Political Exclusion, Lost Autonomy, and Escalating Conflict over Self-Determination

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Abstract

Are existing models of civil war onset specific enough to explain why some conflicts turn into wars while others stay nonviolent? While it is often assumed that violent and nonviolent conflicts are *qualitatively* different and have different causes, that assumption is rarely tested empirically. We explore this question with reference to conflicts over self-determination. Using new data, we investigate the role of ethnic grievances in why nonviolent separatist conflicts emerge and why some of them subsequently escalate to violence. We find evidence that political exclusion and lost autonomy—two grievance factors commonly associated with ethnic war—are associated with the onset of nonviolent separatist claims, but that both factors also help to explain why nonviolent conflicts escalate to violence. Our results support grievance-based explanations of ethnic war and highlight the need to focus on processes of conflict escalation to improve the specificity of models of civil war onset.

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1 Introduction

The launch of the World Bank's program on the economics of violent conflict in 1999 inspired a large empirical literature on the causes of civil war, much of it trying to adjudicate between "grievance" and "opportunity" theories (Collier et al. 2003). More than 100 explanatory variables have been tested and the literature has identified several robust correlates of civil war onset, including per capita income, population size, natural resource dependence, and horizontal political inequalities (e.g. Hegre & Sambanis 2006). Nevertheless, our understanding of civil war outbreak remains limited because most empirical studies neglect that civil wars tend to grow from nonviolent conflicts.

To understand civil wars, we must define and measure the concept while distinguishing it from adjacent phenomena, such as coups, riots, and genocides, but also nonviolent conflicts (Sambanis 2004, Tilly 2003). While there has been progress in analyzing different forms of violent conflict, the process of escalation from nonviolence to violence remains under-studied (exceptions include Bartusevicius & Gleditsch forthcoming, Lindemann & Wimmer 2018, Sambanis & Zinn 2004). The conventional approach in the quantitative civil war literature has been to compare cases of civil war onset to a heterogeneous set of control cases that combine cases of actual 'peace' (i.e., no violent conflict) and cases with ongoing violent conflict where the civil war threshold is narrowly missed. While many existing civil war theories claim to identify factors that are specific to civil wars, this approach does not allow us to test this assumption empirically because it may conflate the causes of conflict in a general sense with the causes of civil wars. A key insight from the literature on contentious politics is that we should not blindly assume that violent and nonviolent conflicts have different causal processes (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001). To effectively test civil war theories, we need to study the process of conflict escalation.

We address this gap in the literature by analyzing new data that allow us to test whether models of civil war can explain why nonviolent conflicts escalate to civil war. Specifically, we revisit one of the most influential results in the quantitative literature on civil war—the positive association between ethnic grievances and civil war onset (Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010, Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009)—and ask whether

ethnic grievances can explain why conflicts turn violent. Grievance theory as articulated by Gurr (1970) and others (e.g. Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010, Horowitz 1985, Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009) leads to the expectation that while nonviolent and violent conflicts have common antecedents in ethnic grievances, nonviolent conflicts should be more likely to escalate in the presence of ethnic grievances imposed by the state. However, directly contradicting grievance theory, one of the few existing cross-national studies of conflict escalation found no clear association between grievances in the form of horizontal political inequalities and the escalation of intra-state conflicts (Bartusevicius & Gleditsch forthcoming). We build on this study while focusing on a sub-set of intra-state conflicts—those fought over the right to self-determination. We argue that we can better understand the process of conflict escalation by focusing on a set of cases with greater causal homogeneity.

Our study makes use of new data on separatist conflicts worldwide that significantly improves coverage relative to previous data collections, especially of nonviolent separatism. Overall, we identify more than 450 conflicts over territorial self-determination from 1945–2012. 90% of these conflicts emerged nonviolently and more than two thirds never turned violent. We find that two factors commonly associated with ethnic grievance models—exclusion from state power and losses of autonomy—promote nonviolent claims for self-determination, though the evidence is weaker for exclusion. Contrary to Bartusevicius & Gleditsch but consistent with Gurr's early theories of rebellion, we also find evidence that the same grievance factors can help to explain violent escalation. At the same time, our analysis suggests that many prominent explanations for civil war *cannot* explain separatist violence as a qualitatively different form of conflict, with country-level per capita constituting a notable exception. Overall, our results support grievance-based explanations of ethnic conflict, but also highlight the fact that we are far from having a good explanatory model of separatist war. Gains in that regard could be made by studying more explicitly the dynamic interactions between states and opposition movements.

2 Related Literature

Classic works on ethnic conflict assign a central role to grievances for the production of collective violence (Gurr 1970, Horowitz 1985). Affective factors also play a major role in the case-based literature on civil war (e.g. Petersen 2002). However, in the early 2000s the role of grievances has been challenged by political economy approaches that highlight the role of opportunity structures (Collier & Hoeffler 2004, Fearon & Laitin 2003), echoing Tilly's (1978) claim that discontent is too ubiquitous to explain the timing of collective violence. Recent contributions to the quantitative literature have challenged these claims and brought grievances "back in." There is now strong evidence that political exclusion, defined as the lack of representation of ethnic groups in a state's governing coalition, increases the risk of ethnic civil wars (Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010, Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009). Other studies found evidence that losses of territorial autonomy, another common proxy for ethnic grievance, are associated with ethnic civil war (Saxton & Benson 2006, Cederman et al. 2015, Gurr 1993). However, these studies compare the onset of ethnic civil wars with a heterogeneous set of control cases that combines cases of 'no conflict' and 'nonviolent conflict'. Consequently, these studies leave open whether ethnic grievances due to exclusion and lost autonomy explain violent conflict *per se.*

