Article

Journal of Conflict Resolution
2019, Vol. 63(2) 528-554

DOI: 10.1177/0022002717734286
journals.sagepub.com/home/jcr
SAGE

Choosing Whom to Target: Horizontal Inequality and the Risk of Civil and Communal Violence

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Abstract

Do different types of inequality spur violence with different targets? This article explores whom violent movements choose to target when they take to arms, by comparing civil conflicts, which target the state, to communal conflicts, which target other ethnic groups. Different types of ethnic group disadvantage relate to conflict through different mechanisms. Political exclusion is expected to promote the choice to target the central government rather than other ethnic groups, while economic disadvantages should increase the risk of both civil and communal conflicts. The different expectations stem from two important differences between political and economic horizontal inequalities: only the government has the authority to change the political distribution, while there can be many avenues to economic redistribution; and blame is more straightforwardly assigned to the government for political than for economic disadvantages. Statistical analysis of 155 politically relevant ethnic groups in Africa (1991–2009) provides support for both propositions.

Keywords

civil wars, communal conflict, horizontal inequality, political violence, Africa

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What strategies do disadvantaged groups adopt when fighting to have their grievances redressed? Do they instigate civil conflict, by targeting the central government, or direct their violence at rival groups instead? In recent years, conflict researchers have established that socioeconomic or political inequalities that overlap with salient social group demarcations, that is, horizontal inequalities (HIs), increase the likelihood of civil conflict. Theorizing about the underlying mechanisms, they have drawn on theories designed to explain many different forms of collective action, from political violence to nonviolent direct action. Few have tried to explain the strategic choices leaders make about whom to target and what tactics to employ, however. These choices are important because they ultimately determine what form of conflict emerges.

In this article, I investigate *whether economic and political forms of ethnic group disadvantage spur conflicts with different targets*.[1] The study makes two important contributions to the literature. First, it explores whom violent movements choose to *target* when they take to arms, by comparing civil conflicts to communal conflicts. Both forms of conflict are violent and organized, but they differ in an important respect: only civil conflicts target the central government. If HI theories are to be considered explanations of specifically civil conflict, they must therefore explain the strategic choice some movements make to target the government. Theories that only account for the overcoming of the collective action dilemma, with reference to dynamics common to several kinds of conflict, are explanations of collective action, not civil conflict (Cunningham and Lemke 2014). To be able to empirically distinguish factors that influence the strategic choice movements make regarding target from factors that facilitate collective action in general, this study undertakes explicit comparison of conflicts that do and those that do not target the central government, whereas previous large-*N* analyses of HI have tended to be restricted to civil conflict.

Second, I argue that different *types of HI* are related to conflict through different mechanisms and that this affects the choice of target. I hypothesize that political HI will increase the risk of civil conflict only because national-level political redistribution has to go through the central government and blame for political disadvantages is more straightforwardly assigned to the government than blame for economic disadvantages. Economic HI will increase the risk of *both* civil and communal conflicts, because economic redistribution can be achieved by attacking rival groups as well as by attacking the government, and it is less obvious who is to blame for economic HI than for political HI.

I find empirical support for both propositions in statistical analysis of 155 politically relevant ethnic groups in Africa, 1991 to 2009. Political HI increases the risk of civil conflict only and helps explain the choice to target the central government. Economic HI increases the risk of both civil and communal forms of conflict. The problem it poses for society has thus been understated in quantitative analyses. Economic HI does not explain specifically civil conflict but should be studied as a determinant of a wider range of political violence outcomes, as suggested in previous qualitative studies.

The article proceeds with a brief review of the literature that links HI to conflict, outlines four theoretical propositions about HI and the choice of target, and presents a research design, before proceeding to discuss empirical results. Before concluding, I present three case illustrations. Together, they serve as a plausibility probe that points to limitations in the analysis and suggests avenues for future research.

Horizontal Inequality and Violent Conflict

The proposition that socioeconomic and political inequalities between strong identity groups (HI) increase the risk of civil conflict has been supported in large-*N* analysis across countries (Østby 2008b; Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch 2014; Lessmann 2016; Østby 2008a; Regan and Norton 2005), ethnic groups (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Gurr 1993), and subnational regions (Murshed and Gates 2005; Østby et al. 2011; Vadlamannati 2011; Gomes 2015).

When theorizing about the underlying mechanisms, researchers have drawn on an extensive body of research on the determinants of collective action. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) synthesize research on civil war, revolutions, and social movements into a simple two-stage model of mobilization for civil conflict. The first step, from objective inequality to grievance, is conditional upon well-defined identity groups, intergroup comparison, the evaluation that one's situation is unjust, and the attribution of blame to the central government. The second step, from grievance to participation in civil conflict, is facilitated by preexisting social networks, strong emotions, and unyielding or repressive responses from the state.

The theories they build on aim to explain a wide range of outcomes, including political violence, from riots and coups to revolutions and civil war (Gurr 1970), as well as nonviolent direct action, that is demonstrations, strikes, and petitions (see Tarrow [2011] for a review of this literature). It is therefore not immediately clear that the theory explains the outbreak of civil war, specifically, and not the more general overcoming of the collective action dilemma. If HI is to be considered an explanation of civil conflict, it must be able to account for all defining aspects of such conflict (Cunningham and Lemke 2014), including the mobilization of a certain number of recruits, but also the choice to target the government rather than another ethnic group.

Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) assert that if civil conflict is to break out, groups must come to blame the central government, but they do not attempt to explain the choice of target. This article goes a step further and explores to what *extent* HIs of different types incite such blame assignment, as manifested in the targeting of either the central government or another ethnic group. My concern is thus with the mechanisms that link HI to a particular choice of target, not with mobilization as such.

A handful of recent studies have investigated the relationship between HI and communal conflict. Several qualitative studies of horizontal HI have argued that it can lead to communal conflict (Stewart 2008b; Langer 2005). The case study

literature on communal conflict also tends to portray such conflicts as "part of a strategy by those living in areas of minimal government intervention to regulate access to critical livelihood components such as water and land and to acquire wealth" (Raleigh 2010, 79) and acknowledge that they concern relational rather than absolute scarcity.

In large-*N* cross-country analysis, Atiku-Abubakar and Shaw-Taylor (2003) found no evidence of an independent relationship between economic differentials and communal conflict, but more disaggregated studies suggest otherwise. Looking at socioeconomic HI, Fjelde and Østby (2014) found that group deprivation, but not group privilege, in assets and education increased the risk of communal conflict across African subnational regions. Mancini (2008) linked HI in child mortality and other socioeconomic outcomes it to intercommunal violence in Indonesian districts.

