THE SOCIETAL ORIGINS OF POWERSHARING

ETHNIC GEOGRAPHY, THREAT CAPABILITIES AND HORIZONTAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN WEAK STATES

Philip Roessler
Department of Government
College of William and Mary
proessler@wm.edu

David Ohls
School of International Service
American University
ohls@american.edu

January 2015

ABSTRACT

Why are some African countries trapped in devastating cycles of ethnic exclusion and civil war while others experience durable peace, secured by informal powersharing between rival ethnic elites? We argue these two equilibriums are rooted in the distribution of societal power and rival groups’ capabilities to credibly threaten to recapture state power if excluded from the central government. Only when both the ruling group and opposition possess strong threat capabilities does self-enforcing powersharing emerge. A strong opposition induces the ruler to commit to powersharing and to reluctantly accept coup risk over civil war risk. The ruling group’s own threat capabilities, in turn, constrain the opposition from trying to convert its share of power into absolute power. Supported by extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence on the effect of ethnic geography on ethno-political bargaining outcomes in post-colonial Africa, the paper advances a novel understanding of horizontal accountability and powersharing in weak states.
1. Introduction

Violent ethnic conflict has been one of the key causes of mass killing, economic underdevelopment and societal displacement in Africa over the last fifty years. From the Biafran War to the Rwandan genocide to the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan, large-scale violence between the central government and an armed opposition, each drawing support from different ethnic groups, has been a major source of state failure across the region. Yet, despite the political salience of ethnic divisions in most African countries, only roughly half have been plagued by ethnic-based civil war (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Posner 2005; Wimmer et al. 2009). What accounts for the durability of ethnic powersharing and the maintenance of ethnic peace in some countries and the breakdown of powersharing and the outbreak of ethnic war in others? This question is not just relevant to the study of sub-Saharan Africa but pertains to weak, ethnically-divided states worldwide (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Wimmer et al. 2009; Cederman et al. 2010).

In weak states rivals must use the threat of force to hold rulers accountable and induce them to share power (North et al. 2009; Svolik 2012). But under what conditions does the threat of force produce peaceful powersharing rather than an endless cycle of ethnic exclusion and violence? We argue that the threat of force credibly deters rulers from violating powersharing when it is backed up by strong societal power, in which a group possesses the mobilizational potential to credibly threaten to recapture state power from its societal base if it is excluded from the central government—what we describe as a group’s threat capabilities. Unless an opposition group possesses strong threat capabilities—Independent of the coercive capacity it gains from powersharing itself—the ruler faces few consequences from refusing or violating powersharing and locking-in a larger share of power for himself and his co-ethnics. Likewise, unless the ruling
group possesses strong threat capabilities, the opposition is tempted to seize and monopolize power for itself.

Thus, we argue that for powersharing to be self-enforcing, such that neither group has incentives to violate any agreement, both (or all) sides must have similarly strong threat capabilities. The costs of reneging on powersharing must constrain not just the incumbent, but constrain in expectation any actor that may seize power in the future. Daunted by the prospects of a devastating civil war—in which a group outside the central government uses force to challenge the state—no one group tries to permanently exclude another, and strong rivals reluctantly share power, even as it increases coup risk—that is the forcible transfer of executive power initiated by a group within the central government. Under such conditions, trading executive power via coups is preferable to risking a mutually costly civil war that would arise if any incumbent pursued ethno-political exclusion.

In contrast, powersharing is significantly less durable when one or both sides lack strong threat capabilities. For strong incumbents bargaining with weak opposition groups, the opposition’s inability to credibly punish the ruling group weakens horizontal accountability and reduces the incumbent’s incentives to share power. Purging the opposition from government is attractive to insulate the ruling group’s hold on power and maximize its control of economic rents. For weak incumbents, their political vulnerability, arising from being unlikely to reclaim power once they lose it, forces them to pursue more offensive strategies to protect their position. Weak ruling groups thus tend to favor exclusionary policies and hedge their bets on civil war, especially when bargaining with other weak groups. When bargaining with strong groups, weak incumbent groups face a particularly acute strategic dilemma: either including or excluding
strong rivals in the central government poses significant risk, via a coup that permanently
displaces them from power or a civil war that overruns their hold of the capital, respectively.

