

**The (Exaggerated) Perils of Democracy:
Analyzing Democracy's Influence on Different Forms of Communal Dissent**

Stephen M. Saideman, McGill University
David Lanoue, University of Alabama

We can be reached via:
Department of Political Science
McGill University
855 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, PQ, H3A 2T7
Office: (514) 398-2324
Email: steve.saideman@mcgill.ca

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Abstract: This paper represents an exploratory analysis of the relationships between democracy and different forms of ethnic conflict. Only recently have scholars sought to unpack ethnic conflict and take seriously the variations in causes and dynamics of different forms of dissent. This article continues in this direction by considering how institutions interact with various kinds of ethnic strife. We consider three different forms of ethnic conflict—protest, conflict among groups, and violence against the state. We focus on whether ethnic conflict rises or falls due to the dynamics of election cycles, and find that each form of dissent is, indeed, distinct, and that elections are not as destabilizing as expected. We discuss our results and the implications for broader debates about political institutions and ethnic conflict.

What is the impact of elections on ethnic unrest? Anecdotal evidence suggests that communally-defined violence increases during elections as groups are mobilized and as politicians make provocative campaign promises. Moreover, elites may seek to create conflict in order to demobilize their supporters their potential opponents (Gagnon 2004). Because the stakes of winning and losing may be very high, it is reasonable to hypothesize that elections may deepen communal frictions.

However, it is also possible that elections may serve to reduce extreme forms of dissent, as individuals and groups focus their efforts on getting their representatives elected. During election periods, groups may decide that working through the system holds potential for improving their situation. Indeed, elections may lead to restraint as groups try to avoid antagonizing potential voters and coalition partners.

These questions are vital to understanding the impact of democratization on ethnic conflict, a topic that has been hotly debated since the end of the Cold War (Snyder 1999). If elections exacerbate ethnic strife, then we need to take seriously arguments that suggest that democracy may not be the best response to divided societies (Lustick 1979). Indeed, much attention has been paid to which kinds of electoral institutions may be best for the new democracies (Horowitz 1985, 1991, 2004; Lijphart 1977, 2004). This literature typically assumes that elections are inherently dangerous, but that these dangers can be ameliorated by the right set of institutions. Given recent and ongoing efforts to create viable democracies in plural societies in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, it is imperative that we continue to work toward a clearer comprehension of the impact of elections on ethnic conflict.

Recent scholarship has produced significant advances in this area. Wilkinson (2004) provides path-breaking work about the relationship of elections, institutions and violence in

India. He demonstrates that politicians have incentives to foster violence among groups as part of their electoral strategies, depending on the composition of their constituencies. It is not clear, however, whether these dynamics play out beyond the Indian context. In particular, we cannot determine the impact of various political institutions, such as electoral systems and federalism, which are held constant in the Indian case.¹ Further, Wilkinson focuses solely on ethnic riots, but there are other forms of communal strife that might interact with elections. By considering three distinct forms of unrest—protest, inter-group violence, and conflict with the government—across a wide variety of political systems, we can assess some of the causal dynamics at work.² Surprisingly, outside of Wilkinson, there has been very little effort to determine what relationships might exist between elections and ethnic strife, as opposed to institutions and conflict.³

By using a global dataset, we seek to determine the general dynamics of the relationship between elections, electoral institutions, and ethnic strife. We first consider the different forms of communal conflict, and suggest that political competition may influence ethnically-oriented protest activity differently than it affects violence among ethnic groups or violence between groups and the government. We then address possible connections between elections and ethnic strife, taking into account the political institutions that may mediate these relationships. We use time series cross sectional data, based in part on information collected by the Minorities at Risk (MAR) project, to determine which causal connections seem to matter most around the globe

¹ To be fair, Wilkinson (2004) does look at a few other cases, but only briefly.

² The obvious tradeoff here is that we will have less precise measures of violence, longer time periods (years instead of months), and more complex interactions among the variables.

³ See also Sisk and Reynolds (1998), which focuses on Africa.

between the mid 1980s and 2003.⁴ Finally, we deal with the implications for both policy and future research.

Varying Forms of Ethnic Conflict: Risks, Rewards and Violence

To understand the impact of elections on ethnic unrest, we need to consider the shapes such unrest can take. Form refers to whether the behavior is peaceful or violent, while target refers to whether the members of the group are focusing on other groups in the society, or on the government itself. Table 1 displays these categories.

Table 1: Target and Form of Conflict

		Form	
		Peaceful	Violent
Target	Central Government	Protest	Rebellion
	Other Groups	Protest ⁵	Communal Conflict

This analysis focuses on three types of ethnic strife: protest, communal conflict, and rebellion. Each presents a different mix of strategies and likely costs—getting out in the street and waving signs may be risky, but not as much as attacking members of other ethnic groups, which is still probably less dangerous than engaging in armed insurgency against the government. Each type of unrest is motivated by some sense of grievance,⁶ but how grievances turn into action varies, depending on the set of institutions that facilitate or inhibit dissent.

Ethnic contention may be peaceful, taking the form of non-violent activities aimed at influencing government policies. Thus, our first dependent variable is **protest**. For instance, the 1963 march on Washington by Martin Luther King, Jr., and his supporters as part of the U.S.

⁴ For more on MAR, see Gurr 1993, 2000, and <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/home.htm>.

⁵ While it is logically possible for groups to engage in peaceful demonstrations against other groups and they occasionally do so, this is less relevant for our study.