We contribute to this literature by unpacking the "zeroes" (i.e. periods of no civil war). Specifically, we consider the effects of exclusion and lost autonomy on the onset of nonviolent separatist conflict and subsequent transitions from nonviolence to violence. Our approach has antecedents in a small number of quantitative studies of conflict escalation(e.g. Lindemann & Wimmer 2018, Cunningham 2013*a*)[1], but by studying the determinants of nonviolent separatism, we also speak to the literature on nonviolent protest. There has been increased interest in nonviolent protest (e.g. demonstrations, strikes, and organized noncooperation) in recent years (e.g. Chenoweth & Ulfelder 2017), though few studies of protest focus on separatist conflict (though see Cunningham 2013*b*, Cun-

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[1]Lindemann & Wimmer (2018) investigate the conditions under which ethnic groups with uniformly high propensities for rebellion actually resort to arms, finding evidence that state repression and access to refuge areas beyond the control of the state favor conflict escalation. Cunningham (2013*a*) provides evidence that organizational divisions within social movements can spur escalation from nonviolence to violence.

ningham, Dahl & Frugé 2017). A notable pattern in this literature is that it tends to downplay the relevance of grievances while emphasizing the role of political opportunities (Kitschelt 1986, Dalton, van Sickle & Weldon 2009), much like the recent trend in political economy approaches to civil war (Collier & Hoeffler 2004, Fearon & Laitin 2003).

Our approach allows us to reevaluate such claims in the context of conflicts over self-determination, but we broaden the scope of previous studies of nonviolent conflict by focusing on *any* claim for self-determination rather than only protest behavior. This allows us to explore whether grievances motivate the articulation of self-determination claims broadly defined, including both institutional mobilization (e.g. running for office) and extra-institutional protest. In a subsequent step we consider whether grievances are more likely to lead to violent conflict conditional on prior nonviolent conflict. We therefore follow a two-stage approach by first analyzing the determinants of nonviolent conflict and subsequently analyzing the determinants of conflict escalation.

2.1 Two-stage Approaches to the Study of Conflict

Similar two-stage approaches are common in the literature on inter-state war (e.g. Bennett & Stam 2004), but have only recently been introduced to the literature on intra-state conflict (Bartusevicius & Gleditsch forthcoming, Cunningham et al. 2017). Directly relevant to this study, Bartusevicius & Gleditsch estimate the effect of ethnic grievances on the outbreak of "incompatibilities" between states and domestic challengers; and, in a second step, estimate the effect of grievances on the outbreak of armed conflict conditional on an incompatibility. Using data from the Conflict Information and Analysis System (CONIAS) (Schwank et al. 2013), they find that ethnic grievances—measured as the population share of the largest discriminated ethnic group—are positively associated with stage-1 outcomes (outbreaks of incompatibilities), but have no effect on stage-2 outcomes (escalation). This suggests that grievances caused by exclusion cannot account for why nonviolent conflicts escalate and that prior studies (Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009, Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010) have conflated the causes of violence with the causes of conflict more generally.

However, a review of the CONIAS dataset used by Bartusevicius & Gleditsch (forthcoming) reveals several limitations that make us question their findings. Around two thirds of the intra-state conflicts coded by CONIAS feature violence *in their first year* (see Bartusevicius & Gleditsch forthcoming, p. 6), which clearly makes this dataset a poor choice for the study of conflict escalation. CONIAS includes nonviolent conflicts only if they involve extra-institutional protest, which is problematic because political violence and civil wars can emanate from institutional contention, such as elections or referendums (Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2013). Moreover, CONIAS covers protest only if it crosses an ambiguously defined intensity threshold. In particular, protest measures must be rejected by the other side as "unacceptable." A likely implication of this is selection bias (Hug 2013). By dropping "acceptable" protest, CONIAS selects out nonviolent movements that are unlikely to turn violent—especially in democracies, where demonstrations and strikes are widely accepted means of claim-making. Furthermore, the focus on "unacceptable" means of contention often leads CONIAS to miss some, or even all, of the nonviolent formative stages of violent conflicts. In fact, violence is often used as a criterion to code the onset of an "incompatibility", despite clear evidence of prior nonviolent mobilization. For example, in the Northern Irish struggle for independence, CONIAS codes an incompatibility only after the onset of the "Troubles" in 1968, despite evidence of prior nonviolent mobilization since 1948.[2]

Other important limitations of Bartusevicius & Gleditsch (forthcoming) include that they simultaneously analyze ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts and conduct their analysis at the country-level. However, there are no a priori reasons to expect that ethnic grievances should be related non-ethnic conflicts. Moreover, by aggregating all group-level data to the country level, Bartusevicius & Gleditsch cannot adequately capture the effects of group-specific grievances.[3]

Finally, an important analytical innovation in Bartusevicius & Gleditsch (forthcoming) is their use of a Heckman selection model in which the first equation models selection

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[2]For an extended discussion of the deficiencies of CONIAS see section 1 in the online appendix.

[3]In addition, one could also question the fit between the empirical proxy for ethnic grievance (population share of the largest discriminated group) and the concept being measured, given that the intensity of grievances need not co-vary with the population size of the aggrieved group.