We test the societal determinants of ethnic powersharing both qualitatively and
quantitatively, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa from independence to 2009. We expect the
distribution of societal power to have a particularly important effect on powersharing in post-
colonial Africa given the “strong societies and weak states” political order that emerged after
decolonization (Migdal 1988). Unable to rely on strong formal institutions to regulate society,
political order and societal peace hinges on a ruler’s ability to strike alliances and share power
with Big Men embedded in rival ethnic groups.

Qualitatively, we show how the durability of inter-ethnic powersharing is a function of the
balance of threat capabilities between the ruler and a given rival group. In particular, the logic of
self-enforcing powersharing accounts for the puzzling historical pattern seen in Ghana and
Benin, in which ethnic rivals traded executive power via coups yet no one group sought to
monopolize power and coup-proof their regimes using ethno-political exclusion. This stands in
stark contrast to the policies of ethno-political exclusion rulers and their co-ethnics in Sudan and
Liberia implemented to monopolize their hold on power, leading to civil war.

Quantitatively, we use data from the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset (Wimmer et al.
2009) and its geo-referenced companion dataset, GeoEPR-ETH (Wucherpfennig et al. 2011), to
develop a parsimonious operationalization of threat capabilities derived from a group’s ethnic
geography—that is, its location and size as a proportion of the population—with the expectation
that the larger a group and the closer to the capital city it is, the more likely its members can
credibly threaten to take power if excluded from the central government. Statistical analysis of
more than 200 politically-relevant ethnic groups in 35 sub-Saharan African countries
demonstrates that ethnic powersharing is most likely when both the ruling group and opposition possess strong threat capabilities. Strikingly, and consistent with the experiences of Ghana and Benin, this is the case despite an elevated risk of coups. In contrast, when either the ruler’s or opposition’s threat capabilities are weak, rulers are more likely to reject powersharing. This strategy is effective at coup-proofing the regime from ethnic rivals but at an increased risk of civil war.

This paper breaks new ground in the study of powersharing and conflict. First, it offers a coherent theory of how the distribution of societal power can lead to horizontal accountability and powersharing in the absence of strong political institutions or a third-party enforcer. This helps to fill an important gap in existing external and institutional theories of powersharing that emphasize the importance of externally-brokered powersharing arrangements (Walter 2002; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007) and the role of formal institutions, such as parties, legislatures, and elections (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Magalon 2008; Boix and Svolik 2013), respectively. While both factors can serve as key levers to reduce uncertainty, most powersharing regimes since World War II have emerged without external intervention, and in most weak states informal institutions have greater influence than formal ones (Helmke 2004; Reno 1998).

Second, it incorporates the study of civil war into a broader framework that considers the competing risks rulers face to their hold on power. Civil war studies, especially the study of ethnic-based conflict, continue to be dominated by a focus on grievances or opportunity structure (Collier 2009; Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010; Cederman et al. 2013), often failing to consider how rulers assess competing threats and why they are unable to simply increase concessions in the
face of anaggrieved population and weakened capacity to repress (Fearon 2010). A bargaining framework is essential to address these questions.1

Third, this bargaining approach leads us to challenge the conventional view of civil war as a form of “effective resistance” (Sambanis 2004), in which a guerilla movement wins by not losing (Kissinger 1969). We conceive of groups mounting such insurgencies as possessing low threat capabilities; they are tolerated exactly because they are weak. The fact that most theorization of civil war draws from this stylized version of a guerilla army is problematic because it suggests a potential selection problem in the study of civil war—inferences are drawn disproportionately from observable (i.e., weak) insurgencies, as those groups with the greatest potential to wage violent opposition are compensated to not do so.2 Reconceptualizing civil war as a contest for state power, rather than as simply conflicts in which the opposition can avoid defeat at the hands of the government, shows that (in contrast to the conventional wisdom) strong threat capabilities underwrite peace, not conflict, as they constrain the ruler from reneging on powersharing.

