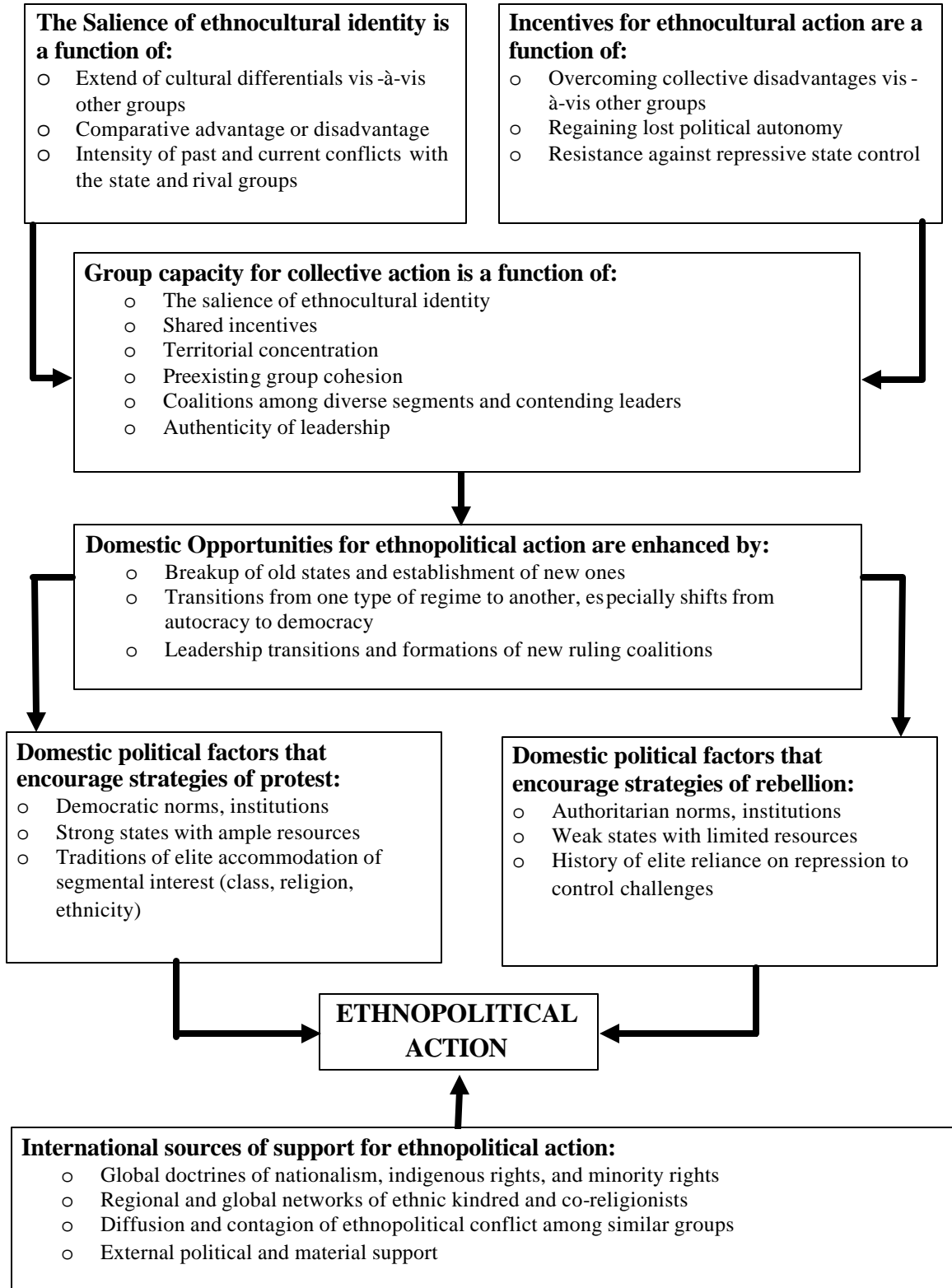
The Salience of ethnocultural identity is a function of:
- o Extend of cultural differentials vis-à-vis other groups
- o Comparative advantage or disadvantage
- o Intensity of past and current conflicts with the state and rival groups

Incentives for ethnocultural action are a function of:
- o Overcoming collective disadvantages vis-à-vis other groups
- o Regaining lost political autonomy
- o Resistance against repressive state control

Group capacity for collective action is a function of:
- o The salience of ethnocultural identity
- o Shared incentives
- o Territorial concentration
- o Preexisting group cohesion
- o Coalitions among diverse segments and contending leaders
- o Authenticity of leadership

Domestic Opportunities for ethnopolitical action are enhanced by:
- o Breakup of old states and establishment of new ones
- o Transitions from one type of regime to another, especially shifts from autocracy to democracy
- o Leadership transitions and formations of new ruling coalitions