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into an incompatibility and the second models escalation to violence. The core advantage of selection models is that they allow to control for potential unobserved factors related with selection into a nonviolent conflict and subsequent escalation that could bias estimates of the effects ethnic grievances. However, selection models require a valid instrument, that is, a variable that determines selection into the first stage but not the second-stage outcome (exclusion restriction). Bartusevicius & Gleditsch propose to instrument for selection into nonviolent conflict with country population. This estimation strategy raises concerns as country population is unlikely to meet the exclusion restriction. Population size constitutes one of the most robust correlates of civil war (Hegre & Sambanis 2006). For population size to be valid as an instrument, it must be argued that population size is unlikely to be correlated with any *observed or unobserved* factor that could affect escalation. That is an implausible assumption. For example, other things equal, a larger population should lower the per capita cost of public goods provision, which could enable a government to provide more public goods and thus lower the risk of rebellion. The size of a government's military is usually larger in more populous countries, which could deter conflict escalation. Minority groups may be larger in large countries, and prior research suggests that larger minority groups are better able to challenge the state violently (Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010). The key challenge in instrumental variables regression is to identify a plausible story to defend the properties of the instrument. This is not done in Bartusevicius & Gleditsch, whose defense of the instrument consists of arguing that no prior study of civil war has articulated a convincing mechanism linking population size to armed conflict.

In contrast to Bartusevicius & Gleditsch, we do not believe that a valid instrument for nonviolent conflict can be identified in the context of cross-national research. Thus, in what follows, our approach is to provide a descriptive analysis of the effects of political exclusion and lost autonomy on the emergence of nonviolent conflicts and subsequent escalation conditional on observing an ongoing nonviolent conflict. Improving the fit between theory and empirics, we focus on separatist conflicts, where ethnic grievances can plausibly be expected to matter. Moreover, to better capture conflict dynamics, we

shift the analysis to the group-level; and we subject our estimates to extensive robustness checks. Although our approach cannot identify the causal effects of ethnic grievances, our analysis addresses a question of first-order importance using new and improved data and our empirical results establish a baseline of comparison for future studies of conflict escalation.

3   Hypotheses

Next, we draw on prominent theories of ethnic conflict to derive testable hypotheses regarding the effects of political exclusion and lost autonomy on the emergence of nonviolent separatism and violent conflict escalation.

Both exclusion and lost autonomy are likely to give rise to separatism, including nonviolent separatism, because they generate separatist demands. Since rule by co-ethnics is a generally accepted principle of political legitimacy in modern nation-states, exclusion de-legitimizes the state. Exclusion can also result in material disadvantages for excluded groups, who cannot claim equal treatment or equal access to goods, services, and opportunities (Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010, Horowitz 1985, Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009). Lost autonomy may fuel separatist demands as collective memories of greater independence in the past lead to resentment about diminished social status and therefore help mobilize group actions to restore the group's former power (Gurr 2000, Hechter 2000). In addition, perceptions of unjust treatment by the state resulting from exclusion or autonomy restrictions make ethnic identity salient and amplify group solidarity, which helps ethnic groups overcome collective action problems in mobilizing for rebellion (Hechter & Okamoto 2001, Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug 2013). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: (a) Political exclusion and (b) lost autonomy increase the probability that ethnic groups make nonviolent separatist claims.

Given group-level mobilization for self-determination, state repression—of which exclusion and lost autonomy are different forms—will increase the likelihood that originally

nonviolent conflicts turn violent. Persistent grievances may serve as reminders that the state cannot be trusted and that nonviolent strategies do not work, thus increasing the appeal of violent strategies (Sambanis & Zinn 2004, Siroky & Cuffe 2015). Political exclusion deprives groups of the ability to use institutionalized forms of opposition to voice their demands, and excluded groups may be less effective in extracting concessions from the state. State repression generates anger and resentment that may also increase the probability that group members condone the use of violence (Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug 2013, Petersen 2002). Finally, the same emotional processes could lead groups to make increasingly radical claims, such as outright secession, that make nonviolent compromises harder to achieve (Hechter 1992). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H2: (a) Political exclusion and (b) lost autonomy increase the probability that nonviolent separatist claims escalate to violence.

So far we have taken a largely static view of exclusion and lost autonomy. However, grievances may be felt more acutely in the immediate aftermath of changes in a state's power distribution. Autonomy losses can date back decades or even centuries, but the affective mechanisms referred to earlier should be more pronounced if autonomy losses are recent, pushing groups to "reverse the reversal." Hechter's (2000) seminal work associates the emergence of any type of peripheral separatism with shifts from indirect to direct rule and, more broadly, versions of "breakdown theory" from the social movement literature suggest that rapid social change can trigger collective action by disrupting the quotidian nature of social life and exacerbating feelings of frustration (Snow, Cress, Downey & Jones 1998). This leads us to expect the following:

H3: (a) Recent loss of access to state power and (b) recent loss of autonomy make nonviolent separatist claims more likely.

H4: (a) Recent loss of access to state power and (b) recent loss of autonomy make the escalation from nonviolence to violence more likely.

4 Data

4.1 New Data on Self-Determination Movements

We use a new dataset on self-determination movements (Sambanis, Germann & Schädel 2018) with better coverage especially of nonviolent separatist claims than the CONIAS dataset, but also other other prominent sources of data on separatism including Minorities at Risk (MAR) (Gurr 2000) and Cunningham (2014). Our dataset (henceforth referred to as the SDM dataset) includes a total of 464 self-determination movements (SDMs) between 1945 and 2012 in 120 countries. Only 10% of the conflicts we code are violent in their first year, and less than a third became violent at any point. CONIAS, by contrast, includes significantly fewer separatist conflicts (156) in a similar time frame, almost half of which were violent in their first year and 70% of which involved an armed conflict at some point. Cunningham (2014) includes a similarly small number of SDMs (around 150), half of which became violent and a quarter of which featured violence in their first year (for more details, including a comparison with MAR suggesting similar conclusions, see section 3 in the online appendix).

