

# **Redemption through Rebellion: Border Change, Lost Unity and Nationalist Conflict**

Cederman, Ruegger, Schvitz

**Rithvik Vakacharla**

**Political Science Seminar: Article Critique 1**

# Overview of Hypothesis and Findings

To what extent are historical border changes responsible for today's civil conflicts? – (Page 1)

- **Hypothesis 1:** The higher the territorial fragmentation of its corresponding aggregate ethnic group, the more likely a group segment is to rebel against its ethnically distinct host government. – (Page 8)
- **Hypothesis 2:** The higher the increase of territorial fragmentation of its corresponding aggregate ethnic group, the more likely a group segment is to rebel against its ethnically distinct host government. – (Page 9)
- **Issue with previous literature:** They were more state-centric as opposed to group centric; the authors offer a more aggregate group-centric theory that includes data beyond borders
- **Results/Finding:** “Based on new geocoded data that document border changes worldwide since 1886, we find strong support for the proposition that ethnic groups’ fragmentation and, even more importantly their loss of unity, are associated with internal conflict.” – (Page 25)

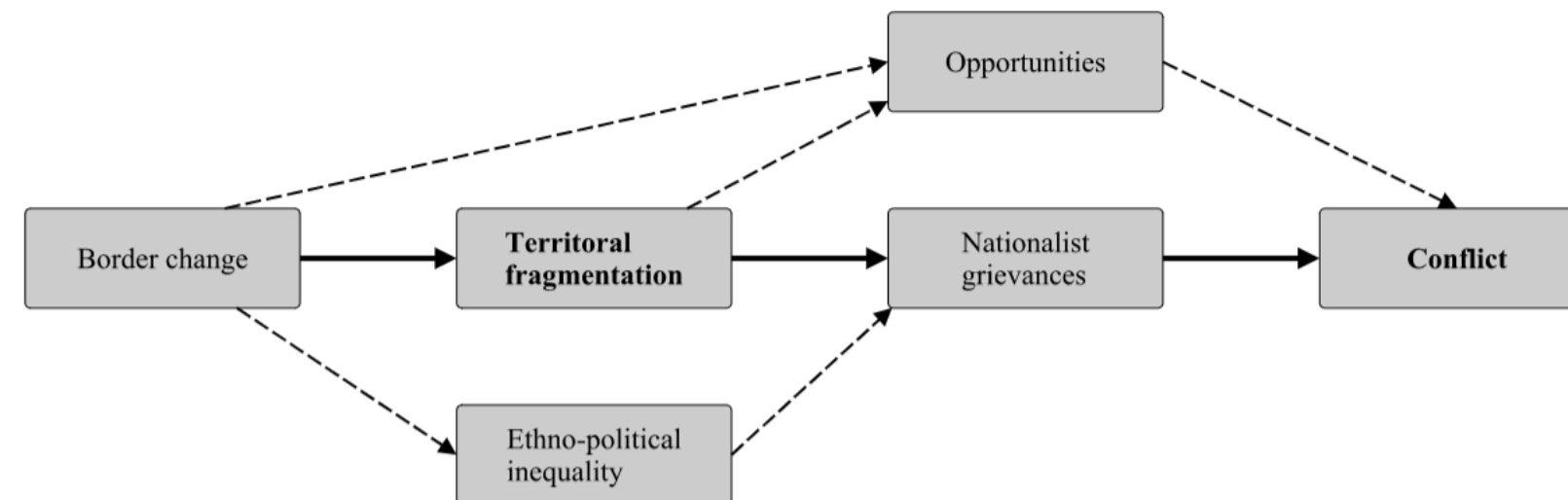


Figure 2: Theoretical framework

# Initial Thoughts and Analysis

---

- Initially expected the paper to be Eurocentric – common with other papers we’ve studied in the class; it was good to see the hypothesis empirically tested with conflicts in Pakistan (with the Baloch), Indian & Pakistan (with the Punjabi Khalistan movement), and Malaysia (Malay Muslims) (Page 23)
  - Issue: There should have been quantitative analysis provided on non-European conflicts because there wasn’t a clear connection between the qualitative details of an Asian country compared to the “numbers”
- The general hypothesis/thesis is one that qualitatively I believed made sense and the decision to focus on “aggregate groups” as opposed to states was a good method
  - Issue: Bit of a confusion with certain words the authors use namely “civil war” (Page 10). They claim they do not want to focus on inter-state conflicts and more on aggregate groups so either there is a disconnect from their definition of civil war and the layman’s definition or this is a flaw (probably the former)
  - Issue: While novel, using aggregate groups could lead to the misassumption that all members of aggregate groups have the same views and will “fight” for the same cause. The example of Russians in Ukraine/Crimea was a good example – would have wanted to see if there are more “exceptions” to their theory (Conclusion)
- The idea of breaking down group segments v. aggregate groups was a positive and added specificity to the hypothesis; there was strong analysis of the reason for violence stemming from fragmentation (qualitative with quantitative support)
  - Issue: The data was a bit difficult to understand and I was confused as to their exact methodology and how it was quantitative in nature (lot of references to previous quant. methods, etc.)

# Discussion Questions/Points

---

- Regarding the discussion of fragmentation and conflict in Africa, is the observed results as a result of European influences on the region?
  - Did European colonial interests lead to African ethnic tribes behaving in the same way ethnic groups (aggregate groups for the authors) in Europe acted?
  - Do these results hold across all areas where there was European influence and “border-making”?
- Concerning the “potato principle” is there a widespread use of the argument (in addition to Putin’s arguments) in other conflicts and irredentist movements?
- Should the results of this study be only associated with certain time periods? Can we make claims on the same hypothesis posed but narrow it to specific time periods?
  - The authors mention how as their data is further expanded to years before WW1 and WW2 the strength of the relationships, they inferred from collected data is weaker – would the relationship exist if they had looked into conflicts before the 1880s?
  - **Ask the same question and have the same hypothesis but test data before the 1880s and see how the impact is like?**