Finally, this theoretical framework accounts for Africa’s large state problem (Clapham 1996; Clapham 2006; Green 2012)—that is, why Africa’s largest countries, such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Chad and Ethiopia, tend to be continually plagued by ethno-political exclusion and civil war. Big states tend to contain more groups with low threat capabilities, which lack the ability to hold the ruler accountable for violating powersharing.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section two analyzes ethnic bargaining in post-colonial Africa as confronting rulers with a coup-civil war trap. Understanding this dynamic is essential

1 For earlier applications of the bargaining approach to ethnic-based conflict, see (Cetinyan 2002; Fearon 1995a).

2 This is a key insight that Cetinyan makes (Cetinyan 2002).
to developing a model of self-enforcing powersharing. Section three explores how the
distribution of societal power and the balance of threat capabilities structures ethnic bargaining,
and the conditions under which this produces durable powersharing. The fourth and fifth sections
test the threat capabilities theory of powersharing, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data,
respectively, and the sixth section demonstrates the robustness of these results. Section seven
concludes with the theoretical implications and identifies several avenues for future research.

2. POWERSHARING IN WEAK STATES AND THE COUP-CIVIL WAR TRAP

One of the defining characteristics of weak states is that locally, spatially-concentrated social
communities, such as kinship or ethnic groups, serve as more durable and binding political
organizations than large, socially-complex cross-cutting organizations that can enforce rules
impersonally (Migdal 1988; North et al. 2009). In the modern state this “strong societies and
weak states” institutional dichotomy (Migdal 1988) gives rise to a coup-civil war trap—political
inclusion is necessary to extend the reach of the regime and prevent societal rebellion, but
bringing one’s rivals to the center of power is risky as it lowers the costs they face to seize power
for themselves in a coup d’état. In this section we elucidate the dynamics of the coup-civil trap,
before explaining the distribution of societal power structures ethno-political bargaining and how
the coup-civil war trap plays out.

The coup-civil war trap is rooted in two fundamental political problems that plague weak
states. The first is the predicament that arises from strong social institutions and weak cross-
cutting political ones. Dense networks, strong norms of reciprocity and spatial clustering among
co-ethnics facilitate *intra-group* cooperation (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Habyarimana et al. 2009;
Weidmann 2009), but serve as barriers to *inter-group* cooperation. Excluded from rival ethnic
groups’ social ties, rulers are not able to directly leverage the technology mechanisms of shared language, reachability, and periodicity and thus face much higher costs of monitoring and sanctioning non-co-ethnics (Habyarimana et al. 2009). This not only makes it more difficult to collect taxes and produce public goods (Easterly and Levine 1997; Miguel 2004; Kasara 2007; Habyarimana et al. 2009) but also to effectively accommodate and repress potential dissidents (Lyall 2010). Mistrust due to the lack of norms of reciprocity also makes non-co-ethnics reluctant to share information or cooperate with the ruler, especially if they perceive that it will harm members of their own group (Nunn and Wantchekon 2009).

To overcome these barriers and extend their authority beyond their own ethnic groups, rulers turn to informal institutions of powersharing (Rothchild 1986; Azam 2001; Roessler 2011). In exchange for political support from other Big Men (and their co-ethnics), rulers agree to share access to the state and the rents and privileges that come from controlling its key levers (e.g., collection of taxes, use of repression, issue of business licenses, trade, disbursement of foreign aid) (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Rothchild 1988; Clapham 1996; Reno 1998; North et al. 2009). By giving rivals a stake in their regimes, rulers seek to win their loyalty and reduce their relative benefits from trying to capture power.

But such informal powersharing arrangements give rise to a second political problem: neither side is able to credibly commit not to leverage its violence capabilities and partial share of power to lock-in a larger share of power.³ While rival elites have incentives to refrain from

³ We conceive there are three primary channels by which powersharing increases a rival group’s ability to internally lock-in a larger share of power: 1.) included groups gain direct control of a critical segment of the military and coercive apparatus; 2.) control of rents and power give rivals bargaining power with members of the military, whether co-ethnics or not, which they can
using violence to avoid the destruction of shared economic rents (Fearon 1995b; North et al. 2009), the use of force by any faction can also “permanently alter the strategic balance of power” (Blattman and Miguel 2010)\(^4\) and bring about “long-term, compounding rewards” (Garfinkel and Skaperdas 2000). Exacerbating this commitment problem in the post-World War II international system has been the de facto “capital city rule,” which offers international recognition and access to external rents, resources, and privileges to whichever group controls the capital city, no matter how it comes to power and how much control it has outside the capital (Herbst 2000). This sovereignty premium increases rivals’ incentives to use force to capture executive authority, as doing so has the potential to exert a large and sudden shift in the distribution of power.