⁶ A recent turn in the ethnic conflict literature has focused on greed, as opposed to grievance, driving civil war (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2001; Ballantine and Sherman 2003; Ross 2004).

civil rights movement would be considered an ethnic protest, as sufficient numbers of African-Americans were engaging in peaceful dissent to indicate they had a common set of grievances. The social movement literature⁷ extensively discusses political protests, but our focus here is on what differentiates peaceful dissent from more violent forms of ethnic unrest.

Because the risks of peaceful protest are relatively low, understanding the size of a demonstration turns on the question of mobilization. The more people involved, the greater the attention from politicians, parties, journalists, and scholars. True, collective action is always problematic and especially so for large groups (Olson 1965), but scholars of contentious politics have not found these problems to be insurmountable (Lichbach 1995). Protests are relatively short-term events—people march on the capital, for instance, and then go home. We should expect more and bigger protests when circumstances aggravate a group's sense of grievance and when conditions are most favorable to mass mobilization.

A second, more violent form of ethnic strife is **communal conflict**, where action is directed against other groups, rather than against the state. A good example would be Hindu-Muslim riots in India, where groups clash with one another, rather than directly challenging the authority of the government.⁸ Attacking another group is more dangerous than protest, but less risky than attacking the government. The attacked group can retaliate, but has fewer instruments of power at its disposal than the state does. Indeed, riots generally occur only when the attacking group has a local majority and feels relatively secure (Horowitz 2001). Thus, for Horowitz, low risks play a key role in fostering inter-group violence.

⁷ The literature is vast, but a few recent books nicely review and extend the debate: Aminzade 2001; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001.

⁸ Wilkinson's book (2004), along with Horowitz (2001), clearly present the dynamics of inter-group conflict, particularly but not exclusively in the Indian case.

The third form of conflict is **rebellion**—violence aimed against the government.

Chechnya provides an obvious contemporary example, with Chechens engaging in a number of violent attacks in their efforts to separate from Russia. Attacking the central government is extraordinarily dangerous, as the national leadership generally controls the means of repression. Because of the personal risks that members of groups face if they join a rebellion, rebellious organizations will be small and often follow a strategy of insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003).

Due to the inherent dangers of attacking the government and the long-term nature of insurgency, it is unlikely that temporary changes in context will cause groups to take up arms against the state. Therefore, short-term fluctuations in political or economic circumstances, such as elections or short-term economic decline, should matter less than longstanding deprivations, real or perceived. That is, relatively permanent national characteristics and the consequent accumulation of grievances are more likely to trigger rebellion (Gurr 1993, 2000).

Table 2 displays the distribution of our dependent variables in democracies during the period from 1980-2003. Not surprisingly, ethnic unrest is the exception, rather than the rule, among most groups over this time span. Nevertheless, a wide variety of behaviors occurs in all three areas (protest, communal conflict, and rebellion), and they range from relatively minor actions to very severe processes that could threaten regimes. It is clear, in any event, that there is sufficient variety and variance in all three categories to allow us to develop and test models of ethnic conflict.⁹

⁹ While communal conflict and rebellion may appear to be very similar, it became quite apparent during backcoding that the two are not only conceptually distinct but also empirically different behavior.

Table 2. Frequency of Ethnic Conflict in Democracies, 1980-2003

Protest¹⁰	N	%	Communal Conflict	N	%	Rebellion	N	%
None Reported	1045	69.5	None Manifest	1041	69.2	No Rebellion Reported	1,150	76.5
Less than 10 k participants	325	21.6	Acts of Harassment	72	4.8	Political Banditry	108	7.2
Between 10k and 100k	91	6.1	Political Agitation	53	2.5	Campaigns of Terrorism	97	6.5
Over 100k	43	2.9	Sporadic Violent Attacks	215	14.3	Local Rebellion	25	1.7
			Anti-group Demonstrations	24	1.6	Small Scale Guerilla Activity	40	2.7
			Communal Rioting	77	5.1	Inter. Scale Guerilla Activity	34	2.3
			Communal Warfare	22	1.5	Large Scale Guerilla Activity	30	2.0
						Protracted Civil War	20	1.3
Total	1,504		Total	1,504		Total	1,504	

Thinking About Groups

In our discussion thus far, we have referred to ethnic groups without any further specification. This might suggest that we expect groups to act *as* groups, with all members pursuing the same course of action, as unitary rational actors. Our concept of the group, both theoretically and as we measure dissent, is a number of individuals sharing a common identity and acting in concert. Thus, an ethnic group or organization claiming to represent an ethnic group, when engaging in protest or violence, need not have the support of their entire membership. For example, while the participants in 1992 Los Angeles riots may have been

¹⁰ In the MAR dataset, the protest variable ranges from zero to six, with one and two focusing on organization rather than demonstrations. To focus clearly on political protest behavior, we re-code the variable with one measuring smaller protests and so on.

largely African-American, this in no way suggests that all—or even most—African-Americans in the area (and certainly not in the country) were involved in the uprising. When we say that groups engage in dissent in response to elections or specific institutions, we mean that some members of an ethnic group have mobilized and are engaging in peaceful or violent behavior.¹¹

More importantly, because we are using the Minorities at Risk data set, which only includes groups that are politically mobilized and/or face significant discrimination, our analyses can only be generalized to such groups. That is, our results speak to the dynamics of a subset of all ethnic groups—those that are already politically relevant. Because we are considering the conventional wisdom that elections might cause more ethnic strife, it makes sense to focus on the groups most likely to be impacted by elections—those already “at risk.” That is, the limits of the MAR data are not particularly harmful given our focus. We also conduct, as discussed below, analyses of data at the state level.