In the political realm, Raleigh (2014) found that in sub-Saharan Africa areas inhabited by politically irrelevant groups were more likely to experience communal violence than other kinds of violence, whereas areas with politically excluded groups were most likely to experience civil violence, and areas with included groups were most likely to experience militia violence. Fjelde and Østby (2014), on the other hand, found that administrative regions inhabited by at least one politically relevant group excluded from the national executive had a heightened risk of communal conflict.

This study contributes to the emerging literature in several ways. Like Raleigh (2014), it explicitly compares the determinants of communal and civil conflicts. In addition, it extends geographical coverage to all of Africa. Most importantly, it introduces group-level data. When testing theories about ethnic groups and their agency, the theoretically appropriate unit of analysis is arguably the ethnic group itself (Gleditsch and Weidmann 2012, 475; Branch 2016, 852, 855), rather than the country, the administrative region (Fjelde and Østby 2014) or the nonpolitically delimited grid cell (Raleigh 2014).

Different Inequalities, Different Targets

Two important differences between economic and political disadvantages, concerning who has the ability to create redistribution and what targets group members are likely to accept, suggest that different mechanisms link the two to the decision of whom to target. Both differences indicate that political HI should bias the choice of target toward the government, while economic HI could go both ways. In this section, I elaborate on each argument, before theorizing about what happens when both forms of inequality coincide. Before moving on to explanations, however, some conceptual clarifications are in order.

Defining Civil and Communal Conflicts

The question of who is targeted is a question of who suffers at the hands of the group that takes to arms. In civil conflict, violence is waged between a nonstate actor and

the central government. It involves the state's official forces—such as the army or the police—and occasionally militias acting on the state's behalf. Communal conflicts are fought between ethnic groups. They form part of a wider category of nonstate conflicts (NSCs), defined as violence waged between nonstate actors only, from rebel organizations and militias to more loosely organized groups affiliated with political parties or ethnic groups (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012). Since this study concerns inequalities between ethnic groups, I focus on NSCs fought between ethnic groups—communal conflicts.

It is commonly assumed that communal conflicts require less in terms of mobilizational resources than civil conflicts (Fjelde and Østby 2014, 743). All else equal, this is probably true. Still, while small-scale communal conflicts are less resource demanding than conventional battles between rebels and the government, most rebels have a range of alternative tactics to choose from, from guerilla tactics to terrorist attacks, that are more comparable to communal conflict in this regard. These nonconventional tactics let them target the government even with limited resources, as long as the state does not have complete control over all parts of its territory (Gates et al. 2015; Butler and Gates 2009). I therefore proceed from the assumption that most ethnic groups can choose between civil and communal conflicts.

I also assume that the choice between targets is usually made by elites, such as group leaders and movement entrepreneurs. As will become clear from the discussion, however, elites are unlikely to succeed unless members of their group can be convinced that the targeted entity is to blame for the disadvantage at hand.

Targets that Allow for Redistribution

The first important difference between economic and political HI concerns the ability to create redistribution. In instances where only the government has the authority to alter an unjust distribution, targeting the central government is a more rational strategy than targeting other actors, regardless of the costs involved. This is the case in the political, but not the economic, realm.

Political inequality concerns unequal access to executive power. It is rooted in the idea of nationalism (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010). The fear of alien rule, of domination by ethnic strangers, creates hostile group relations that are conducive to ethnic conflict (Horowitz 1985, 2001). Political power is, however, per definition located largely at the center. Thus, the formal distribution of national political power can be altered only through the central government. Movement entrepreneurs seeking to redress political exclusion should therefore aim to target the state. The proposition is consistent with Raleigh's (2014) findings, which indicate that areas inhabited by politically discriminated or powerless groups are more likely to experience civil conflict than areas with included groups, while both are about equally likely to experience communal conflict.[2]

The point is illustrated by the case of the politically excluded Lari/Bakongo ethnic group in the Republic of Congo. Their militias have targeted the central government, and the ethnoregional group in control of it, every time they have taken to arms (Clark 2008, 111-42). Thus, while their historical rivalry is with the Mbochi ethnic group (Minorities at Risk 2006), the Lari/Bakongo militia did not target the Mbochi when they took to arms in 1993. Instead, the groups fought a common enemy, the Nibolek-dominated central government (Clark 2008). Only later, after the Mbochi came to dominate the government, excluding the Lari/Bakongo, did the latter target their historical rival, most notably in the civil wars of 1998 and 2002 (Uppsala Conflict Data Program [UCDP] 2016, conflict no. 861).

Two potential limitations merit some discussion. First, the theory developed here concerns national-level political exclusion. In situations where ethnic groups are excluded from local political power, election violence or other communal clashes targeting the group(s) competing for local political power could be rational alternatives for local group leaders, if they believe it can alter an election outcome or force local officials to change the local political distribution. In fact, many NSCs concern local political power (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013). The implications of the lack of measures of local political exclusion are discussed in more detail in the Illustrations and Limitations section. Second, excluded groups could choose to form government-aligned militias and fight groups considered more threatening to the government.[3] Raleigh (2014) finds, however, that political militia violence is more likely in areas inhabited by politically included, rather than excluded, groups.

The economic distribution is more vulnerable than the political distribution to challenges at the local level, where violent movements may be able to alter it without involving the state at all. First, they can do so directly, by challenging other ethnic groups for access to farming land, grazing land, water, natural resources, or livestock (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013). In Northern Nigeria, for example, a region suffering severe socioeconomic inequality compared to the South (Mustafa 2006), Fulani herdsmen have taken part in severe communal clashes with members of the Wurukum (1999), Yugur (2003), Tarok (2004), and Afor (2009) ethnic groups (UCDP 2016),[4] after allegations that they let their cattle graze on the farmland of these groups and counterallegations of cattle theft. Conflicts over scarce grazing land and cattle theft are also common in Ethiopia and Kenya (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013, 8-9), for example in the conflict between the Turkana and Borana (UCDP 2016).[5]

In the Rift Valley in Kenya, the economically disadvantaged Kalenjin have fought the more privileged Kikuyu over land ownership, after many Kikuyu were awarded Kalenjin land from the first Kikuyu president. Land is economically important to the Kalenjin, who are mainly pastoralist (UCDP 2016).[6] They are the fifth largest group in the country, which makes them a good example of a group that could have challenged the government for redistribution, but chose to target another ethnic group instead, one who was not in power at the time of conflict.