The commitment problem arising from the shadow of the coup d’état reduces ruler’s willingness to share real power with their ethnic rivals. Instead, they often symbolically share formal power (e.g., through a representative cabinet),\(^5\) while keeping real power in the hands of co-ethnics in a “shadow state” (Reno 1998). The opposition’s exclusion from the relevant instruments of control undermines the credibility of powersharing, leading rivals to withdraw their support for the regime and conflict to ensue. This dynamic can be seen leading to the outbreak of some of Africa’s most devastating civil wars, such as the Biafra war, the Rwandan

---

\(^4\) See also (Fearon 1995b; Powell 2006).

\(^5\) On cabinets as a source of ethnic coalition-building, see (Arriola and Johnson 2013).
genocide, the outbreak of Africa’s Great War in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the civil war in South Sudan.

However, the devastating exclusion-civil war equilibrium has not emerged in all sub-Saharan African states. As violent and unstable as states such as Sudan, Angola, Rwanda and Uganda have been, other African countries, such as Benin, Ghana, and Zambia, have been characterized by more durable ethnic powersharing and significantly less large-scale political violence, despite similar underlying structural conditions. What accounts for how the coup-civil war trap has played out across sub-Saharan Africa? How have some been able to produce durable powersharing and avoid ethnic-based civil wars?

3. THE SOCIAITAL BASIS OF SELF-ENFORCING POWERSHARING

The coup-civil war trap confronts rulers in weak states with a difficult choice—include ethnic rivals and accept coup risk or exclude and accept civil war risk. Why do rulers choose one strategy or the other? We argue that the ruler’s strategic choice is conditional on the threat capabilities of both his own group and that of his rival’s. As the strategic costs of civil war increase, such that a forcible challenge from outside the regime is equally threatening to the ruler’s political survival as a forcible challenge from inside the regime, ethno-political exclusion becomes a less appealing strategy.

3.1 Rethinking Civil War

In conceiving of civil war, we diverge significantly from existing scholarship that tends to equate civil war with insurgency—“a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas” (Fearon and Laitin 2003).

---

6 See Online Appendix for descriptive statistics.
The success of an insurgency is often measured based on its ability to *effectively resist* the government—that is, inflict at least a minimal level of costs on the government while avoiding defeat (Sambanis 2004; Collier 2009). As Henry Kissinger famously quipped, “the guerrilla wins if he does not lose” (Kissinger 1969). Equating civil war with armed insurgency has led scholars to focus on those conditions that “render insurgency more feasible and attractive” (Fearon and Laitin 2003) and make it hard for the government to effectively defeat the insurgents. Such factors include distance to the capital, sanctuary in neighboring countries, mountainous terrain, and ethnic group concentration (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Buhaug et al. 2008; Weidmann 2009; Salehyan 2009).

We instead conceive of civil war as a contest for state power between the central government and an organized, armed opposition movement. Armed rebellion is the lever the opposition employs to gain a share of power and rents, and civil war capabilities represent its capacity to do so. As bargaining is a dynamic process, capturing state power for oneself is the only sure way to guarantee one’s share of power. This approach suggests a different set of predictors than is conventionally used: groups located in remote, mountainous areas far from the capital have weaker, not stronger, civil war capabilities. In contrast we expect groups that are large, located close to the capital, and control valuable resources or dominate economic markets to have the greatest capacity to credibly threaten to bring down the central government and lock-in a share of power.

### 3.2 Balance of Threat Capabilities and Powersharing

Self-enforcing powersharing is, by definition, the joint participation of leaders of two or more rival groups in a governing coalition for an ongoing period of time, in which both sides agree to parcel out the rents that come from control of the state and each refrains from using
force to grab a larger share of power. This implies two necessary conditions. First, the leader in power must choose to bring the opposition into the government. Rather than attempt to rule the country unilaterally, keep potential opposition at arms-length, and extract all of the rents accompanying dominant control of the state apparatus, the ruler must prefer to accommodate the opposition and accept the risk of giving rivals positions of some power. Second, the opposition group, once invited to participate in the central government, must accept its share of power and refrain from leveraging its privileged position to gain absolute power.

For these conditions to hold, we contend both the ruler and the opposition must be constrained by the prospect of a strong civil war produced by the other side. The costs of reneging on powersharing must constrain not just the leader currently in power, but constrain in expectation any actor that may seize power and become the leader in the future. In order for the first condition of powersharing to be met—the leader chooses accommodation—the opposition’s power base must threaten strong civil war capabilities. In order for the second condition of powersharing to be met—the opposition refrains from exploiting access as a stepping-stone to gaining absolute power—the leader’s group must also have strong civil war capabilities.

