

Research Statement

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How do citizens and elites react to ethnic representation? What factors cause ethnic representation to fail to promote ethnic tolerance and lead to ethnic violence? My research investigates dimensions of elite behavior — particularly intra-elite ethnic diversity and contact — that have previously not received attention. Within this context, I study the ways in which ethnicity is incorporated into strategic interactions between citizens and elites. The citizen-elite relationship is even more critical when ethnic inclusion fails to promote social stability, leading to ethnic violence. I contribute to longstanding work on ethnic politics by (1) theorizing about how elites react to ethnic representation, (2) systematically exploring how elites manipulate citizens' ethnic identities for personal and political gain, and (3) showing how misaligned citizen or elite incentives causes ethnic representation to fail and ethnic violence to become an attractive alternative. These contributions carefully consider the importance of sound and varied methodologies as the prudent way to conceptualize and study ethnicity and ethnic violence.

Citizen and Elite Responses to Ethnic Representation (Dissertation Project)

How does ethnic representation influence citizens and elites views of outgroups? I explore the impact of ethnic representation on relations between ethnic groups across citizens and elites and cabinets and legislative committees. Ethnic representation is thought to improve ethnic relations, and citizens, elites, and the international community push for increased ethnic representation at all levels of government. I test whether ethnic representation actually improves views of the outgroups, as many have speculated, at both the citizen and elite level.

First, I theorize about the conditions under which government leaders increase ethnic representation. While leaders justify such representation in many ways, in work published in *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, I argue and show that the primary motivation leaders have for making their cabinet more diverse is the expectation that ethnic groups gaining representation will lend them political support. An under review paper extends the intuition behind this argument to encompass leaders responding to incentives from the international community.

Reactions to ethnic representation matter at two levels: within political elites and among citizens. Elite legislative committees operate in a collective decision-making environment where the opinions of members can shape major political decisions. As ethnic diversity increases as a function of ethnic representation, I argue that elites react negatively because outgroup members are less familiar. Yet, since members can profitably collaborate to increase the resources they distribute to citizens, legislative committees are spaces where increased interethnic contact should improve outgroup views. I test this argument using original data from Indian municipal corporation committee members — mid-level political elites — coupled with several months of fieldwork. Ethnic diversity does not negatively impact views of the outgroup in the way many have feared. Interethnic contact improves overall outgroup attitudes at the expense of slightly worsening intra-elite relationships. Hence, leaders should find ways to encourage interethnic contact in order to foster positive relations among elites (paper under review).

Citizens evaluate ethnic representation based on the perceived benefits such representation provides them. These benefits influence views of the outgroup because they put citizens in a domain of gain that makes them more willing to accept outgroups. I develop a survey experiment with both ethnic majority Macedonians and minority Albanians in North Macedonia and show that increasing minority cabinet representation does not change Albanians' outgroup views while simultaneously making Macedonians' outgroup views worse. It is not the case that increasing ethnic cabinet representation improves citizen views of the outgroup as many leaders have hoped ([paper under review](#)).

My ongoing work seeks to extend the nature of these questions beyond views of the outgroup to study the consequences ethnic representation has on minority group welfare. Improved attitudes alone are not sufficient to support disadvantaged minority groups. First, I assess the impact that ethnic representation has on social welfare spending for minority citizens. Using a unique shock to Indian state cabinet size as an instrument for ethnic cabinet diversity, I find that welfare spending for minority groups increases as cabinet diversity increases. Additionally, ethnic group welfare depends in part on citizen participation in the deliberative democratic process. I argue and find that representational preferences vary across groups: minority citizens are more willing to participate in community meetings to gain descriptive representation whereas majority citizens are more willing to participate in community meetings to gain substantive representation.

Related Research

Violence

Ethnic representation often fails to help ethnically diverse polities achieve long-term stability, sometimes resulting in ethnic violence. Both citizens and elites hold responsibilities for ethnic violence; in particular, I investigate how perceived personal benefits result in citizens and elites promoting or engaging in ethnic violence.