Second, localized redistribution can be achieved more indirectly, by forcing local authorities to make concessions in the allocation of patronage (Fjelde and Østby

2014, 746). Members of the Hausa–Fulani group in the Nigerian Middle Belt, for example, while generally (over)represented on the national political stage, have frequently contested their exclusion from the local administration of the Jos area. The exclusion is caused by local authorities' refusal to recognize Hausa–Fulanis as indigenous to the area, which denies them access to all the money, land, public-sector jobs, university admissions, and health care that in Nigerian are regulated through a localized system of "indigenous certificates" (Ostien 2009). As a consequence, local political appointments and elections have provoked severe communal violence between the Hausa–Fulani and indigenous ethnic groups, most notably in 1994, 2001 to 2004, and 2008 (Ostien 2009).[7]

Localized strategies can be less costly to sustain and more likely to succeed than challenges to the state. First, depending on available technologies of violence, the organizational resources required may be lower than for mounting and sustaining an insurgency against the state as such (Fjelde and Østby 2014, 743). In addition, the state is less likely to intervene with its full force when it is not directly challenged. In sub-Saharan Africa, one-third of violent communal conflicts saw no intervention from the central government from 1989 to 2010 (Elfversson 2015, 791), often because the state lacked material capacity or was tied up fighting rebels elsewhere (Elfversson 2015).

Targeting the central government makes particularly little sense if the government has limited power to change the economic distribution at all, as suggested by theorizing (Raleigh 2010, 79) and initial evidence that NSC is more likely to occur in places and periods where the state is weak and areas where it has limited presence (Fjelde and Østby 2014; Kreutz and Eck 2011).

In sum, then, economic HI should increase the risk of communal conflict as well as that of civil conflict. This proposition is consistent with the qualitative studies and initial quantitative evidence outlined in the literature review.

This article is mainly concerned with deprived groups. HI theory proposes that economically privileged groups can be motivated to instigate civil conflict (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013) to avoid having to share their wealth. They should have little to gain economically from attacking other ethnic groups, however.[8] And while rich groups pose tempting targets for less advantaged groups to attack, such attacks should be deterred by the increased likelihood that governments intervene in communal conflicts in economically important areas (Elfversson 2015, 794) and the higher level of protection rich groups can afford.

Targets that Facilitate Blame Assignment

The second difference between economic and political HI concerns blame assignment. The success of a violent campaign depends crucially on its leaders' ability to convince enough group members to take part in violence. This ability is enhanced by the existence of a resonant collective action frame, including a convincing account of who is to blame for the disadvantage at hand (Benford and Snow 2000). Theories

on collective action framing take a social constructivist view on the question of identity and conflict. Collective action frames can be constructed or shaped by elites, but to have the desired effect on mobilization, the narrative that is established must find widespread resonance among group members (Benford and Snow 2000). Such resonance depends crucially on the frame's internal consistency, its empirical credibility, and how commensurable the frame is with group members' everyday experiences and their cultural repertoires, myths, and assumptions (Benford and Snow 2000).

When group leaders consider what actor to direct their violence toward, the chosen target needs to resonate with group members' perceptions of blame. To maintain consistency, a strategy to target the central government should be underpinned by a frame that blames the government. If the assignment of blame to the government does *not* resonate with the experiences of most group members, a decision to target the state will undermine the internal consistency and credibility of the movement's message in the eyes of group members, thus constraining mobilization. Accounts of government blame may fail to resonate because they are not in line with group members' everyday experiences or with entrenched cultural myths and assumptions, for example if most group members blame an ethnic group they have a long-standing rivalry with, rather than the state, for their disadvantage.

Government responsibility should be more obvious for a political than an economic disadvantage. Once group members are convinced their group is politically excluded or discriminated against, it is fairly intuitive that the state is to blame for the situation (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013, 43); if not for putting it in place, then at least for sustaining it. This should make the successful assertion of resonant claims that target the government fairly straightforward. The Bakongo/Lari, for example, were easily convinced that the Nibolek government was to blame for their exclusion in 1992, when the president unlawfully dissolved the newly elected parliament. They resorted to blaming their historical rivals, the Mbochi, only after the latter rose to power in 1998.

Economic underdevelopment tends to have more intricate causes, like peripheral location or prior imperial rule, in addition to, or combination with, active discriminatory policies (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013, 99). Assigning blame to the government thus necessitates more elaborate arguments, like unfair taxation or exploitation of natural resources (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013, 43), and economic framing is more likely to hit a dead end or target actors other than the central government. For the Hausa–Fulanis in Jos, for example, accounts blaming the central government that they themselves dominated for their economic marginalization would likely have found little resonance, when local government decisions were clearly at fault. And for the Kalenjin in Kenya, blaming the non-Kikuyu government they themselves were part of for decisions made by a Kikuyu government in the past should resonate less than blaming the Kikuyu on Kalenjin land.

Blame assignment dynamics thus imply the same empirical pattern as the structural considerations outlined above:

Hypothesis 1: Economically deprived groups are more likely to experience both civil and communal conflicts.
Hypothesis 2: Politically excluded groups are more likely to experience civil, but not communal, conflict.

When Economic and Political Inequalities Coincide

Previous research suggests that the effect of economic HI on civil conflict is driven by politically excluded groups (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011). According to Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013, 99), political exclusion lets leaders assign blame for economic disadvantages to the government more easily, with reference to the government's actual or proclaimed favoritism of its own kin in economic policy making, thereby using it as a convenient lighting rod that enables harnessing additional emotional power. Qualitative case studies confronted with a similar pattern argue that economic deprivation alone is unlikely to produce the leadership needed for collective action. Political exclusion, on the other hand, incentivizes elites to organize action in pursuit of their own political ambitions (Langer 2005; Stewart 2008a, 18).

For communal conflicts, I expect the effect of economic HI to be *weaker* for politically excluded groups, however. For these groups, it makes less sense to attack another group than the government. Attacking another group is not only unlikely to remedy their political exclusion. It is also likely to invite government repression, especially if the group targeted is included in the government (Elfversson 2015), that would undo any economic gains from the attack. Thus, they might as well target the government directly.

Hypothesis 3.1: Relative economic deprivation increases politically excluded groups' risk of experiencing civil, but not communal, conflict.