It is important to note that the presence of mutually strong civil war capabilities does not resolve (initially at least) the commitment problem at the heart of the coup-civil war trap. Without agreed upon rules or institutions regulating the distribution and transfer of sovereign power, both groups are still vying to control the executive (and gain the international recognition and rents the come with it) and are concerned that the other side will try to usurp sovereign power. But under such conditions capturing executive control does not open the door to political dominance or absolute power. Though a ruling group may desire to monopolize power after a
purge or coup, strong civil war capabilities of their rivals make this less attractive. They are forced to reluctantly share power, leaving themselves vulnerable to future internal challenges.

In sum, strong threat capabilities produce durable, but sometimes fluid, powersharing, in which rivals prefer powersharing (even when it involves trading power via coups) to engaging in mutually costly civil wars for absolute power. This leads to our first hypothesis:

*H1: When both the ruling group and opposition group have strong threat capabilities, the opposition is included in the central government, reducing civil war risk but increasing coup risk.*

When groups have asymmetric threat capabilities, however, self-enforcing powersharing is significantly less likely. While both sides may wish to share access to the central government to avoid costly conflict, the power differential undermines such an agreement.

Most obviously, weak groups bargaining with strong ruling groups lack the threat capabilities to hold the strong group accountable if it violates the terms of a deal. The stronger group’s inability to credibly commit itself not to exploit its greater bargaining leverage induces the weaker group to stay on a war footing or face political irrelevance. This increases the likelihood of protracted civil war (Fearon 1995a; Walter 2002), particularly given the challenges of inter-ethnic control without trusted intermediaries.

Additionally, because the weak group’s low civil war capabilities render them unlikely to be able to reclaim power if they lose access to the central government, they are more likely to approach political bargaining as a one-shot game and adopt extreme policies (e.g., consolidating power in an ethnocracy, using high-levels of repression) to try to hold on to power at all costs. This further drives strong groups to hedge their bets on exclusion as it sees the marginal costs of civil war as being significantly lower than the marginal costs of a coup. This leads to our second hypothesis:
**H2:** When the ruling group’s threat capabilities are high and the opposition group’s are low, the opposition is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

Similar dynamics lead weak ruling groups to universally reject powersharing, both with strong and weak groups. Again the breakdown of powersharing arises from the weak groups’ weak threat capabilities and thus their political vulnerability. When bargaining with other weak groups, neither side possesses the mobilizational potential to hold the other to account if they renege on powersharing. Consequently, both have strong incentives to eliminate the other from state power before they are eliminated, leading to ethnic exclusion and civil war. This leads to our third hypothesis.

**H3:** When the ruling group’s threat capabilities are low and the opposition group’s are also low, the opposition is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

When the opposition is strong, weak groups face a more acute dilemma. Powersharing puts stronger rival in a position to usurp power in a coup, likely leading to the permanent exclusion of the weak group. But employing exclusion to prevent such an outcome provokes a strategically costly civil war. Both are bad outcomes, but losing power via civil war is seen as more uncertain than in a coup in which its rival already controls a significant share of the state. This leads to our fourth hypothesis.

**H4:** When the ruling group’s threat capabilities are low and the opposition group’s are high, the opposition is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical predictions and how they align with H1-H4.
4. Qualitative Empirical Evidence

To test this paper’s central argument on the effect of the balance of threat capabilities on self-enforcing powersharing, coup risk, and civil war risk in weak states, we draw on both qualitative and quantitative evidence from post-colonial Africa. Figure 2 illustrates paradigmatic cases consistent with our four hypotheses. In this section, we analyze inter-ethnic bargaining in Ghana and Benin—two countries in which the main axis of political competition has been between relatively strong ethnic groups based on size and proximity to the capital. Strikingly, powersharing has been largely durable in both countries, even as executive authority was highly unstable and prone to several inter-ethnic coups in the first decades after independence. The

---

7 Space constraints prevent detailed qualitative evaluation of each of the four hypotheses. See Online Appendices for discussion of examples consistent with H2, H3, and H4.
political histories of Ghana and Benin contrast with the high-levels of ethno-political exclusion and large-scale political violence seen in Sudan and Liberia, which we briefly discuss.