We define SDMs as movements constituted by one or more organizations that are connected to an ethnic group and make claims for territorially-defined self-rule. Similarly to MAR and other extant sources of data on separatism, our definition of ethnicity is broad and includes regionally-defined groups, such as the Lombards in Italy. We code a broad range of self-determination claims, ranging from limited internal autonomy demands (e.g Mayas in Mexico) to demands for national independence (e.g. Scots in the UK) or the merger with another state (e.g. Serbs in Bosnia).[4] Separatist sentiment is insufficient for inclusion in our dataset; we require evidence of organized political mobilization. Political mobilization may be violent or nonviolent, including both extra-institutional protest and institutional forms of mobilization, such as participation in elections. We code an end to a separatist claim if a group ceases to make separatist

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[4]This approach lends itself to the study of escalation, since the scope of group claims for autonomy is likely endogenous to the history of their interaction with the state. Even seemingly minor claims can develop into large-scale conflicts.

Figure 1: Annual frequencies of violent and nonviolent self-determination claims
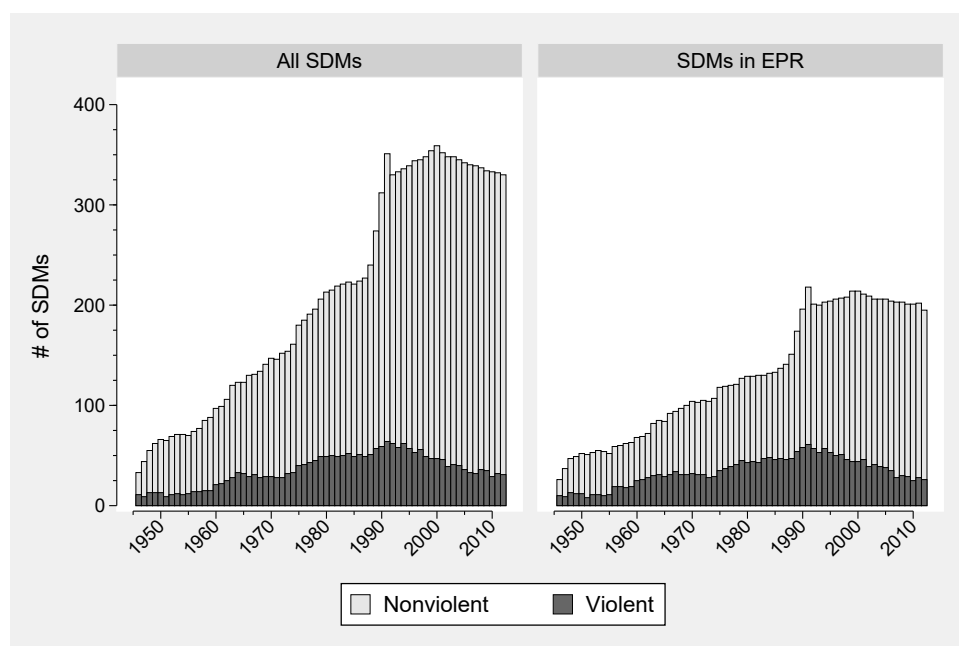
claims or if the group secedes. The average duration of a self-determination conflict is long (30 years) and more than two thirds of the conflicts we identify were ongoing in 2012.

For each year of movement activity we code whether there was violent conflict, defined as a lethal conflict with casualties on both sides that is fought over self-rule. We code both major civil wars and low-intensity violence, drawing on several sources including the UCDP armed conflict dataset (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg & Strand 2002), Doyle & Sambanis (2006), and MAR. The left panel of Figure 1 gives annual counts of the number of violent and nonviolent SDMs. More information on coding rules and sources is included in section 2 of the online appendix.

4.2 EPR

We merge our SDM data with group-level data on ethnic exclusion from the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset (Wimmer, Cederman & Min 2009), version 2014 (Vogt et al. 2015). EPR is less likely than MAR to overrepresent groups that are discriminated against by the state and merging with EPR allows us to engage with previous studies on political exclusion (e.g. Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010). However, it is important

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to note that our reliance on EPR also has costs since by anchoring our study on EPR we lose many of the groups in SDM. In particular, EPR only includes groups defined over race, language, or religion, but does not consider groups defined by region of origin. EPR does also not include groups in overseas territories, even if they are in a noncolonial relationship with their host state, and provides no data for 1945. Overall, we are able to match 289 of the 464 SDMs in our dataset to EPR groups, or 62% (see section 4 of the online appendix for more details). The right panel in Figure 1 gives annual breakdowns of the number of violent and nonviolent SDMs in EPR.

4.3 Dependent Variables

We analyze two binary dependent variables. The first captures the onset of nonviolent SDMs, coded 1 the first year an organization made a separatist claim on behalf of an ethnic group and 0 otherwise while dropping the 22 cases of SDMs that start violent. All group-year observations with an ongoing SDM after the first year are dropped. Overall, there are 192 nonviolent SDM onsets in our data.

The second dependent variable captures conflict escalation, coded 1 if we observe a transition from nonviolent to violent conflict and 0 otherwise. All observations without prior nonviolent conflict are dropped, including the 22 cases of SDMs that start violent, as are observations with ongoing armed conflict. We code 159 cases of conflict escalation; 77 are 'first-time' escalations, while the other 82 represent cases of conflict recurrence in the same state-group dyad.

4.4 Main Explanatory Variables

The EPR dataset codes political exclusion as a binary variable indicating whether a group has (0) or has not (1) representation in the national executive at the beginning of a calendar year.[5]

Lost autonomy is a binary variable that is coded 1 if a group had a higher level of territorial self-rule in the past compared to the beginning of a given year, 0 otherwise.

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[5]We revised EPR's coding of political exclusion in selected cases (see section 12 of the online appendix).