Politically included groups, on the other hand, like the Kikuyu, should benefit from their foothold within the government. The capital is likely to cater "to the ethnic groups in the periphery that are most important to the central executive's political survival" (Lacina 2015, 695). Rebelling against the government would almost certainly remove all benefits, a fact that should dissuade such attacks (Lacina 2015, 696). Attacking a neighboring group, on the other hand, could help remedy the economic situation with more immediate effect than government policies can (Fjelde and Østby 2014). And since politically included groups are part of the government's constituency, the government is less likely to intervene with force on the side of the other group, as long as the group targeted is not a more senior member of government.

Hypothesis 3.2: Relative economic deprivation increases politically included groups' risk of experiencing communal conflict more than that of civil conflict.

Research Design

To test the propositions, I use data on all the ethnic groups in Africa that are listed as politically relevant by the Ethnic Power Relations Project (EPR-ETH, version 2.0) in the period 1991 to 2009 (see Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013, 66-67). I exclude all years where a group enjoyed political dominance or monopoly.[9] In addition, 945 observations drop out of the analysis because information about economic HI is missing.[10] As a result, the analysis covers 2,558 group-years across 155 groups in thirty-seven countries.[11] The empirical restriction to Africa has to do with data availability, but Africa is also a theoretically useful place to start. Given that a large share of the world's civil and communal conflicts takes place in Africa, theories about political violence that claim to have global coverage must apply there if they are to be considered externally valid.

I use multinomial logistic regression analysis with country-clustered standard errors.[12] The dependent variable is a three-category index denoting whether a group in a given year experienced the onset of neither kind of conflict, civil conflict, or communal conflict. Group-years where both kinds of conflict took place are classified according to which type of conflict occurred first. For both kinds of conflict, a new onset is defined as renewed conflict following at least one year of inactivity. The variable records 18 group-years with civil conflict onset (0.7 percent) and 131 with communal conflict onset (5.1 percent).

To construct the dependent variable, I use data on civil conflict from the PRIO/Uppsala Armed Conflict data set (ACD)[13] and data on communal conflict from the UCDP NSC data set (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012).[14] Both cover violence that resulted in at least twenty-five battle-related deaths per year. Civil conflicts are fought between a nonstate organization and the government, the latter represented by the army, police, and occasionally government militias. Communal conflicts are fought between loosely organized groups that define themselves along ethnic, clan, religious, national, or tribal lines (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012, 353).[15] They are a subset of UCDP NSCs (organization level 3). A large share of the communal conflicts took place in Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia (see Online Appendix Table A-1); and there is substantial overlap between the countries that experienced each kind of conflict. Almost two-thirds of the sixteen countries that experienced one or more communal conflict involving EPR groups in the period also saw a civil conflict.[16]

Political HI is measured with a variable that denotes exclusion from executive power, as recorded in the EPR-ETH (version 2.0) data set (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). All EPR groups that were not represented in the national executive in a given year are coded as excluded. This covers groups that were actively discriminated against and groups that were not, as well as groups with and without regional and separatist autonomy. Groups that are recorded as junior or senior partners in the executive are coded as included.[17]

Table 1 illustrates an important conceptual clarification: conflicts that involve a politically included group are not per definition civil conflicts. When a loosely

Table 1. Types of Conflict by Political Horizontal Inequality.

	Civil conflict	Communal conflict	Neither	Total
Included	6	67	1,533	1,606
Excluded	12	64	876	952
Total	18	131	2,409	2,558

organized ethnic grouping targets another ethnic group without involving government forces or progovernment militias, the resulting conflict is considered communal regardless of the political status of the group.[18] In fact, about half of the communal conflicts in my data set involved included groups. They tend to concern violence over cattle theft, grazing rights, or political control over ethnic homelands. Most of them involve Oroma subgroups in Ethiopia; Kalenjin, Masai, Turkana and Samburu subgroups in Kenya; Hausa–Fulani subgroups in Nigeria; or Northern groups in Ghana.

Relative economic deprivation (HI) is measured with a variable developed by Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann (2015). It compares each group's income to the national average income using several complementary data sources: geocoded estimates of per capita GDP (Nordhaus et al. 2006) are overlaid on group settlement areas (Wucherpfennig et al. 2011) to estimate group GDP per capita, then divided by the national average per capita GDP. In geographic areas where data quality is considered low, the variable is bolstered with inequality estimates obtained from satellite imagery of night-light emissions. Finally, it is complemented with survey data–based estimates where available. In order to ease interpretation of models with interaction terms, I subtract 1 from the economic HI index, so that situations with no economic HI are coded as 0.

I control for relative economic privilege, the group's share of the country's total population,[19] and whether another group was fighting an ethnic rebellion in the country the previous year (Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann 2015). The latter should affect the government's capacity to intervene. I also include variables for logged and lagged ($t - 1$) country GDP per capita and log population from the World Penn Table 7.0 (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011). Both are well-established predictors of civil and nonstate/communal conflict (Sambanis 2004; Fjelde and Østby 2014; Cunningham and Lemke 2014; Landis 2014; Fjelde and von Uexkull 2012; Buhaug et al. 2015). To account for conflict history, I include the civil peace years variable from Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann (2015) and construct a corresponding variable for communal peace years.[20] Descriptive statistics are reported in the Appendix Table A-2 (available online).

Results

Model 1 in Table 2 investigates the independent effects of economic and political HI on civil and communal conflicts onset, respectively. It provides support for

Table 2. Multinomial Logit Models of Conflict Onset, Africa 1991 to 2009.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Civil conflict	Communal conflict	Civil conflict	Communal conflict
[G] Economic deprivation	0.467*** (0.175)	0.233** (0.103)	0.600** (0.276)	0.499*** (0.177)
[G] Economic deprivation × political exclusion			−0.358 (0.467)	−0.467** (0.212)
[G] Political exclusion	0.803* (0.479)	−0.149 (0.306)	0.987* (0.559)	0.129 (0.334)
[G] Economic privilege	1.002*** (0.228)	0.056 (0.099)	0.942*** (0.241)	0.025 (0.088)
[G] Relative group size	−3.323 (2.030)	2.005** (0.922)	−3.601 (2.208)	1.999** (0.977)
[G] Peace years: communal	−0.048 (0.044)	−0.254*** (0.022)	−0.049 (0.044)	−0.252*** (0.022)
[G] Peace years: civil	−0.025 (0.016)	−0.003 (0.006)	−0.024 (0.016)	−0.002 (0.007)
[C] Ongoing civil conflict	−0.322 (0.596)	0.356 (0.297)	−0.284 (0.576)	0.405 (0.336)
[C] GDP (log, $t-1$)	−0.911*** (0.238)	−0.129 (0.287)	−0.868*** (0.245)	−0.122 (0.287)
[C] Population (log)	−0.547** (0.267)	0.923*** (0.124)	−0.484* (0.290)	0.962*** (0.131)
Constant	6.217* (3.742)	−10.533*** (2.588)	5.335 (3.978)	−11.132*** (2.743)
Observations	2,558		2,558	
Log likelihood	−457.2		−455.3	

Note: Country-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category "neither." Observations where both civil and communal conflicts broke out for the same group in the same year are classified according to which occurred first. [G] = group level; [C] = country level.