Figure 2: Balance of Threat Capabilities and the Exclusion-Conflict Nexus in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Ruling Group</th>
<th>Weak Ruling Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong Opposition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak Opposition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1: Powersharing and societal peace (despite high coup risk)</td>
<td>H2: War-prone ethnocracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Repressive minority rule (or unstable powersharing)</td>
<td>H3: Unstable, violent, exclusionary regimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 The Puzzle of Self-Enforcing Powersharing amid the Coup Trap in Ghana and Benin

As with many countries in post-colonial Africa, politics in Ghana and Benin has represented a high-stakes game for control of state power and its associated rents, largely played out between powerful individuals mobilizing support from ethnic and ethno-regional coalitions (Smock and Smock 1975; Chazan 1982; Ronen 1975; Decalo 1995). Seeking to maximize their power vis-à-vis rivals, rulers sought to maximize the share of rents and political positions controlled by their co-ethnics and other allies (Chazan 1982; Decalo 1995). In Benin the first decade after independence saw the country severely divided along “ethnoregional lines” between the Fon in the southwest, the Nagot-Yoruba in the east, and the Bariba in the north (Decalo 1997). In Ghana, political faultlines emerged between the southern Akan groups allied to the independence
leader, Kwame Nkrumah, versus the Ashante and Ewe, and subsequently between Ashante, Ewe, and northerners (Chazan 1982). These divides did not differ in kind from ethno-regional divisions that plagued other African states, such as in Sudan between riverine Arabs and those from Dafur, Nuba Mountains and South Sudan (Lesch 1998) or in Liberia, after the overthrow of the Americo-Liberians, between the Krahn, Gio, and Mano (Ellis 1999).

Where Ghana and Benin differ from Liberia and Sudan, however, is how inter-ethnic bargaining played out. In Sudan, the riverine Arabs who ‘inherited’ the state from British colonial rule consolidated power and left little room for representation from peripheral groups. This ethno-political exclusion triggered a civil war in southern Sudan that the government was able to contain to the South but had trouble defeating (Lesch 1998). In Liberia, the overthrow of Americo-Liberian reign in 1980 in a multi-ethnic coup by a group of non-commissioned officers, led by Samuel Doe and Thomas Quiwonkpa, had the potential to usher in a powersharing regime. But powersharing quickly collapsed as Doe and Quiwonkpa became locked in a bitter power struggle, leading Doe to rely almost exclusively on the support of his Krahn co-ethnics at the cost of provoking a civil war against loyalists and co-ethnics of Quiwonkpa (Ellis 1999; Berkeley 2003). In stark contrast, in Ghana or Benin in the 1960s and 1970s, nearly each time a ruler leaned too heavily on their own ethnic groups at the expense of their ethnic rivals they were thrown out of power in a coup d’état. This did not lead to exclusion, however, but rather to a new, but ethnically-inclusive, political configuration. In fact, both countries would experience five successful inter-ethnic coups (in which at least some of the conspirators hailed from a different ethnic group than the head of state) in the first decades after independence, but very low-levels of ethno-political exclusion and no civil wars (Roessler 2011). What accounts for the different political outcomes? Why were rulers in Liberia and Sudan able and willing to employ
ethno-political exclusion to consolidate their hold on power but those in Ghana and Benin were not?

The answer lies in the particular ethnic compositions of Ghana and Benin. Both are relatively small in area (below the median for Africa) and divided between four relatively large ethnic or ethno-regional blocs,\(^8\) giving each substantial societal power and making it hard for any one group to rule alone (without incurring high costs). Inter-ethnic alliances proved necessary, though fragile. Executive power cycled between groups in a pattern of very fluid, but continuous, powersharing (Decalo 1995). While coups generated a lot of instability, they also served as a vehicle to rotate power between ethnic rivals and reduced incentives to invest in civil war. Trading power via ethnic-based coups spared Benin and Ghana the costly civil wars that would devastate Uganda and Chad during the same period.