A third set of issues also arises. Not all politically relevant groups are the same, so we need to think about how different ones will face various risks and opportunities. Specifically, highly concentrated groups have been found to be more prone to conflict.¹² Individuals within geographically concentrated groups may feel less threatened by the risks of their behavior when surrounded by their kin. Further, because this study focuses on institutional arrangements, concentration matters because it interacts with electoral institutions. Concentrated minorities, for example, can gain representation even under plurality systems, such as the Scots in the United Kingdom. Group size should also matter, since we expect that groups who have more weight in

¹¹ Obviously, social mobilization is complex, so we simplify here. For more on mobilization, see Finkel and Muller 1998, Lichbach 1994, and Muller and Opp 1986; and see footnote 7.

¹² While there is a statistical consensus that concentration is associated with conflict, the explanations vary rather widely. See, for instance, Gurr 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2002; Toft 2003.

elections are taken more seriously, and perhaps may, therefore, be more willing to work within the system.

Elections and Electoral Institutions

It has long been argued that democratic competition may cause elites to promise increasingly extreme policies on behalf of one ethnic group at the expense of others (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). This dynamic, known as ethnic outbidding, has been explored by Rothschild, de Figueiredo Jr. and Weingast, Horowitz (1985), and others. Rothschild (1981, 1995) may have put it best: “outbidding and outflanking counterelites seek to tap this mass emotional potential by inciting ethnopolitical radicalization. Even incumbent ethnic elites may have to tap it ... to protect their flanks.” Ethnic outbidding can initiate an increasing spiral of conflict, as competition among elites for one group’s support will influence the calculations of other groups, justifying the fears they may have (Saideman 1998, de Figueiredo Jr. and Weingast 1999). Wilkinson (2004) suggests a different but similarly problematic dynamic—that politicians may actually encourage violence as part of their electoral strategies. Thus, we need to consider whether ethnic violence and electoral cycles are related.

Elections Cycles: Before, During, and After

While ethnic unrest can be both ongoing and episodic, elections themselves obviously provide a focal point for groups’ hopes and fears. The process of competing for office may pose a potential threat to political stability. Campaigning politicians may seek to mobilize supporters, and these efforts may get out of control, leading to violence. During an election, violence may increase as factions seek to prevent others from voting. Finally, after an election, conflict may increase, as a politician put into power based on an extreme nationalist platform attempts to follow through on those promises and accountability is at its lowest level.

On the other hand, elections may reduce tensions by providing a mechanism through which grievances can be peacefully translated into public policy. Further, the arrival of elections may divert activists away from conflictual behaviors in favor of concentrated efforts to gain power through the ballot box. Moreover, the post-election period may see a decline in ethnic conflict as a new government enjoys a period of legitimacy immediately upon taking office.

Because of these conflicting dynamics, we do not automatically expect election years to be better or worse than other years. Wilkinson (2004) shows that politicians may have incentives to play up or play down divides, to facilitate riots or to prevent them, as elections approach, depending on other factors. Thus, our first hypothesis is that election years will be no worse and no better than other years.

A Key Caveat—Elections May Be Endogenous

A confounding factor is that elections may not be obviously approaching in systems where they are called by the sitting government rather than determined by calendar. In many—particularly parliamentary—systems, one may not know for certain when balloting is likely to take place unless the following year is the last possible year of a government’s term. For instance, in a parliamentary system where elections must be held no later than an incumbent government’s fifth year in power, one could only be certain that an election would soon occur during the cycle’s last year. Because called—as opposed to fixed—elections may be both the cause and the consequence of other factors (including ethnic strife), we refer to them as “endogenous” elections.

Endogenous elections raise several complications. First, members of ethnic groups may not be expecting elections early in the term, so they may not start mobilizing until it is too late to stage significant actions prior to election day. Second, and more problematic for analysts,

politicians may choose to call elections *because* of the current state of ethnic relations. A politician may call an election at a time of relative ethnic peace if her constituency is multiethnic, and delay calling elections when ethnic hostilities peak. On the other hand, a politician reliant on a single ethnic group may want to call elections when conflict is high, since his supporters are most likely to be mobilized to turn out.

How, then, might groups react in systems that have fixed election cycles compared to where elections are endogenous?¹³ In the first case, citizens know well in advance precisely when the next election will be held. In the latter case, however, the government is free to call an election at any time within a given period (say, four years).¹⁴ Systems with fixed cycles may help to limit ethnic conflict by reducing uncertainty over when and under what circumstances the next election will be held. But it is also possible that the rigidity of such systems may contribute to unrest by allowing pressures to build up without any opportunity to address them democratically until the end of the fixed cycle.

Endogenous systems, while they may allow governments to respond more quickly to deteriorating conditions, are also not without potential dangers. We may, for example, see more conflict, both against other groups and against the state, in endogenous systems. Politicians can manipulate the political process in endogenous systems, timing elections so that incumbents have the best chance of achieving re-election. This may increase the sense that the system is unfair, that the game is rigged. If engaging in normal politics is deemed unlikely to work, then more risky means of achieving one's ends become more attractive.

¹³ In our dataset, fixed and endogenous systems are highly, but not perfectly, correlated with presidential and parliamentary regimes. Most of the differences between these measures are due to semi-presidential systems. Our findings about fixed systems may thus involve dynamics that are related to other aspects of presidentialism besides the electoral calendar. In future research, we hope to develop these nuances further

¹⁴ Of course, governments may fall due to no confidence votes or to disintegrating coalitions. For the sake of simplicity, our discussion focuses on one cause of elections in non-fixed systems.