Domestic political factors that encourage strategies of protest:
- o Democratic norms, institutions
- o Strong states with ample resources
- o Traditions of elite accommodation of segmental interest (class, religion, ethnicity)

Domestic political factors that encourage strategies of rebellion:
- o Authoritarian norms, institutions
- o Weak states with limited resources
- o History of elite reliance on repression to control challenges

ETHNOPOLITICAL ACTION

International sources of support for ethnopolitical action:
- o Global doctrines of nationalism, indigenous rights, and minority rights
- o Regional and global networks of ethnic kindred and co-religionists
- o Diffusion and contagion of ethnopolitical conflict among similar groups
- o External political and material support

Figure 1 - The Etiology of Ethnopolitical Conflict (Gurr,2000)

There has been generally very little study of ethno-nationalist terrorism (for an exception see Byman 1998). In adopting Gurr's theoretical model, we are looking at terrorism as a strategy of contentious politics like protests and revolutions. Gurr, building on his own work of focusing on grievance (Gurr, 1970), draws on the work of those who have focused on political opportunity structures and resource mobilization (Tarrow 1998, Tilly 2003) to create a model which can serve as a useful basis for our purposes. Specifically, Gurr is arguing that Ethnopolitical action, in our case terrorism, is a product of how the government has treated the group and the group's past responses to this treatment.

ETHNIC TERRORISM MODEL (ETM)

Gurr (2000) indicates some feedback loops in his ethnopolitical action framework. In his inquiry from the feedback loops is to identify root causes. His correspondence with his college describes the origins of ethnopolitical conflict as "chicken-and-egg" issue. The origins of conflict are different for different groups. Gurr suggests the examination of the consequences of each episode of protracted conflict using the concepts employed here.

We believe system dynamics modeling is the right tool that answers Gurr's suggestion. System dynamics methodology helps us to understand how systems change over time. System is a collection of elements (variables) that continually interact over time to form a unified whole (Martin, 1997). Gurr's theoretical framework of ethnic terrorism can be an example of such a system. The structure of ethnic terrorism is defined by the interactions between several variables such as rebellion, group capacity, repression, group's perception of rebellion activity, salience of ethnic identity, comparative disadvantages, opportunity structure, political-economic-cultural discrimination, authenticity of leadership, international support, territorial concentration, government's decision structure and political-economic-cultural differences.

We used Gurr's theoretical framework to build causal relationships between variables. While his model of etiology of ethnopolitical conflict describes some causal relationships, it doesn't describe complete feedback loops. His descriptions of relationships between variables are used to define causal loop diagrams. These causal loop diagrams are explained below.

Extend of group capacities defines intensity of rebellion. Government adopts repression policies on ethnic group to decrease rebellion activities. This repression decreases group's resources dedicated to rebellion such as terrorists and ammunitions (Figure 2).
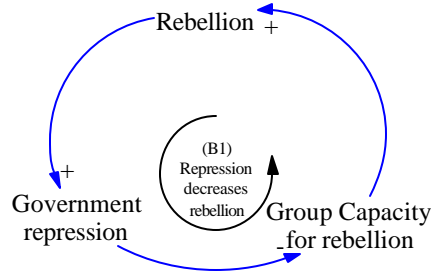
Figure 2- Repression decreases rebellion

Government repression also decreases other variables that affect group capacity such as leadership, international support to ethnic group, and territorial concentration (Figure 3). Government can capture or kill leaders of terrorist organization (ex. Israeli Government in Hamas case killed Hamas Leaders in 2004), can put pressure on terrorist supporting countries (ex. Turkish Government's pressure on Syria, Russia, Italy and Greece during October-November 1998) and can decrease ethnic group's territorial concentration by moving them from original towns.
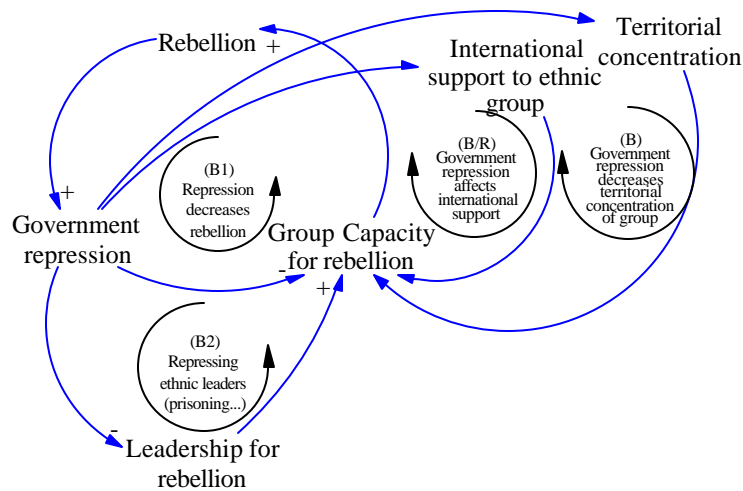
Figure 3 - Government repression decreases group capacity for rebellion