*$p < .1$.

**$p < .05$.

***$p < .01$.

Table 3. Area under the ROC Curve.

	Civil conflict			Communal conflict		
	AUC	Absolute change	Percentage change	AUC	Absolute change	Percentage change
Baseline						
Controls only	.8132	—	—	.8859	—	—
Adding variables						
Economic deprivation	.8345	.0213	2.6	.8872	.0013	.1
Political exclusion	.8219	.0087	1.1	.8857	−.0002	0
Both	.8450	.0318	3.9	.8867	.0008	.1
Both and interaction	.8420	.0288	3.5	.8879	.0020	.2

Note: AUC = area under the ROC curve.

Hypotheses 1 and 2: economic deprivation is positively related to both forms of conflict, political exclusion only to civil conflict.

The fact that economic HI affects the risk of civil and communal conflicts in a similar way is particularly interesting, given that results for many of the controls differ between the two. Quite a few of the differences are due to the fact that the estimated relationships between control variables and civil conflict in the African context do not conform to theoretical expectations, however. This is the case for population, peace years, and relative group size. In the communal conflict equation, the nonsignificance of GDP per capita is somewhat surprising. Economic privilege, on the other hand, increases the risk of civil, but not communal, conflict, in line with the expectation that economically privileged groups have little to gain from attacking other groups.

To avoid relying exclusively on statistical significance, I investigate how the inclusion of each HI variable influences our ability to predict conflict onsets, as measured by the area under the ROC curve (Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke 2010). Table 3 shows, in line with theoretical expectations, that economic HI contributes positively to the prediction of communal as well as civil conflict onset (in sample), while political HI contributes to the prediction of civil conflict only.

To ease the interpretation of effect sizes, Figure 1 illustrates how the probability of civil conflict and communal conflict varies across the observed range of HI, with other variables fixed at mean values. The left panel shows that the probability of both forms of conflict increases with higher levels of economic HI, in line with Hypothesis 1. Comparing observations at the 2.5th and 97.5th percentile on the economic HI variable (values 0 and 2.71), the probability of communal conflict is estimated to increase 1 percentage point, up from 1.1 to 2.1 percent, and the risk of civil conflict 0.7 percentage points, up from 0.3 to 1.0 percent. The similar slopes suggest that many African groups consider targeting other groups an equally viable strategy for redistribution as targeting the government.

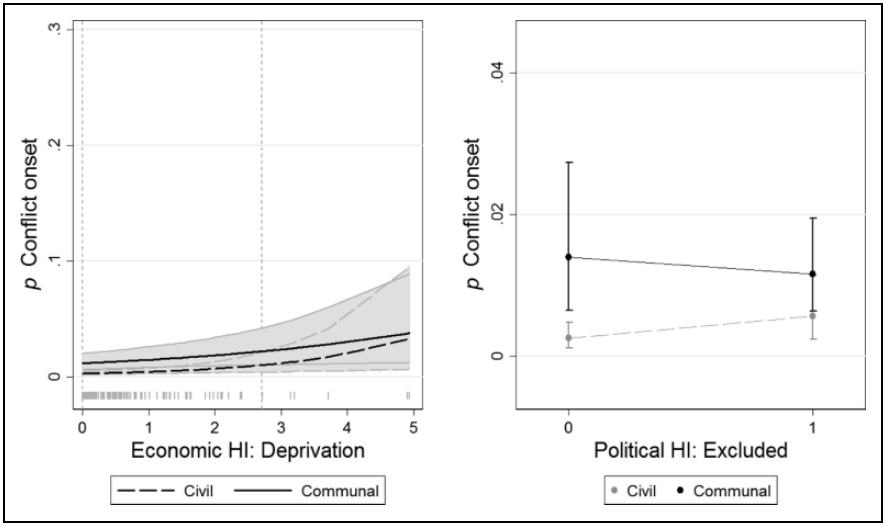

Figure 1. Probability of civil and communal conflict by economic (left panel) and political (right panel) horizontal inequality. Other variables at their mean; shaded area marks 95 percent confidence interval; vertical lines mark 2.5th and 97.5th percentile. Predicted probabilities and 95 percent confidence intervals obtained through simulation in the Clarify package (http://gking.harvard.edu/clarify).

Political exclusion, on the other hand, affects the two forms of conflict differently. The right panel of Figure 1 shows that the estimated probability of becoming involved in communal conflict is 0.2 percentage points smaller, and the probability of becoming involved in conflict with the government 0.3 percentage points larger, for politically excluded than for politically included groups. This is in line with Hypothesis 2. It indicates that many group leaders realize that attempts to alter the national power distribution must go through the central government and that they are able to convince group members that the government is to blame.

Model 2 in Table 2 demonstrates that the effect of economic HI on communal conflict is conditional upon political status. For politically included groups, the risk of communal conflict increases with as much as 3 percentage points across the middle 95 percent of observations on the economic HI variable (Figure 2). Among politically excluded groups, the estimated effect is close to zero.[21] The effect of economic HI on communal conflict is, in other words, almost exclusively driven by politically included groups.