Because endogenous systems create greater uncertainty about the political process—both one's access and its fairness—we expect more dissent in such systems. Thus, our second hypothesis is that severe dissent is less likely in systems with fixed electoral calendars.

Length of Election Cycles

The length of election cycles may vary in both fixed and endogenous election systems. In the United States, for example, presidential elections are held every four years; in Mexico, the president is chosen every six years. In the American and Mexican cases, of course, we are dealing with fixed electoral systems, so voters in those countries know when their next elections will be held. By contrast, voters in most parliamentary systems have no such knowledge; they merely know the last possible date that an election can be called, based on the government's constitutional or legal term of office.

Because large scale mobilization is hard to sustain over the long term, we may see less ethnic unrest when terms of office are long. When elections are a relatively common occurrence, it is easier to sustain activism from peak event to peak event. However, if there is a longer dry spell between elections, then group members will be harder to mobilize.

On the other hand, we may also see more conflict in systems with longer terms office, because groups will have fewer opportunities to exercise influence. Thus, alternative means of expressing frustration and seeking power may become more attractive. There may be fewer opportunity costs to engaging in conflictual behaviors if elections are far off than if they are frequent.

Because longer terms essentially limit access to the political process, we expect that the negative consequences of longer terms are likely to outweigh the positive ones. Thus, our third hypothesis is that longer terms are associated with more dissent.

Federalism

The literature is mixed in its assessment of federalism's impact on ethnic unrest. The same structures that give politically relevant groups voice and influence also provide them with a means for mobilizing against opponents. Further, within the federal sub-units, the dominant group, even if a minority nationally, may use its power to oppress smaller groups in the same region. Thus, federalism has alternatively been considered a helpful tool for managing ethnic conflict (Lijphart 1977, Horowitz 1985), or has been viewed as a significant contributor to ethnic strife (Nordlinger 1972, Roeder 1991, Snyder 1999).¹⁵ To help respond to these debates, we will include a simple measure of federalism in these analyses, based on whether or not a country is divided into federal sub-units.

The Electoral System: Translating Votes into Representation

The electoral system may also have a significant impact on the incidence of ethnic unrest. Countries may employ a winner-take-all, or first-past-the-post, system in which seats are distributed geographically, and only the top vote-getter for each seat wins election to the national legislature. Such a system disadvantages smaller parties and, to the extent that these parties are tied to ethnic groups, also disadvantages minority groups themselves. A first-past-the-post system may increase group frustrations by limiting members' access to positions of power.

Proportional representation (or PR) systems ascribe representation to parties on the basis of the percentage of the vote they win nationally. While there are many variations on this theme, including rules governing minimum thresholds for representation, PR systems generally allow smaller parties the chance to win at least a few seats in the national legislature and even, in some cases, to participate in governing coalitions. For this reason, scholars have tended to argue that

¹⁵ For more recent work on federalism in general, see Amoretti and Bermeo 2003; Filippov et al. 2004; Suberu 2001.

systems with PR suffer from less ethnic strife than those with Plurality electoral laws (Reynolds 1995; Cohen 1997; Saideman et al. 2002), though not all agree (Lardeyret 1991).

New vs. Enduring Regimes

One final institutional variable to be considered is the age of the regime itself. We argue above that groups at risk should be concerned with the link between political institutions and electoral outcomes, because these outcomes determine how influence is distributed and whether each group will be secure against threats from more powerful adversaries. But the link between institutions and outcomes is not necessarily self-evident. Rather, it is often learned through years of experience within a particular institutional framework. Thus, it is likely that this relationship is both clearer and better understood in older regimes than in younger ones.

Indeed, much debate has considered whether younger democracies face more conflict than their older counterparts (Snyder 1999; Saideman et al. 2002). Younger regimes may be seen as untested, unstable, and thus more prone to acts of protest and violence. But it is also possible that older regimes suffer from a longer accumulation of grievances which may give rise to unrest. By controlling for the age of each democracy in our sample, we can deal with these issues.

To summarize, our research seeks to explore the following questions dealing with the relationship between electoral institutions and ethnic conflict:

1. Is conflict greater during election years?
2. Does conflict recede or grow during the period immediately following each election?
3. Is ethnic unrest greater in fixed or endogenous systems?
4. Does the length of electoral cycles have any impact on the degree of unrest?
5. Does federalism reduce or exacerbate group strife?

6. To what extent, if any, are PR electoral systems superior to first-past-the-post systems in keeping the peace?
7. Is conflict greater in older, more established regimes, or in relatively new ones?

As noted above, we also recognize that protest, communal conflict, and outright rebellion are very different processes, with different goals, costs, and risks. Thus, we consider it entirely possible that institutions may have an impact on some forms of conflict and not others. In particular, we expect that rebellion, as the riskiest of all conflict behaviors, is less likely to be subject to short-term forces than are protest and communal conflict. In any event, because each process is distinct, we will analyze each one separately.