While this balancing loops decrease rebellion, other effects caused by the same repression increase rebellion. Repression on ethnic group increases disadvantages for ethnic group (Figure 4). The existence of collective disadvantages creates opportunities for ethnic leaders to mobilize the ethnic group for rebellion.
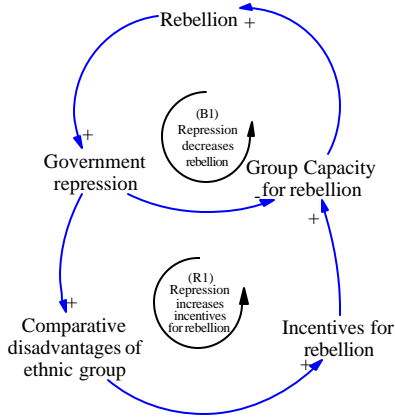
Figure 4-Repression increases group's disadvantages

Government's discrimination policies may create these disadvantages or other factors such as geographical disadvantages may create them. Along with the counted government repressions above, government's discrimination policies can increase comparative disadvantages of ethic group (Figure 5).
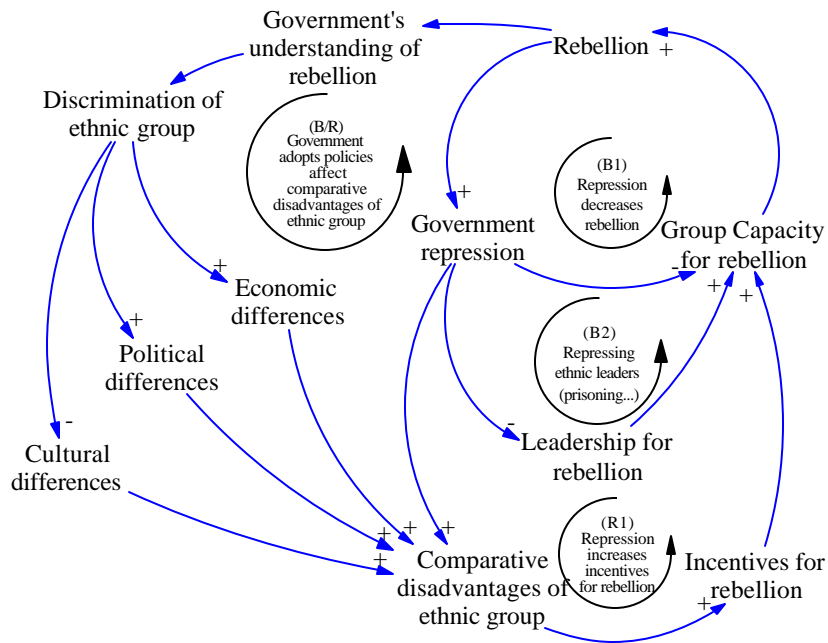

Figure 5 - Government discrimination increases comparative disadvantages of ethic group

Government's discrimination policies can be based on government's understanding of rebellion. This process is closely related to regime type. Although rebellion is a way to communicate the political message of ethnic group, increase in rebellion can increase government's discrimination of ethnic group. Government's discrimination policies may be based on a trend analysis of rebellion, government's perception of rebellion, or there may be a certain discrimination policy tied to regime

type that isn't affected by rebellion level. This sector is important to explore how governments response ethnopolitical actions, and how their response affect level of actions.

Intensity of past and current conflicts with the state and rival groups can be incentive for ethnic group to rebellion (Figure 6). Conflicts might have occurred too many years ago, but group has a perception of conflicts and it will take some time for them to forget those conflicts. Sometimes these conflicts are never forgotten (for example conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland).
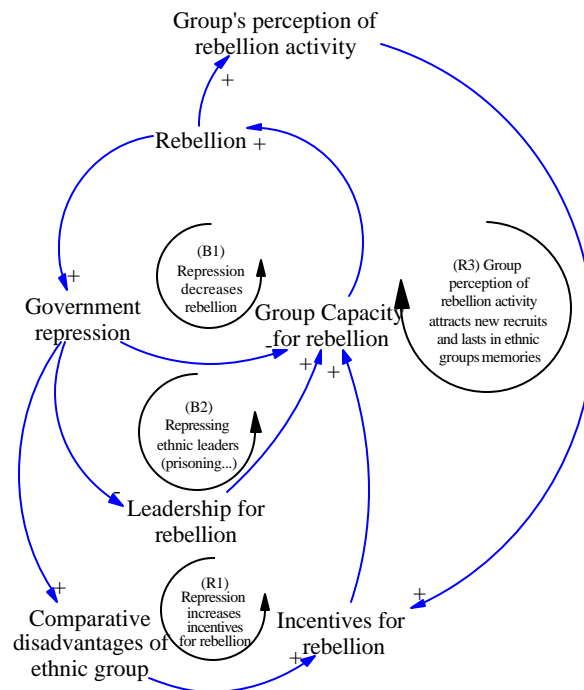