The probability of civil conflict, on the other hand, is estimated to increase about 0.8 percentage points across the middle 95 percent of observations regardless of whether the group is politically excluded or included (Figure 2). AUCs confirm the pattern. The interaction term improves our ability to predict communal conflict but decreases our ability to predict civil conflict (Table 3). This runs

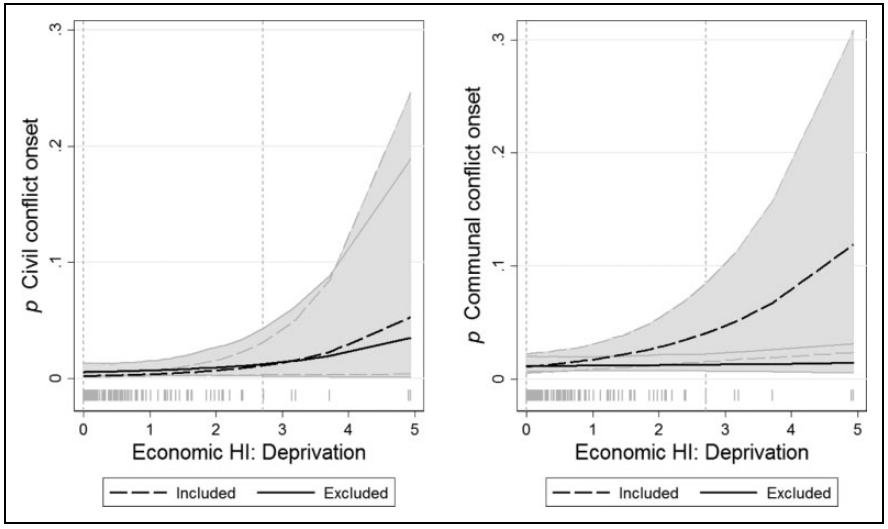

Figure 2. Probability of civil and communal conflict by economic horizontal inequality, for politically excluded and included groups. Other variables at their mean; shaded area marks 95 percent confidence interval; vertical lines mark 2.5th and 97.5th percentile.

contrary to the finding in previous HI research that the effect of economic HI on civil conflict is driven mainly by excluded groups. It begs the question why some politically included groups respond to economic inequality by attacking the government, when they could work to remedy economic policy from the inside? One possibility is that when progress on economic issues is slow, within-group contenders for political leadership seize the opportunity to mobilize against current leaders and resort to violence to replace them. A related explanation could be that many EPR groups encompass distinct subgroups. If these feel insufficiently represented by the political representatives of the larger EPR group, subgroup leaders may opt to rebel against the government.

In the theory section, I proposed that that economic HI increases the risk primarily of civil conflict among politically excluded groups (Hypothesis 3.1.) and the risk of communal conflict among included groups (Hypothesis 3.2). Both receive tentative support. In line with Hypothesis 3.1, predicted probabilities from Figure 2 suggest that politically excluded groups are more likely to direct their violence at the central government than at another ethnic group. Across the middle 95 percent of observations on the economic deprivation variable, the probability of civil conflict is estimated to increase 0.8 percentage points and that of communal conflict 0.1.

In line with Hypothesis 3.2, predicted probabilities suggest that politically included groups are more likely to direct their economic inequality–induced violence at other ethnic groups than at the government. Across the middle 95 percent of observations on the economic HI variable, the probability of participation in

communal conflict is estimated to increase as much as 4 percentage points, compared to 0.8 for civil conflict.

In sum, political status is an important determinant of the choice of target when politically relevant ethnic groups in Africa take to arms. Economic deprivation increases the probability that a group comes to take part in civil conflict regardless of political status. If their grievance is exclusively political, on the other hand, the groups tend to attack the central government rather than other ethnic groups. The decision to attack another group in response to economic deprivation also depends crucially on political status. If a group is both economically and politically excluded, it has reason to fear government intervention, should it target another group for redistribution. For included groups, the government is less likely to intervene when it is not itself targeted, so other ethnic groups become more strategically viable targets.

Robustness

All robustness tests are reported in the Appendix (available online). To begin to address endogeneity concerns, I lag political and economic HI with one and two years (Tables A-13 to A-16). Neither changes the reported results.[22] Concerns that the level of political exclusion in a country could result from policies chosen in response to experiences with, or future expectations of, conflict are reduced by the results from Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman (2016). They used systematic differences in British and French colonial practice to instrument for political exclusion and showed that endogeneity's distorting effect has been overstated for the relationship between political exclusion and civil conflict. Economic inequality between groups is very stable over time and thus less likely to be endogenous to government policies (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013, 116).

The main results remain robust across a range of specifications. I run a bivariate probit model (Table A-5) to allow for correlated errors, add country-level random intercepts (Table A-26) and African regions fixed effects (Table A-27) to account for unmodeled heterogeneity,[23] and include peace years cubic polynomials (squared and cubed terms) to account for time dependence (Carter and Signorino 2010; Table A-6). I drop group-years with both civil and communal conflicts (Table A-7) and years of ongoing conflict (Table A-8), in case they entail different mechanisms, restrict analysis to communal conflicts across EPR group boundaries (Table A-9), include groups with political dominance or monopoly in the analysis (Table A-10), and log transform economic HI (Table A-12).

In some of these specifications, the estimated relationship between political exclusion and civil conflict drops below conventional levels of statistical significance, but coefficient sizes remain similar.[24] The interaction term in the communal conflict model loses statistical significance when analysis is restricted to communal conflicts across EPR groups (Table A-9), however, suggesting the finding of no relationship between economic deprivation and communal conflict for politically

included groups, and the support for Hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2, is driven largely by conflicts between subgroups within the same EPR group.

In a final set of robustness tests, I control for additional factors that could influence both HI and the risk of conflict: absolute group size (Table A-18), group GDP (Table A-19), group night-light emissions (Table A-20), urban group settlement (Table A-21), the mean travel time from the group's settlement area to the nearest major city (Table A-28; Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012; Uchida and Nelson 2009),[25] state capacity (International Country Risk Guide bureaucratic quality index, Table A-23; PRS Group 2010) and democracy (polity2 index, Table A-24; Marshall 2014), and for whether the group was downgraded from politically included to excluded status in the past two years (Table A-17).

The results are generally robust to these additional controls. The relationship between economic HI and communal conflict is dampened, however, when controlling for group night-lights emission (Table A-20), suggesting this relationship is driven in part by absolute as well as relative economic deprivation. Finally, it should be noted that the relationship between political exclusion and civil conflict loses statistical significance when controlling for travel time. This suggests that HI researchers should pay more attention to the confounding effect of peripheral location in future research. The coefficient remains positive and of a similar size, however. AUC estimates (Table A-29) also indicate that political exclusion contributes to our ability to predict civil, but not communal, conflict, in accordance with results from the main model (Table 3) and theoretical expectations.

