

10 February 2002
Review of "Taking Sides"

This study investigates countries' support of ethnic groups claims against states. It is an important study because it goes beyond the monadic analyses that characterize this literature and employs the more appropriate dyadic design. Further, it uses a new data set. Thus, it has two major advantages over other studies of the issue, and should become the new standard reference in this area of inquiry.

A potential weakness of the study concerns the statistical analyses. Table 1 reports that 0.5% of the cases have a non-zero value on the dependent variable. To address this skewed distribution the author(s) takes advantage of the recent work by Zheng and King on rare events. Further, to report the substantive results, the author(s) uses King and his collaborators' CLARIFY software. Further, the write-up of the design, data, estimation, and results is clear. As such, the statistical analyses are a strength of the study: they are a cut above what one typically finds in the general literature, to say nothing of what one often finds in the literature on ethnic conflict.

I have only one suggestion, and it is the type of suggestion one makes for an author's consideration, rather than a request for revision. That is, reasonable arguments can be advanced both in favor of and in opposition to it. So I do not necessarily expect the author to make changes in response to it. Rather, I encourage the author to consider it.

The suggestion concerns the specification of the regression models. Recent work by Kevin Clark (*AJPS*, unpublished dissertation) makes a case for how best to test different models. I find Clark's work compelling, though I don't believe that his method is directly applicable to this study. However, the thrust of Clark's work raises questions about the specification in this study (and in many other studies). To explain, the author(s) reviews 3 distinct arguments whether countries will support an ethnic group in its struggle against another country. The arguments motivate hypotheses, and each hypothesis proposes a relationship between a given concept and whether a country will support an ethnic group. Each of these variables is then included in a multivariate regression.

This is a venerable practice in the literature. Yet I would argue that it is not a particularly sound practice. It seems to me that we know from the start that the regression is misspecified—none of the three arguments implies that regression. A better way to investigate the utility of these three arguments would be to specify and estimate the parameters for three different statistical models. Clark's work explains how we might draw inferences about which model is best if the models are nested. I don't believe these three models would be nested, so I don't believe Clark's work would come directly into play.

Some would argue that my view is unnecessarily purist, and perhaps it is. The authors' approach is certainly the norm, and I would not make a case against publication on these grounds. Instead, I throw it out for consideration as I believe it is a better way to proceed.

Below, I note some copy editing suggestions. To summarize, this is an interesting, well executed study. The author knows the literature well, has designed a sound study and collected useful new data, has used appropriate statistical techniques, and written a good report. I enjoyed reading it and

learned something by doing so.

Copy Editing

I would cut the first paragraph—the link to 11 Sept would be appropriate in a newspaper or magazine article, or in a study that is focused directly on an issue that is more centrally related to the events surround 11 Sept. I found it a stretch.

Rewrite the 1st sentence of the first paragraph in the section entitled “Dependent Variable: What is International Support?” (p. 11).

The 1st sentence below “Insert Figure 1 Here” is awkward (p. 11).

The phrase “separatist states” is awkward (in the restatement of hypothesis 2, p. 12).

The sentence which begins “This produces variables ranging from one to twenty...” (p. 15) is awkward.