

# Beyond Ethnicity: Dead States and Modern Conflict

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Word count: 9999

## Abstract

Historical states, be they sprawling empires or nominal vassal states, can make lasting impressions on the territories they once governed. We argue that more ‘dead states’ increase the chance of civil conflict because they: (1) created networks useful for insurgency (2) were symbols of past sovereignty, (3) generated modern ethnic groups that activated dynamics of ethnic inclusion and exclusion and (4) resisted western colonialism. Using new global data we find a robust positive association between more HSEs inside a modern state and the number of civil conflict onsets between 1946-2019. This relationship is not driven by common explanations of state-formation that also drive conflict such as the number of ethnic groups, population density, colonialism, levels of historical warfare, or other region specific factors. Using mediation analysis we find some moderate support for the colonialism mechanism, although a strong independent effect of more historical state entities on civil conflict onsets remains across all models. Our study points to unexplored channels linking past statehood to modern day conflict that are independent of ethno-nationalist conflict and open possibilities for a new research agenda linking past statehood to modern-day conflict outcomes.

**Keywords**— Artificial states, civil conflict, historical states, state entities, state formation, civil war, ethnic conflict, pre-colonial states