Illustrations and Limitations

Before concluding, I outline three case illustrations. Together, they serve as a plausibility probe that points to limitations in the analysis and avenues for future research.

The Hausa–Fulani in Nigeria look like a typical case for the mechanisms outlined, and the model predicts their participation in communal conflict well. Yet, the specific events of communal violence it has taken part in Jos seem to have been triggered by quarrels between members of the groups involved, often over some everyday expression of religion, and there is little mention of strong leadership of the gangs and militias involved in the clashes that ensue. The case thus serves to illustrate that not all violent events that result from HI are precipitated by explicit strategizing by group leaders over whether to target the central government or another ethnic group. Some communal clashes are more spontaneous in nature.

The fact that some of the clashes in the Jos area appear to have been driven by people without clear leadership, "mobilized on their own accord in response to current circumstances" (Higazi 2008, 121), does not undermine the theoretical argument, however. As long as a process of framing and blame assignment along ethnic lines provided individual group members with the motivation to take to arms against other groups, before the specific clashes were triggered by more immediate circumstances (see Horowitz 2001, 194-204), the argument holds.

This seems to have been the case in Jos, where the system of indigenous certificates had motivated local political elites to mobilize along ethnic and religious lines (Higazi 2008, 114), through the "politics of labelling and the selective reciting of historical accounts that foster group boundaries to secure control over local government areas" (Krause 2011, 10). The resulting Hausa–Fulani narrative holds that they are "only seeking a fair share of the benefits that should accrue to them by virtue of [. . .] the long-standing existence of their community in Jos" (Ostien 2009, 9), that they have lived long in Jos and identify as Jasawa, an identity separate from that of the Hausas in other parts of the country, that they have helped increase Jos' prosperity, and that the exclusion imposed on them by indigenous groups is both unfair and unlawful. Indigenous groups, on the other hand, find the Hausa–Fulani claim illegitimate, given its roots in colonial administration and warn that the Hausas aims to rule and Islamize the entire country (Ostien 2009, 8-10). These conflicting narratives make up the backdrop for each communal clash, regardless of more immediate triggers.

The violence in Jos in 1994 seems to have been initiated by Jasawa youth, but it is disputed which side first resorted to violence in 2008 (Ostien 2009, 12, 32). The case thus serves to illustrate a methodological challenge: the theory in this article concerns whom aggrieved groups target, but the dependent variable measures groups' participation in, not initiation of, communal conflict. Future research on targeting and other strategic choices can therefore be improved by recording which side initiated communal conflict in future data collection efforts.

The Ijaw in Nigeria and the Somali in Ethiopia serve to challenge the argument that for groups with political grievances the only rational choice is to target the central government (Hypotheses 2 and 3.2). Both are politically excluded from executive power, but have been involved in communal conflict. They illustrate three challenges in the research design. First, the dynamics linking HI to communal conflict are sometimes too localized to be meaningfully captured by the EPR-based measures of inequality. The EPR only includes groups considered politically relevant on the national level and measures inequality for these groups as a whole, when inequality within specific regions could matter equally much for communal mobilization (Fjelde and Østby 2014; Brown 2008; Langer and Ukiwo 2008).

The Ijaws have repeatedly challenged the Itsekiri, who have dominated local government in the Warri area, for the right to be recognized as indigenous to the area, given the localized political and economic benefits that follow from such recognition, and the two clashed violently in 1997, 1999, and 2003 (UCDP 2016).[26] In this case, as in the Hausa–Fulani case, targeting another group rather than the government falls within what I have argued is a rational choice of target, given that the local government had the power to acquiesce to their demands. Yet, my model does not predict the case well because it does not capture the localized dynamics. In a similar vein, a federal restructuring in Ethiopia in the 1990s that served to link territorial and political claims to ethnicity, spurred localized tensions,

and violence among a range of Somali and Oroma clans and subclans in the Ogaden area over border delimitations and access to scarce land resources (UCDP 2016).[27]

The cases illustrate that the aggregate nature of the EPR-based measures is particularly problematic in federalist systems that link ethnicity to political representation and economic benefits. The possibility that HI is more likely to spur civil conflict in centralized systems and communal conflict in federal or decentralized systems therefore merits investigation. This proposition expands on Boone's (2014) argument that when land-allocation power rests with the local chieftaincy, conflict will tend to play out on the local level, for example between ethnic groups, but when the state is the allocator of land, it is more likely to take on a national scope.

Second, some excluded groups have less reason than others to fear government intervention if they attack another ethnic group. In the Ethiopian case, the government is tied up in several civil conflicts, which makes intervention in subclan rivalries less likely. In the Nigerian case, the government has been fairly weak and has had several communal and civil conflicts to deal with. Future studies should investigate this potential interaction with state capacity and institutional stability. Third, both cases are complicated by the fact that the groups are represented by more than one armed group, of which some target the government while others wage communal conflict. Oil wealth in Southern Nigeria has led to the Ijaws becoming involved in a self-determination conflict with the government, and the Somalis in Ogaden have been involved in a long-standing separatist conflict with the Ethiopian government (UCDP 2016).[28] Analysis where the violent organization, rather than the ethnic group, is the unit of analysis could therefore add nuance our understanding of the choice of target. The data collection required is daunting, however, since the actors in communal conflict often are informally and loosely organized.

Finally, conflict can be motivated by individual group members' low opportunity costs as well as by group-centered grievances. In some pastoral areas, traditional cattle raids for restocking and retaliation have become supplemented by what is often referred to as commercialized cattle raids or theft for sale in markets (Agade 2010; Eaton 2010). Commercialized raids, unlike traditional raids, are not sanctioned by community elders, and the profit is not shared among community members (Agade 2010). The raids are often committed by young men, sometimes organized in multiethnic bands, motivated by opportunism or by the need to satisfy immediate needs (Agade 2010). This demonstrates that group deprivation can lead to conflict because of the low opportunity cost individual group members face, rather than collective grievance alone. In these cases, individual group members, rather than group leaders, choose the target, and targeting the government is likely not an option. Like in other communal conflicts, these raids should be more likely among politically included groups because inclusion makes government intervention less likely. To empirically disentangle the alternative mechanisms, future research should combine data on group deprivation with individual level data on wealth, unemployment, and participation in different forms of violence.