Previous studies have drawn data on lost autonomy from MAR (e.g. Siroky & Cuffe 2015), but MAR covers only a fraction of the groups in EPR (250 versus 800). We revised and expanded the MAR data on lost autonomy to include all EPR groups in our analysis. Similarly to MAR, lost autonomy is coded as 1 under three scenaria: if a group's home state no longer exists; if a change of borders leads to groups being stranded outside of their home state; and if a group had, but lost, significant internal autonomy within a larger state. For all three scenaria we consider the period from 1800 onwards. See section 5 of the online appendix for coding details and sources.

Finally, to test the short-term effects of autonomy and power loss, we code two additional variables measuring, respectively, recent 'downgrades' from inclusion to exclusion and recent losses of autonomy. Both downgrade variables consider events from the previous two years.

4.5   Controls

We control for a large number of variables that have been associated with separatist war in previous studies. Group-level controls include regional concentration; relative group size; cross-border separatist kin groups; regional autonomy; presence of oil/natural gas resources; mountainous terrain; and non-contiguity to the main body of the country. The latter three are specific to ethnic settlement areas and are therefore available only for regionally concentrated groups. Country-level controls include constant GDP per capita (in logs); total population size (in logs); democracy score; federal institutions; and the total number of politically relevant ethnic groups. Systemic conditions that might influence separatism are captured by a binary indicator for the Cold War. Sections 6 and 7 in the online appendix provide more detailed variable descriptions, data sources, and summary statistics.

5 Analysis

5.1 Nonviolent SDM Onset

We start by analyzing the onset of nonviolent SDMs in group-year data from 1946–2012 (see Table 1). We drop all groups that dominate the executive branch of government without sharing power with any other groups (e.g. Turks in Turkey) because these groups almost by definition make no separatist claims against the state that they control. Time dependence controls consist of cubic polynomials for the number of years since the beginning of the sampling period or since the last time a group made a claim (Carter & Signorino 2010). We first discuss logit regression models including region dummies (models 1–3); further below we turn to linear probability models with country fixed effects (models 4–5). Standard errors are clustered by country.

In line with *H1*, we find that both exclusion and lost autonomy have a statistically and substantively significant effect on the probability of a nonviolent SDM onset (see model 1 in Table 1). On average, political exclusion increases the probability of a group making a nonviolent separatist claim by a factor of 2.5 in our sample, from 0.4% to 1.1%; whereas lost autonomy increases the same probability by around a factor of 3, from 0.4% to 1.3%.[6]

Next, we consider the effects of recently imposed grievances. According to *H3*, recent losses of autonomy and recent downgrades from inclusion to exclusion should have a pronounced effect on the probability of a nonviolent SDM emerging. In line with *H3b*, model 2 shows that a loss of autonomy within the previous two years strongly increases the probability of a nonviolent SDM onset ($p < 0.001$) by a factor of more than 6, from 0.8% to 5.2%.

However, contrary to *H3a* we find no evidence that recent loss of representation at the center triggers nonviolent SDMs. We do not include this variable in the regression analysis because a simple χ^2-test suggests no significant association with the onset of nonviolent

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[6]Note that all regressions control for a group's level of autonomy, which allows us to estimate the effect of autonomy *loss* at different levels of observed autonomy. In additional models reported in section 9 of the online appendix we tested whether exclusion and lost autonomy interact to produce a stronger effect. We find no clear evidence for an interaction effect.

Table 1: Explaining the onset of nonviolent separatist claims

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ethnic grievances:					
Exclusion	0.987**	0.960**	0.694*	0.004[+]	0.004
	(0.314)	(0.304)	(0.313)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Lost autonomy	1.098**	1.024**	0.806**	0.012***	0.013***
	(0.354)	(0.341)	(0.282)	(0.002)	(0.004)
Autonomy downgrade		2.064***	1.920***	0.065*	0.074*
		(0.454)	(0.487)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Group-level controls:					
Regional concentration	1.562***	1.554***		0.009**	
	(0.372)	(0.367)		(0.003)	
Relative group size	0.536	0.390	-0.479	-0.007	-0.010
	(0.668)	(0.677)	(0.823)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Separatist kin_{t-1}	0.555**	0.587**	0.634**	0.008*	0.007*
	(0.202)	(0.200)	(0.234)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Regional autonomy	0.210	0.319	0.140	0.003	0.005
	(0.298)	(0.278)	(0.347)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Hydrocarbon $reserves_{t-1}$			0.667*		0.004
			(0.276)		(0.003)
Mountainous terrain			0.211		-0.002
			(0.356)		(0.004)
Noncontiguity			1.938**		0.021
			(0.746)		(0.021)
Country-level controls:					
ln(GDP per $capita_{t-1}$)	0.454*	0.441*	0.368	0.007	0.009[+]
	(0.215)	(0.218)	(0.242)	(0.004)	(0.005)
ln(country $population_{t-1}$)	0.339**	0.314**	0.286*	-0.005	-0.009
	(0.108)	(0.107)	(0.111)	(0.007)	(0.009)
$Democracy_{t-1}$	-1.068	-1.049	-1.785*	-0.021*	-0.020
	(0.749)	(0.714)	(0.784)	(0.010)	(0.013)
Federal $state_{t-1}$	0.526	0.512	0.607[+]	0.003	0.001
	(0.371)	(0.355)	(0.328)	(0.011)	(0.014)
Number of rel. groups	-0.034***	-0.033***	-0.033***	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Systemic conditions:					
Cold War	-0.037	-0.062	-0.312	0.000	-0.002
	(0.326)	(0.334)	(0.364)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Country FEs	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Only concentrated groups	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
No. of groups	686	686	528	686	528
No. of countries	140	140	121	140	121
Observations	23612	23612	18169	23612	18169