Modeling Protest, Communal Conflict, and Rebellion

We created a time series dataset, using variables from the Minorities at Risk project and elsewhere. We use these data as our starting point because we are interested in how different groups react to institutional incentives. Some have criticized MAR for selection bias, as groups may have been included based on their level of protest or violence (Hug 2003).¹⁶ However, it currently is the only group level dataset containing worldwide data. More importantly, because many states contain groups that respond differently to various conditions, focusing solely at the state level would miss important variation. Further, as our study tends to focus on how institutions influence mobilized groups to engage in conflict, as opposed to what causes groups to form in the first place, this bias should not be so severe for the present project. Because the data set does not include all ethnic groups, however, we cannot generalize beyond the sample in

¹⁶ Because MAR includes only political mobilized or discriminated groups, we cannot use this data to ask why groups become mobilized in the first place or why some groups face discrimination. One can view MAR as similar to the datasets in International Relations that focus on politically relevant dyads. Just as one would not expect Burkina Faso to war with Nepal, we should not expect all ethnic groups to respond to political events. Thus, one way to review MAR is as a dataset of politically relevant ethnic groups.

the data set. Nevertheless, because the data include nearly all politically relevant groups around the world, our analyses should still have something meaningful to say.

To address these concerns, we have also constructed a state-level dataset based on MAR. In this dataset, countries were coded by giving each the maximum level of the particular variable in a given year. Thus, a country with three groups, two at peace and one engaged in protracted civil war, would be coded as a seven for rebellion. Since we include all countries throughout the world with populations greater than one million in our set, those countries that do not have any MAR groups residing within it are coded as zero for protest, communal conflict and rebellion.

The time span for both datasets ranges from 1980-2003.¹⁷ The analyses only include democracies with a POLITY (Gurr and Jagers 1999) score of 6 or greater.¹⁸ We include all democracies, new and old, in our analyses.

Our basic unit of analysis in the first table is the individual ethnic group. The MAR data set measures the largest protest and the degree to which each group commits acts of rebellion and inter-group conflict during a given year. We have added to this data set information on the electoral systems and electoral cycles in the countries in which these groups reside. We refer to our individual data points as “group/years” because we create one individual observation for each ethnic group living in a country for each year under consideration.¹⁹ In the second set of results, we use “state/years” as our individual data points as we are using a second dataset that focuses on states rather than groups.

¹⁷ .We also recognize that during this time frame, the definition of “ethnic minority” might also change. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuanians were considered a minority group, given their vulnerable status within the USSR; once Lithuania achieved independence, ethnic Russians in Lithuania became the “minority at risk”.

¹⁸ Setting the limit at either 5 or 7 does not radically change our results.

¹⁹ Obviously, it would be better to use monthly or quarterly data to capture the impact of timing of elections, but we lack quarterly or monthly data for other variables.

Our dependent variables, taken from MAR, are protest, rebellion and communal conflict.²⁰ We also include a variable measuring the level of dissent during the previous year, assuming that the level of ethnic strife depends partly on the level of previous conflict. While this is standard procedure for time series cross sectional analysis, it does present an important problem. Many of the variables that might account for this year's behavior might also shape last year's. The inclusion of a lag, therefore, may cause otherwise relevant variables to appear to be insignificant since their impact is captured by the lag's coefficient. Therefore, we present results for analyses with and without lag terms.

Our primary concern is with countries' political institutions and election cycles, so we include several independent variables to measure these concepts. First, we specify an indicator of whether or not a given year is one in which a national election occurs (scored "1" if it is, and "0" otherwise).²¹ Second, we include a variable that counts the number of years since the last national election. Third, we measure whether or not a country uses a fixed or endogenous system for scheduling elections (fixed = "1"; endogenous = "0"). Finally, we measure, in years, the length of each country's maximum electoral terms.

In addition, we include three variables that characterize a country's political institutions: the proportionality of the electoral system, the use or nonuse of federalism, and the age of the regime. In the analyses below, we use an indicator that ranges from one to four in increasing

²⁰ A recent critique of time series cross sectional (TSCS) analyses recommends using first differences as one way to take more seriously the temporal dimension of the processes at work (Wilson and Butler 2003). We get identical results if we use as our dependent variable first differences rather than the level of dissent, with the exception that the coefficients for the lags change direction and size.

²¹ We define a national election as one where the outcome may change who governs the executive branch of government. It may be the case that legislative elections in off-years of presidential systems may matter as well, but our focus for now is on the executive branch. Cox (xxxx) finds that party dynamics vary depending on whether legislative and executive elections are concurrent or not. We do not address this here, but plan to do so in future work.

proportionality (majority, plurality, semi-PR, PR).²² Further, we code each group as living in either a federal (1) or a unitary (0) state.²³ Finally, we identify young democracies as those in which the regime is less than twenty years old (scored “1”); all others regimes are considered “older” and are given a score of “0.”²⁴

We also recognize that ethnic conflict may be generated by factors beyond elections and electoral institutions. Thus, we will also specify several control variables dealing with economic and demographic conditions. Of our two economic control variables, one is designed to measure fluctuations in the economy, and is operationalized as the *change* in gross domestic product [GDP] per capita. The other is an indicator of the overall wealth of societies, and is measured as the *level* of GDP per capita. Thus, our models will account for both short- and long-term economic conditions in each country.

For the group-level analyses, we include measures dealing with the ethnic groups themselves. First, we specify a variable indicating how geographically concentrated a group is, ranging from “0” for highly dispersed to “3” for most concentrated. We also employ measures of group size, both absolute and relative.

In our analyses of the state-level dataset, we obviously drop the group level variables of group concentration, as well as relative and absolute group size. Instead, we add a few variables that differentiate states by their composition and size. For example, scholars have been engaged in debates over whether diverse societies are more or less productive, and more or less

²² We have chosen to use the ordinal variable in this case to keep this study consistent with previous work (Cohen 1997, Saideman et al. 2002). We chose not to use district magnitude for this reason.