Elites make decisions to engage in or avoid violent conflict in order to achieve potential personal or political gain. In some cases, the prospect of maximizing the financial benefits of political power is enough to prompt leaders to engage in ethnic conflict. I find in a meta-analysis of natural resources and conflict that natural resource wealth is not associated with increased conflict propensity, but that ethnic diversity is an important moderator variable ([published in *Research & Politics*](#)). At the micro-level, the location of natural resources influences leader decision-making within ethnic conflicts ([published in *Journal of International Studies*](#)).

More often, elite personal financial gain mixes with re-election prospects to make the threat of inciting ethnic violence a powerful political negotiation tool. Here, leaders of minority ethnic groups have the ability to make credible threats if their co-ethnic citizens are geographically concentrated in resource rich regions. These leaders bargain for extra political power in exchange for committing not to incite ethnic violence ([published in *Caucasus Survey*](#)). Sudden influxes of wealth can function in the same way: leaders in regions with unexpected increases in tourism spending can extract greater financial concessions from the central government ([published in *Tourism Economics*](#)).

Rhetoric is an important tool that elites use to prompt citizens to support their decisions; indeed, elites do not always respond to crises in other, more meaningful ways ([published in *British Politics*](#)). One common tactic is to portray an ethnic outgroup as unlike ethnic ma-

jority citizens. I find that central government leaders talk about de-facto separated regions as more distanced than autonomous regions, providing them with a rationale for justifying attempting to take back these regions by force (paper under review). Elite rhetoric alone is not sufficient for radicalizing citizens, but rhetoric may be effective if it occurs in conjunction with instrumental incentives like socio-economic deprivation (published in *British Journal of Political Science*).

Measurement

Special care is needed when conceptualizing and measuring ethnic diversity and ethnic violence, as the way these measures are constructed necessarily impacts the results obtained. As a partly constructed identity group, ethnic categories often take on different meanings in political and social contexts. Stemming from my work creating the first cross-national index of ethnic cabinet diversity, a working paper develops methods to measure elite caste membership. At the citizen level, I have a paper under review studying tendencies to provide unexpected responses to researcher questions in online surveys; the results here imply that relying on citizen ethnic self-identification is difficult unless survey incentives are carefully designed to promote reporting these items.

While scholars have a relatively robust accounting of major ethnic conflicts, my focus on resolving ethnic tensions before they manifest into civil conflict means that I need to develop measures of lower-level ethnic violence. Past work has relied heavily on media sources — particularly newspapers — for data on ethnic violence. At some level, even newspapers traditionally read by opposing ethnic groups report on ethnic violence in similar ways (published in *Asian Journal of Communication*). However, these similarities obfuscate the fact that newspaper-based reports of ethnic violence are highly dependent on reporter biases and journalistic norms, meaning that scholars should critically compare newspaper reports with other sources of event data, such as police reports (working paper). New media sources do little to solve this problem: social media posters exhibit wide-ranging biases that make it difficult to precisely estimate the size of ethnic collective action without on-the-ground evidence (published in *Studies in Indian Politics*).

Future Extensions

I am extending this ongoing work in two main ways. I have started to examine the impact that ethnic representation has on minority group welfare. This is particularly difficult to measure, as welfare improvements generally require many levels of implementation before benefits reach citizens. For this reason, in addition to the projects mentioned previously, I am beginning to work on tracing the effect of ethnic representation through the bureaucracy to better link representation with citizen welfare provisions. I was prompted to move in this direction as a result of my fieldwork interviews with academics, non-government officials, and bureaucrats in India.

Second, I have thus far studied ethnic representation and its effect on outgroup views and welfare in relative isolation, without considering the role that other identities play in shaping this relationship. Now that I have established theories and measures of ethnic representation, I am beginning several projects to consider how ethnicity may interact with other identity-based factors including language and gender. Both India and post-Communist cases provide ideal opportunities to implement these extensions.