Note: Models 1–3 include region dummies (not shown) and are estimated with logit regression. Models 4 and 5 include country dummies (not shown) and are estimated with OLS. All models include controls for time dependence and a constant (not shown). Standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. [+] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

SDMs ($p = 0.39$). Out of 227 cases of power downgrades that occur outside of the context of an ongoing separatist conflict, there are only 3 cases of nonviolent SDM onset. Two of these cases occur in the same country (Nigeria) and also featured a recent autonomy downgrade.[7] We interpret this finding as evidence that losses of representation lead to mobilization aimed at reinstating the group's representation in central government rather than seeking autonomy. Perhaps the degree of attachment to the state or nation is higher among recently included groups relative to groups that had always been marginalized or excluded. Thus, following a downgrade from inclusion, groups try to restore their power rather than seek to distance themselves from the state by seeking autonomy. Autonomy is more likely a goal of structurally marginalized, historically excluded minority groups.

Models 3–5 in Table 1 show the results of two robustness checks. First, model 3 shows that all results hold when restricting the sample to regionally concentrated groups. Regional concentration is close to a necessary condition for separatism and only 5% of the nonviolent SDM onsets (10/192) involve groups that lack regional concentration as coded in EPR. Restricting the sample to regionally concentrated groups also allows us to include three additional controls that are specific to ethnic settlement areas: the presence of hydrocarbon reserves, noncontiguity, and mountainous terrain.

Second, models 4 and 5 present results from linear probability models with country fixed effects. All results discussed thus far are based on logit models with region fixed effects. While pooling group- or country-level data is common in conflict studies, these models cannot account for unobserved country-level heterogeneity. However, unobserved country-level characteristics could explain why ethnic groups make claims for self-determination as well as why ethnic cleavages are sufficiently salient for EPR coders to identify more groups in some countries compared to others. We find that the results are generally consistent when accounting for country-level fixed effects, with one exception. Exclusion is now only marginally significant when including all groups in the analysis ($p = 0.08$) and becomes entirely non-significant when we restrict the sample to geographically concentrated groups ($p = 0.14$), suggesting that the effect of exclusion on

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[7]Adding 'inclusion downgrades' to the model does not yield a statistically significant result; see section 9 in the online appendix.

nonviolent SDMs could be sensitive to unobserved confounders.

We report additional robustness checks in section 9 of the online appendix, including models with a large battery of additional controls, a formal sensitivity analysis to assess sensitivity to hidden bias, changing the threshold used to code historical losses of autonomy from 1800 to 1900; and using different temporal cut-offs for the autonomy downgrade variable (coding downgrades in the previous 1, 3, or 5 years instead of the default 2-year period). Overall, these additional tests suggest that the results for both historical and recent autonomy loss are robust. By contrast, the formal sensitivity analysis provides additional evidence that the effect of exclusion is sensitive to violations of the exogeneity assumption. Moreover, we find that the effect of exclusion in pooled logit models is sensitive to dropping influential countries with large numbers of nonviolent SDM onsets, such as Russia/USSR. Russia/USSR alone accounts for a quarter of all nonviolent onsets, almost all of which occurred during the final years of the USSR's existence. It is possible that unobserved leadership decisions that expanded the freedoms of minority groups during the Perestroika and Glasnost periods as well as declining state capacity account for the large number of claim onsets in the former USSR.

Overall, we find strong evidence that historical and especially recent autonomy loss make it more likely that ethnic groups start to make nonviolent claims for more self-determination. We also find qualified support for *H1a* about the effect of exclusion on nonviolent separatism, but the evidence is weaker.

5.2   Conflict Escalation

Can ethnic grievances help explain why nonviolent separatist conflicts escalate to violence? Whereas previous literature has reported strong correlations between political exclusion and ethnic war (e.g. Cederman, Wimmer & Min 2010)[8], results reported by Bartusevicius & Gleditsch (forthcoming) suggest that these studies could have conflated an effect on war with a more general effect on incompatibilities, and that ethnic grievances cannot therefore account for why conflicts take violent forms. In this section, we reassess

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[8]We can reproduce these results using our data (see section 8 in the online appendix).

this question using our new data on violent and nonviolent separatist conflict.

Table 2 shows the results. The dependent variable is conflict escalation, defined as transitions from nonviolent separatist claims to armed conflict. Cases of ongoing armed conflict are dropped. In models 1–3, we focus on first-time escalations while dropping all observations after the first incidence of violence. In models 4–6 we include all escalations, including cases of armed conflict recurrence. All models are conditional on prior nonviolent separatist mobilization and include controls for time dependence (cubic polynomials of the number of years since the group first made a nonviolent claim or, where applicable, since the last spell of violence). Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 show results from pooled logit models with region fixed effects, whereas models 3 and 6 are estimated via least squares regression with country fixed effects. As almost all separatist groups are regionally concentrated and this allows us to include all group- and country-level controls, we only show results from models restricting the sample to concentrated groups. The results are similar when all groups are included (see section 10 in the online appendix). Standard errors are clustered at the country level.

Contrary to Bartusevicius & Gleditsch, we find that nonviolent separatist conflicts are more likely to escalate if groups are excluded from state power. Substantively, the effect of exclusion is large. According to model 1, exclusion increases the probability that a previously nonviolent conflict escalates for the first time threefold, from 0.7% to 2.2%. If cases of armed conflict recurrence are included, the effect size drops to a twofold increase, from 1.6% to 2.8% (model 4). These results are robust to the inclusion of country fixed effects ($p = 0.05$ and 0.06 for first-time and all escalations, respectively). This supports theories of radicalization in the protest movement literature, according to which political exclusion leaves few options other than violence for the group to pursue its interests. Importantly, this result also helps fuse the literatures on grievance and opportunity since ethnic exclusion captures important dimensions of both concepts: conditional on organized demands for self-determination, ethnic exclusion narrows the opportunities for further nonviolent claim-making and makes violent conflict more likely.