²³ We recognize that it is possible to have a more fine-grained indicator for varying levels of federalism, but we prefer our definition to be as simple and inclusive as possible to minimize the loss of cases due to missing data.

²⁴ Again, this follows the convention of previous work, and also coincides with the idea that it takes a generation for institutions take root.

conflictual than more homogeneous ones.²⁵ Thus, because we are interested in how elections influence ethnic politics, we use ethnic fractionalization and its square in our analyses. We use both because the growing consensus is that fractionalization has a curvilinear relationship with conflict. Highly heterogeneous societies, such as Tanzania, are less susceptible to violence than bipolar or tripolar societies, such as Rwanda. By including ethnic fractionalization and its square, we control for heterogeneity. We also specify a measure of the state's population since it affects both the likelihood that protests will be of significant size and the state's capacity to deter conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003).

We perform Prais-Winsten regressions with panels corrected standard errors since we are dealing with a pooled cross-section time series dataset.²⁶ None of the independent variables is correlated sufficiently to pose a threat of multicollinearity. For each dependent variable, we estimate two models. These models are identical except that the even-numbered ones drop the lag term. Table 3 displays the results of our analyses of the group-year dataset, while table 4 presents the analyses of the state-year dataset. As the tables indicate, the various forms of dissent are, indeed, distinct processes. We deal specifically with each of our dependent variables below.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of this debate, see Posner 200x.

²⁶ Our dependent variables are ordinal, but we chose regression analysis due to the lack of good tool for doing pooled cross-sectional time series analysis with ordinal data. For more on such analyses, see Beck and Katz 1995. Wilson and Butler (2003) are critical of TSCS analyses that blindly use Beck and Katz's recommendations. As a result, we performed a series of analyses using other techniques, including STATA's xtreg with fixed effects, random effects, population averaging and most likelihood estimation. Our results were quite consistent, except for the fixed effects models, which focus on the temporal dynamics. In fixed effects analyses, changes in GDP/capita, regime duration, election years and years since last election have similar results as in the results presented in the table. We do not report these results here.

Table 3: Election Cycles and Dissent, All Democracies, Group-Level Data, 1980-2003

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependent Variable	Protest	Protest	Communal Conflict	Communal Conflict	Rebellion	Rebellion
Previous Dissent	.49*** (.06)		.61*** (.06)		.77*** (.04)	
Fixed Election Calendar	-.06** (.03)	-.14*** (.05)	-.01 (.13)	-.16 (.22)	-.24** (.08)	-.84*** (.24)
Election Year	-.05 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	-.01 (.06)	-.002 (.05)	.003 (.04)	-.04 (.03)
Years Since Last Election	-.01 (.01)	-.001 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.001 (.01)	-.02** (.01)
Maximum Years in Cycle	-.02 (.02)	-.02 (.03)	.01 (.05)	.13 (.08)	.03 (.02)	.17*** (.08)
Change in GDP/Cap	-.04 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.04 (.05)	.09** (.04)	-.07* (.04)	.06*** (.03)
Log, GDP/Cap, \$10,000's	-.001 (.02)	-.01 (.04)	-.11*** (.04)	-.21*** (.06)	-.04 (.04)	-.33*** (.12)
Enduring Regime	.01 (.03)	.03 (.05)	.09 (.09)	.26* (.13)	.03 (.08)	.32*** (.13)
Electoral System	-.04*** (.02)	-.06** (.02)	-.04 (.07)	-.11 (.09)	-.02 (.03)	-.44 (.07)
Federal	.05* (.03)	.11** (.05)	.11 (.09)	.40** (.16)	.00001 (.05)	.14 (.18)
Group Proportion	.15 (.09)	.35* (.19)	-.15 (.47)	2.22*** (.83)	-.58 (.37)	.25 (.75)
Group Size, 100,000's	.34** (.16)	.67** (.28)	.48** (.23)	1.00 (.69)	.08 (.20)	.18 (.74)
Group Concentration	-.004 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.07** (.03)	-.14*** (.04)	-.05* (.03)	.35*** (.09)
Constant	.44*** (.17)	.69** (.28)	-1.57*** (.38)	2.63*** (.66)	.42 (.31)	2.54*** (1.04)
Rho	-.12	.48	-.25	.50	.1	1
R²	.3447	.0753	.5833	.1687	.7472	.1336
Wald X²	180.63	44.30	382.15	61.01	1083.26	130.15
Prob > X²	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000
Observations	2068	2071	2068	2071	2060	2064

Standard Errors are in Parentheses, * p > .1, ** p > .05, *** p > .01

Table 4: Election Cycles and Dissent, All Democracies, State-Level Data, 1980-2003