Figure 6 - Group's perception of rebellion activity

Salience of ethnic identity plays important role in group's capacity. There are two variables in our model affect the salience of ethnic identity. First variable is cultural differences. The greater ethnic group's cultural differences than dominant group which they interact regularly, the more salient their identity is likely to be. Second variable is group's perception of rebellion activity. Intensity of past and current conflicts with the state increases salience of ethnic identity (Figure 7).
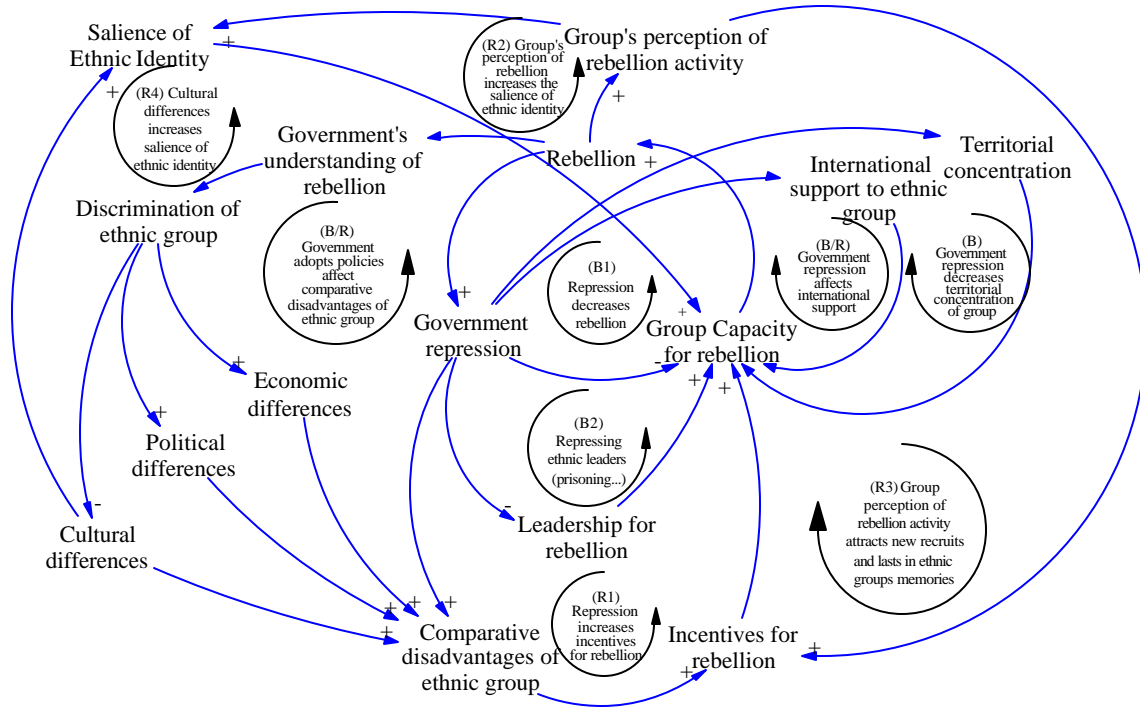
Figure 7 - All causal loop diagrams in ETM

CONCLUSIONS

We mapped Gurr's theoretical framework on etiology of ethnopolitical conflicts to several causal loop diagrams and built Ethnic Terrorism Model (ETM). We believe ETM helps us to understand the causes of ethnic terror and it helps to examine the relationship between government policies and ethnic group behaviors. According to our knowledge, this work is the first systems dynamics approach to political violence.

In ETM, we didn't include an important variable, "protests", in our model. Literature on ethnopolitical conflicts also indicates the relationship between protests and rebellion as a function of some political factors (political norms, institution policies, state resources…) in the country. We will include "protests" variable and related causal relationships in our next model.

We also received important feedback during the System Dynamics Conference. Our colleagues offered several difference perspectives on both model and approach. For example, Markus Salge offered to consider "youth effect" in our model by modeling based on aging chain structure. We appreciate these feedbacks and we will consider them in our following modeling efforts. We believe that we reached our goals by reflecting Gurr's ideas to a system dynamics model in this project.

During the modeling process, we also worked on "Kurds in Turkey" case to see how our model performs. Although we reached some results, we didn't publish those here. We

both need to work more on the case and get more data about it. We will work on other cases to test and improve our model.

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