Turning to autonomy loss, contrary to *H2b* we find no evidence linking lost autonomy

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Table 2: Conflict escalation

	First escalation			All escalations		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ethnic grievances:						
Exclusion	1.135**	1.114**	0.024*	0.607*	0.589*	0.021[+]
	(0.386)	(0.381)	(0.012)	(0.267)	(0.268)	(0.011)
Lost autonomy	0.353	0.305	0.003	0.299	0.206	0.006
	(0.371)	(0.386)	(0.005)	(0.263)	(0.286)	(0.007)
Autonomy downgrade		1.139*	0.071		1.872***	0.180***
		(0.490)	(0.047)		(0.364)	(0.051)
Group-level controls:						
Relative group size	1.188	1.268	0.029[+]	-0.056	0.060	0.027
	(1.029)	(1.019)	(0.016)	(0.875)	(0.920)	(0.017)
Separatist kin$_{t-1}$	0.318	0.383	-0.002	0.356[+]	0.436*	0.004
	(0.378)	(0.388)	(0.009)	(0.198)	(0.199)	(0.007)
Regional autonomy	0.556	0.589	0.014	0.347	0.402	0.016
	(0.504)	(0.475)	(0.013)	(0.301)	(0.296)	(0.011)
Hydrocarbon reserves$_{t-1}$	0.142	0.140	0.009	0.216	0.191	0.021[+]
	(0.367)	(0.356)	(0.009)	(0.286)	(0.268)	(0.011)
Mountainous terrain	0.217	0.175	0.003	0.506	0.467	0.013
	(0.588)	(0.616)	(0.013)	(0.353)	(0.371)	(0.009)
Noncontiguity	-0.885	-0.968	0.020	-0.710	-0.806	0.017
	(0.651)	(0.658)	(0.015)	(0.475)	(0.498)	(0.011)
Country-level controls:						
ln(GDP per capita$_{t-1}$)	-0.615*	-0.604**	-0.012	-0.323[+]	-0.324[+]	-0.007
	(0.243)	(0.232)	(0.009)	(0.169)	(0.176)	(0.008)
ln(country population$_{t-1}$)	-0.060	-0.054	-0.016	-0.005	-0.002	-0.015
	(0.153)	(0.155)	(0.022)	(0.103)	(0.105)	(0.014)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	-0.288	-0.314	0.016	-0.417	-0.304	-0.008
	(0.987)	(0.988)	(0.016)	(0.624)	(0.670)	(0.018)
Federal state$_{t-1}$	0.153	0.099	0.003	0.259	0.249	0.013
	(0.416)	(0.395)	(0.030)	(0.302)	(0.308)	(0.024)
Number of rel. groups	-0.010	-0.009	0.000	-0.015	-0.015	-0.000
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.002)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.001)
Systemic conditions:						
Cold War	0.472	0.506	0.015[+]	0.086	0.076	0.009
	(0.346)	(0.336)	(0.008)	(0.190)	(0.194)	(0.007)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Country FEs	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Only concentrated groups	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of groups	221	221	221	260	260	260
No. of countries	86	86	86	89	89	89
Observations	4452	4452	4452	6351	6351	6351

Note: Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 include region dummies (not shown) and are estimated with logit regression. Models 3 and 6 include country dummies (not shown) and are estimated with OLS. All models include controls for time dependence and a constant (not shown). Standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. [+] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

to conflict escalation.[9] A likely reason is that this variable includes historical losses of autonomy going back decades or longer. Distant memories of lost autonomy might not inspire the same degree of political mobilization as recent retractions of autonomy. When focusing on recent autonomy losses, we find that they make violent escalation much more likely, consistent with *H4b*. The risk of first escalations increases from 1.6% to 4.6% in the two years after autonomy revocations (model 2) and the effect is even larger when we include cases of conflict recurrence (model 5). This pattern suggests that, unless autonomy downgrades are reversed, conflicts are hard to resolve and recurrence is likely even after a period of little or no violence. However, it should be noted that the number of autonomy downgrades is small (67), especially in the first escalation sample (41), so these results could be sensitive to changes in model specification. Notably, the autonomy downgrade result survives the inclusion of country fixed effects only when including cases of armed conflict recurrence (models 4 and 6).

Finally, we again find no evidence for an effect of having recently lost representation at the center, contrary to our theoretical prior (*H4a*). There are just 45 cases with inclusion downgrades in our sample (30 in first escalation models). We observe violent conflict escalation in four of these cases, yet in all but one (Turks in Cyprus), there was also an autonomy downgrade (Uzbeks in Afghanistan, Shan in Myanmar, and Igbo in Nigeria). Given the small number of cases, we refrain from formally testing this hypothesis in regression models.[10] Again, this interesting pattern could suggest that separatism grows out of an experience of persistent exclusion, whereas for groups with prior inclusion, a recent experience of power downgrade is likely to motivate the group to regain representation in government rather than seek autonomy. However, the small number of cases is a significant limitation.

Additional results reported in section 10 of the online appendix suggest that the effects of exclusion (especially when focusing on first-time escalations) and recent autonomy loss (especially when including cases of conflict recurrence) survive a large number of robust-

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[9]We also find no evidence for an interactive effect with exclusion; see section 10 of the online appendix).