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependent Variable	Protest	Protest	Communal Conflict	Communal Conflict	Rebellion	Rebellion
Previous Dissent	.57*** (.06)		.63*** (.06)		.73*** (.05)	
Fixed Election Calendar	-10** (.04)	-.28*** (.06)	-.08 (.14)	-.43 (.31)	-.17** (.13)	-.99*** (.32)
Election Year	.03 (.03)	.04 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.01 (.05)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Years Since Last Election	.02* (.01)	.02 (.01)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.02)	.003 (.01)	-.001 (.02)
Maximum Years in Cycle	-.05* (.03)	-.04 (.04)	.09** (.05)	.16* (.09)	.11*** (.04)	.24* (.14)
Log, GDP/Cap, \$10,000's	-.05* (.03)	-.05 (.06)	-.14** (.06)	-.19* (.10)	-.15** (.07)	-.30*** (.11)
Change in GDP/Cap	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	.03 (.03)	.06** (.03)	-.02 (.02)	.04* (.02)
Enduring Regime	.01 (.03)	-.10* (.06)	.09 (.07)	-.01 (.13)	-.05 (.09)	.10 (.12)
Electoral System	-.02 (.02)	-.07** (.03)	.01 (.04)	-.14 (.12)	.17*** (.06)	-.03 (.18)
Federal	.01 (.04)	.19** (.10)	-.03 (.09)	.08 (.26)	-.41*** (.05)	-.56* (.30)
Log, Country's Population	.08*** (.02)	.19*** (.02)	.22*** (.04)	.54*** (.07)	.24*** (.05)	.41*** (.11)
Ethnic Fractional	1.12*** (.30)	2.74*** (.53)	2.22*** (.63)	4.56*** (1.31)	2.49*** (.65)	6.20*** (2.27)
Ethnic Frac, Squared	-.95*** (.32)	-2.45*** (.64)	-2.18*** (.62)	-4.61*** (1.21)	-2.23*** (.70)	-6.04** (2.68)
Constant	-.06 (.30)	-.95* (.52)	-1.22*** (.70)	-3.25** (1.39)	-1.98 (.43)	-2.05 (1.79)
Rho	-.25	.15	-.56	-.13	.17	.93
R²	.5890	.2596	.7752	.4064	.8203	.2397
Wald X²	906.06	205.24	2804.46	387.53	5385.86	387.88
Prob > X²	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000
Observations	1229	1269	1229	1269	1229	1269

Standard Errors are in Parentheses, * p > .1, ** p > .05, *** p > .01

Protest

We find that non-violent political protest is significantly influenced by several institutional variables. It is less common, for example, when groups enjoy consistent and

predictable access to positions of power and influence in the political system. Proportional presentation, which guarantees most minorities at least some electoral representation, is negatively associated with our measure of protest.²⁷

Further, systems with fixed electoral terms also exhibit less protest activity than those in which elections are called by the sitting government. As noted above, not only do fixed systems provide for more certainty about when elections will be held, but they also reduce opportunities for manipulation of the electoral calendar. These factors apparently help to ameliorate the insecurity felt by groups who are out of power, and thus reduce the propensity to protest.

On the other hand, federalism apparently exacerbates non-violent dissent. In both Table 3 and Table 4, we find that federal systems have more protest activity than unitary systems. This is likely related, at least in part, to the fact that federal systems create more targets for protest activity (i.e., groups can express dissatisfaction with either the national or regional government). In addition, many federal systems are constructed to deal with pre-existing ethnic cleavages, suggesting that ethnic unrest may sometimes pre-date the imposition of federal structures.

While peaceful is apparently affected by national institutions, it seems to be generally unrelated to the electoral calendar itself. For the most part, protest is neither more nor less common during election years or at any given point in the electoral cycle. To be sure, in our state-level data, there is some evidence that protest grows as years pass since the last election, but this finding is substantively small and not robust.²⁸

²⁷ In additional analyses, we substitute two dummy variables: one for whether a system is plurality/majoritarian or not and one for whether it is semi-PR or not. We find that plurality/majoritarian is strongly related to more protest and more rebellion, but not more communal conflict, while semi-PR is not significantly related to any form of dissent.

²⁸ Interestingly, our state-level data also provide a seemingly contradictory suggestion that non-violent dissent is inversely related to the length of a country's electoral cycle, but this finding, too, is weak and only occurs in one analysis.

While the findings above hold for both our group-level and state-level analyses, there are some interesting results that are unique to each table. We find, for example, in our group-level data that both relative group proportion and raw group size are, as expected, positively related to protest, although this may be an artifact of how our dependent variables are constructed. As we have already mentioned, high scores on the protest variable are based on the number of participants in the protest, which is, in turn, partially a function of the overall size of the group. Thus, larger groups are, by definition, better equipped to engage in larger protests.

Turning to our state-level analysis, we find that the logged value of a country's population is positively related to protest, which is also consistent with the expectation that countries with more people simply have more candidates to engage in dissent. Our results are also consistent with our discussion of fragmentation above. Our measure of ethnic fragmentation is positive and significant, while our indicator of squared ethnic fragmentation is negative and significant. As expected, while ethnic conflict obviously requires the existence of at least two or three competing groups in a country, any significantly greater fragmentation beyond that point *reduces* the likelihood of ethnic strife. Indeed, our state-level findings for population and fragmentation are strong and robust regardless of the dependent variable in question, and are also significant in our analyses of communal conflict and rebellion.

Communal Conflict

Unlike protest, inter-group conflict is noticeably less sensitive to the institutional and electoral measures specified in our models. At the group level, there is some evidence that federalism encourages communal conflict, and that such conflict is greater in enduring regimes. At the state level, we find that clashes between groups are more likely in countries with longer electoral cycles. Nevertheless, we see none of the strong, consistent results that are apparent

above in the case of non-violent dissent. Indeed, in the case of our economic measures (GDP and changed GDP), the results for group-level and state-level data actually contradict each other both in terms of the size and direction of the coefficients.

In our group-level analysis, however, we do find some interesting results for our control variables. As is the case with protest, communal conflict is greatest among groups that are relatively large, both in real and relative terms. On the other hand, more concentrated groups are less likely to engage in inter-group violence, probably because, given their concentration, they face fewer formidable opponents in the region of the country in which they live.