Conclusions

This article has investigated how horizontal inequality influences violent movements' choice between targets, by explicitly comparing civil and communal conflicts. I have argued that in the face of political exclusion, groups will choose civil over communal conflict because political redistribution per definition must go through the government, and the blame for political disadvantages is easily assigned to it. Economic HI should increase the risk of both, because the blame for economic disadvantages can be difficult to assign to the government, and some economic redistribution can be achieved by attacking other ethnic groups rather than the government.

Finally, economically disadvantaged groups who are also politically excluded can be expected to prefer civil over communal conflict, and included groups to prefer communal over civil conflict. Politically excluded groups have ample reason to expect the central government to intervene whether they attack another group to achieve economic redistribution. They should prefer to attack the government directly to fight for simultaneous political and economic redistribution. Included groups, on the other hand, should not want to jeopardize their political position by attacking the government they are part of but may expect to be afforded some leeway when attacking other groups.

Statistical analysis of 155 politically relevant ethnic groups in Africa, 1991 to 2009, indicates support for all propositions. They thus illustrate the importance of comparing different types of conflict when trying to get at the microdynamics of conflict. Political exclusion helps explain the choice to target the government, while relative economic deprivation is related to both civil and communal conflicts. The conflict-inducing effect of the latter has thus been understated in quantitative analysis. Economic HI should be treated as a determinant of organized political violence more broadly, not an explanation of specifically civil conflict. The effect of economic deprivation on communal conflict is driven mainly by politically included groups, however, who have less reason to fear government intervention.

Authors' Note

A previous version of the article was presented at the 2016 International Studies Association Annual Convention.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Scott Gates and Håvard M. Nygård for enlightening discussion.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Horizontal inequality (HI) theory also covers situations of relative group privilege (Østby 2013), but the focus of this article is on situations of relative group deprivation.
2. Raleigh (2014) also argued that politically irrelevant groups should be more likely than politically relevant groups to wage communal conflict. My empirical analysis does not cover irrelevant groups, so I am unable to test this proposition.
3. For a review of the literature of progovernment militias, see Carey and Mitchell (2017).
4. Conflict no. 5399, 5234, 5494, and 5486.
5. Conflict no. 5580.
6. Conflict no. 5266.
7. The framing of the Nigerian conflicts outlined also tends to have a religious dimension, as the Hausa–Fulani are Muslims and in much of the communal violence in the North-Central region, they are pitted against Christian groups.
8. With the possible exception of cases where the situation of the poorer group is improving (Mitra and Ray 2014).
9. This restriction is common in analyses of HI and civil conflict, because politically dominant or monopoly groups by definition cannot rebel against themselves, but is arguably less appropriate for communal conflicts. Excluding the years where a group was dominant or had a monopoly in the government means dropping 191 group-years, and four groups fall out of the analysis altogether. Including these years does not change the results, however (see Online Appendix Table A-10).
10. These observations are not systematically different from the others when it comes to risk of conflict (see Online Appendix Table A-11).
11. See Online Appendix Table A-1 for a country-by-country list of ethnic groups that are included in analysis as well as group that are excluded because they lack information on the economic variables, enjoy political dominance/monopoly the entire period or are listed as politically not relevant in the period in Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data.
12. Results hold in a bivariate probit (seemingly unrelated regression) specification (see Online Appendix Table A-5), which relaxes the independence of irrelevant alternatives restriction by allowing for correlated errors across choices and the possibility that both kinds of conflicts break out in the same group-year.
13. Civil conflicts from the Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict data set (Gleditsch et al. 2002) have been mapped to EPR groups using the ACD2EPR data set (version 1.2; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). The resulting variable was retrieved from Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann (2015)

14. To link the actors named as participants in communal conflict to the relevant EPR groups, I rely on a list developed by Wig and Kromrey (Forthcoming).
15. Comparing civil and communal conflicts from the UCDP means comparing conflicts with different levels of organization as well as different targets. Organization is unlikely to be an alternative explanation in this case, however. If anything, HI should be more strongly associated with the loosely organized communal conflicts than with the more organized civil conflicts because HI entails a lack of resources. A theory of HI and organization thus entails other empirical expectations than the theory of HI and targeting developed here.
16. This correlation has potentially important implications. To account for country characteristics that could confound the relationship between HI and both kinds of conflict, I run robustness tests that control for democracy (Online Appendix Table A-24) and state capacity (Online Appendix Table A-23), and a random intercept model (Online Appendix Table A-26) that allows for variations in the baseline risk of conflict across countries. More research is needed, however, on how many civil conflicts started out as a communal conflict, like in the Southern Philippines (Brown 2008), and the extent to which communal conflicts are fought to secure the funding and political leverage needed to fight the government later on (cf. Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). If HI influences the risk of communal conflict, and escalation from communal to civil conflict is common, my results could be overestimating the effect of HI on civil conflict.
17. When groups with monopoly or dominance are part of the analysis, they are coded as politically included (see Online Appendix Table A-10).
18. When included groups use more formally organized militias to attack other groups, the resulting conflict could be coded as either civil or communal depending on whether or not the group is considered to be acting on behalf of the state in a national-level incompatibility over government or territory. These borderline conflicts, coded as organization level 1 in the UCDP data, are not included in this analysis.
19. Retrieved from the EPR Core Dataset 2014 (Vogt et al. 2015), available from the Geographical Research on War, Unified Platform (https://growup.ethz.ch/).
20. The civil peace years variable goes back to 1946. The communal conflict variable starts from 1989 due to data availability. Adding the cubic polynomial of each peace years variable does not change the results (see Online Appendix Table A-6).
21. Its statistical nonsignificance is confirmed in the Online Appendix Table A-3.
22. Results for political HI and civil conflict are somewhat stronger when the former is lagged two years. When economic HI is lagged two years, the same coefficient loses statistical significance but retains its sign and size.
23. Region fixed effects are more appropriate than country fixed effects here because as many as two-thirds of the countries have no variation on the civil conflict variable, meaning no group experienced civil conflict in the period.
24. This is the case for the models with random intercept and logged economic HI as well as when standard errors are clustered on the group rather than country. Only in the models dropping group-years that saw both forms of conflict does the effect estimate decrease markedly, down from 0.803 to 0.568 (0.987 to 0.781 in interaction model).
25. Group-level controls were retrieved from the GROWup data platform (https://growup.ethz.ch/).

26. Conflict nos. 5253, 5414, and 5253.
27. Conflict nos. 5356, 5435, 329, 5351, 5292, 5293, 5200, 5281, and 5280.
28. Conflict nos. 890 and 329.

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