[10]However, adding inclusion downgrades to the specification suggests no significant effect (see section 10 of the online appendix).

ness checks, including models with additional controls, models using different temporal cut-offs for historical and recent losses of autonomy, and models dropping influential countries with many instances of escalation. We find similar results when using data on violent conflict from a different source (UCDP) and, according to a formal sensitvity analysis, the effects of these variables are relatively robust to unobserved confounders.[11] Overall, our analysis suggests that the risk that nonviolent separatist conflicts escalate to violence increases significantly if states do not share power with separatist groups or if they restrict a separatist group's level of autonomy. These results are the opposite of what Bartusevicius & Gleditsch (forthcoming) report using different data.

5.3 Beyond Exclusion and Lost Autonomy

Before concluding, we turn our attention to the remaining variables in our models. The analyses reported above control for common predictors of (separatist) civil wars; yet we find that only few have statistically significant correlations with conflict escalation. Many of the variables that are purported to measure "opportunity structures" for insurgency (territorial non-contiguity, mountainous terrain, and country-level population size; see Fearon & Laitin 2003) cannot explain why some separatist conflicts turn violent while others do not. The same is true for resource wealth (hydrocarbon reserves) in the territory occupied by separatist groups, relative group size, as well as (see section 10 of the online appendix) the size of a government's military and having civil war in one or more neighboring countries.

An exception is country-level per capita income, which has a significant-positive association with the onset of nonviolent SDMs and a significant-negative correlation with escalation (see Tables 1 and 2). Additional results reported in the online appendix suggest that the proximity of an ethnic group to international land borders also increases the risk of escalation. This is consistent with arguments about the difficulty of state-building

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[11]In section 11 of the online appendix we also show the results of multinomial logit models, where observations with no conflict are coded 0, nonviolent conflict observations are coded 1, and violent conflict observations are coded 2. This allows for a direct test of the effects of grievances on different types of conflict incidence. The conclusions remain similar, with the exception that also historical losses of autonomy help to distinguish violent from nonviolent separatism according to these models.

in peripheral areas of less developed countries; and with previous results highlighting the destabilizing effect of cross-border groups and cross-border sanctuaries for insurgency (Salehyan 2007). In sum, an important conclusion that emerges from our analysis is that that many of the variables that have been thought to explain the outbreak of civil war are in fact capturing conditions that are conducive to the articulation of any type of self-determination claim, either violent or nonviolent.

6   Conclusion

Partly due to the paucity of data on nonviolent conflict, patterns of conflict escalation remain under-explored. Our new data on SDMs makes it possible to explore the transition from nonviolent to violent separatist conflict and improves on previously available sources especially in terms of its coverage of nonviolent separatist claims. A significant limitation of our analysis remains that we cannot identify the causal effects of exclusion and lost autonomy. However, while we recognize that an un-modeled selection process is built into our framework, our two-stage approach improves over the conventional way of modeling civil war outbreak and produces new insights.

One of our main findings is that political exclusion is more robustly associated with violent escalation than it is with the onset of nonviolent separatist conflict. This is consistent with the view that exclusion limits the alternatives to groups seeking more autonomy, making violence relatively more attractive despite its costs. Equally instructive is the finding that the association between violent conflict and exclusion emerges only when political inequality is long-lived. In these cases, groups are unlikely to see themselves as part of the nation and their marginalization may induce the violent pursuit of separatism. Conflicts involving structurally excluded groups are likely to quickly escalate to violence as negotiations with the state over a nonviolent compromise do not seem credible. In addition, we find that recent retractions of autonomy make nonviolent conflicts harder to resolve and therefore increase the risk that nonviolent separatist conflicts escalate to violence, especially if conflicts were previously violent. However, our results suggest that

lost autonomy—both historical losses and recent downgrades—are strongly associated also with the onset of nonviolent claims for self-determination in the first place.

Taken as a whole, our analysis lends support to grievance theory as articulated by Gurr, Horowitz, Cederman, Wimmer, and others. However, returning to the debate between grievance and opportunity that has framed much of the civil war literature, our results are also consistent with the view that exclusion is not simply a measure of grievance. Given reduced access to the state, exclusion implies diminished opportunities to address grievances nonviolently and, in turn, limited opportunities for the nonviolent adjudication of disputes increase the risk of war. More generally, consistent with recent studies that merge grievance- and process-based theories (Shadmehr 2014) we find that both factors traditionally associated with grievance and opportunity models (country wealth and proximity of ethnic groups to borders) help to explain why separatist conflicts escalate from nonviolence to violence.

However, another important conclusion is that many prominent 'determinants of civil war' cannot actually explain why separatist conflicts escalate to violence. Models of civil war and state failure tout their specificity and predictive accuracy (Fearon & Laitin 2003, Goldstone et al. 2010, Collier & Hoeffler 2004). The most basic task for such models is to establish that they can explain the occurrence of *violent conflict*. Yet our research suggests that the extant literature on civil war may be overly confident about its ability to identify the causes of violence *per se*. Strong correlations in retrospective analyses of civil war do not always result in good predictions in out-of-sample studies (Ward, Greenhill & Bakke 2010, Hill & Jones 2014). Our analysis suggests that a likely cause of this forecasting failure is that the structural theories that have been fit to civil war data may not be specific enough to explain civil war and that they can apply to other forms of conflict, including nonviolent conflict. Therefore, an important lesson from our analysis is that progress in both explaining and forecasting separatist and other civil wars requires a shift in focus from structural indicators to variables that are designed to capture the dynamic process of conflict escalation between states and dissident groups. More fine-grained over-time data from within specific cases of escalation could offer a better handle

on this important question. More qualitative, process-tracing research could help to further explore the reasons why nonviolent conflicts escalate.

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