Rebellion

We suggested earlier that anti-government violence, as the riskiest type of ethnic conflict, should be more sensitive to enduring institutions and characteristics than to temporary or short-term changes. Our results generally bear this out. While short-term improvements in national GDP do appear to suppress rebellion, as least temporarily, the presence or proximity of an election year is irrelevant. Rather, the long-term nature of the electoral calendar (i.e., whether election dates are fixed or determined by the government), the maximum years in a government's term, and the existence or absence of federalism seem to have the greatest impact on violence directed against the government.

As in the case of protest, the relative stability and absence of manipulation afforded by fixed electoral systems appears to help reduce violent rebellion. Anti-government action is far less likely to take place in systems where everyone knows more or less exactly when the next election will take place. By contrast, endogenous systems may lead to increased violence against

the state because the sitting government can manipulate the electoral calendar, calling elections at times when they are more likely to be successful.²⁹

On the other hand, longer terms of office are clearly correlated with greater rebellious activity. Certainly, significant frustrations can accumulate over the length of a party's term in office. In systems with particularly long terms, the frustrations can grow very acute, as various actors lose patience with the ability of the political process to deal with their concerns in a timely fashion.

At the state-level, our findings also very strongly suggest that federal systems are less prone to rebellion. Federal structures, of course, allow certain groups to enjoy significant power within the federal sub-unit, making rebellion both more costly and less necessary. Perhaps by giving minority groups a share of the power, at least over their geographical region, federal systems serve to reduce satisfaction with the national regime. This finding does, however, seem to contradict arguments suggesting that federalism designed to give groups power only encourages separatism (Nordlinger 1972, Snyder 1999).

Finally, there is some evidence in our group-level analysis that anti-government violence is greater in enduring regimes than it is in newer ones. It is, of course, important not to overstate this finding, since it does not occur in our state-level data. Nevertheless, it does reinforce one finding from previous research—that, controlling for all other factors, young democracies face less violence than older ones (Saideman et al. 2002). Because violence requires a great deal of motivation, we should expect individuals and groups to resort to coercive measures only after a government has proven itself, after a sufficient time, to be incapable of addressing the potential violent actors' interests. Thus, new democracies may enjoy something of a “honeymoon” period

²⁹ The question of whether incumbents and challengers have different preferences for playing the ethnic card is something that deserves further exploration.

with ethnic groups. This may be especially true since groups may view newly gained democracy as a negotiated solution to previous problems.

Conclusions

Our analyses have significant implications for the study of dissent and for our understanding of elections and political institutions. First, we find that elections are less problematic than expected. Ethnic strife does not seem to strengthen or recede during election years, and there is no evidence that violence against the government accelerates as elections approach (indeed, according to Table 3, there is some suggestion that it may even decline). These analyses, supporting Wilkinson (2004), suggest that the relationship between elections and ethnic unrest is far more complicated than earlier arguments have suggested. Between this finding and the continued support for the notion that younger democracies are not as prone to violence, we apparently have less to fear from political competition and democratization than we might have thought.

In conjunction with emerging work, we continue to find that different forms of ethnic conflict have distinct dynamics. Actions against the government (protest and rebellion) are much more sensitive to political and electoral institutions than in communal conflict. In addition, group size and proportion, which are strongly correlated with protest and inter-group conflict, do not apparently drive rebellion, which is typically the undertaking of a small group of dissatisfied citizens.

Second, our findings allow us to get a better handle on the impact of federalism. Federal institutions apparently increase the incidence of protest and, perhaps, communal conflict. However, they also seem to decrease the level of rebellion against the state. Thus, the choice of

federalism poses a challenging tradeoff—more conflict at the national level in unitary systems or more strife at the lower levels in federalist systems.

Third, we find that institutions matter, but in ways that challenge policymakers. Parliamentary democracies may be more susceptible to protest and rebellion than previously expected because of their endogenous electoral calendar, a possibility that has largely been overlooked. Further work, however, is required to determine whether it is the uncertainty of the election calendar or other features of parliamentarism and presidentialism that drive these results.

Our work raises perhaps as many questions as it answers. The endogeneity of elections creates critical challenges and clearly requires further, more focused analysis. Case studies may help us to determine the causal mechanisms that explain precisely why there is less communal strife during election years. Policymakers unquestionably face difficult decisions, as less of one kind of conflict may mean more of another kind. The good news, however, is that the functioning of democracy via elections is apparently not inherently as problematic as previously feared.

Appendix: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Rebellion, First Difference	1386	-0.03	0.96	-7.00	7.00
Lag of Rebellion	1420	0.94	1.79	0.00	7.00
Protest, First Difference	1747	0.00	0.63	-3.00	3.00
Lag of Protest	2065	0.36	0.70	0.00	3.00
Communal Conflict, First Difference	1338	0.12	1.23	-6.00	6.00
Lag of Communal Conflict	1425	0.94	1.72	0.00	6.00
Is There a National Election This Year	1312	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
Years Since Last Election	1310	1.63	1.36	0.00	6.00
Number of Years in Election Cycle	1316	4.70	0.79	3.00	7.00
Gross Domestic Product Per Capita	4304	5053.64	6248.75	78.00	101120.00
Change in GDP/Capita	3777	0.12	0.82	-0.96	22.21
Has the Regime Lasted for More Than Twenty Years	1503	0.37	0.48	0.00	1.00
Electoral System	1428	2.91	1.10	1.00	4.00
Federal	1503	0.29	0.46	0.00	1.00
Group Proportion of Population	1503	0.10	0.13	0.00	0.90
Absolute Group Size (1000's)	1503	4898.15	13975.68	35	130000
Group Concentration	1503	2.00	1.15	0.00	3.00

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FOOTNOTES