Sudan and Liberia have very different ethnic structures and distributions of societal and political power. Sudan, as Africa’s largest country (until the independence of South Sudan in 2011), has been dominated primarily by those from three riverine Arab tribes (Shaygiyya, Ja’alin, and Danagla), whose homelands are situated in the Nile River Valley just above the capital, Khartoum, and which make up some 15 percent of the population. De facto policies of ethno-political exclusion helped to consolidate the riverine Arabs hold on power, though at the cost of civil war from other groups. Yet the size of the country and the fractionalization of

\(^8\) In Benin, the EPR dataset identifies the key groups as: Northern (15 percent of population), Southwestern (15 percent), Southeastern (18.5 percent), and South/Central (33 percent of population). In Ghana, Ewe (13 percent of population), Asante (Akan) (15 percent), Northern Groups (23.5 percent), and Other Akans (34.5 percent).
society prevented these armed rebellions from ever coming close to threatening the capital and amounted to a “perfect war” (Martin 2002) for the ruling elite.

In Liberia, the position of Samuel Doe was much weaker than that of riverine Arabs in Sudan. Coming from a relatively small ethnic group in the hinterland (the Krahn tribe located primarily in Grand Gedeh County), Doe’s political base was relatively narrow. This increased his vulnerability while weakening his group’s capabilities to come back to power if they lost hold of it. Thus, when Doe became locked in a power-struggle with his co-conspirator and high school friend, Thomas Quiwonkpa, who also hailed from a small group in Liberia’s hinterland (the Gio tribe located in Nimba County), Doe forcefully pursued a policy of ethnic exclusion to try to insulate his hold on power. Doe’s strategy worked, at first, as he was able to survive the initial armed rebellion by Quiwonkpa in 1985 and employed brutal large-scale repression to try to subjugate Quiwonkpa’s co-ethnics (Ellis 1999; Berkeley 2003). However, this minority-based ethnocracy proved unsustainable and collapsed in 1990.9

The histories of Benin and Ghana compared to those of Sudan and Liberia illustrate that peaceful, if uneasy, powersharing endures in countries with multiple groups with strong power bases. Any group’s desire to dominate the central government is constrained by the high costs and low strategic value of exclusion. Moreover, unlike small minorities, strong opposition groups have greater staying power as a political force and thus do not need to approach politics as a one-shot game. When both groups have high threat capabilities, rivals prefer coup risk to a bloody civil war for exclusive control of the central government.

9 Consistent with our theory, the minority groups that overthrew Doe were themselves unable to consolidate power in the capital, leading to the subsequent collapse of the state.
5. Quantitative Empirical Evidence

To test the generalizability of the threat capabilities theory of powersharing, we estimate models of interethnic powersharing, coups, and civil war sharing using the Ethnic Power Relations dataset of ethnic groups in 35 African states from 1946 to 2009 (Wimmer et al. 2009). The EPR dataset is especially useful to test this paper’s central argument because, drawing from a survey of country-experts, it provides information on the inclusion or exclusion of politically relevant ethnic groups in central governments across countries in Africa (and other states in which ethnicity is politically salient). Since the theory is about the interaction between the ruling group and a given rival group, the unit of analysis is the ethnic-dyad-year, with models including all politically relevant ethnic groups in relation to the ruling group. Ruling groups are those identified as being politically-dominant, or having the most politically powerful status, based on the EPR dataset (most of the time, though not always, this corresponds to the ethnic group of the executive).\(^{10}\) As we are interested in whether particular binary outcomes do or do not occur, we use a logistic regression specification with standard errors clustered by country to account for non-independence of ongoing political relationships within states.

5.1 Variables

There are three dependent variables of interest. The first, interethnic powersharing, is operationalized using a measure of whether a given non-ruling group was included in a governing coalition in that year. The dichotomous variable, *Ethnic powersharing*, takes a value of 1 if the non-ruling group was included in government (coded by EPR as monopoly, dominant,

\(^{10}\) When there are multiple senior partners in government, we code whichever group controls the executive as the ruling group.
senior partner or junior partner) and a 0 if it was not (coded as regional autonomy, separatist, powerless, or discriminated).

The second dependent variable, successful coup, identifies whether members of a given group were key conspirators in a successful coup attempt that year (Roessler 2011). The dichotomous variable, Successful coup, takes a value of 1 if there was at least one successful coup and 0 if there was not.

The third dependent variable, group rebellion onset, identifies whether members of a given ethnic group initiated a major armed rebellion or insurgency against the central government in a given year. The dichotomous variable Group rebellion takes a value of 1 if members of the group launched a rebellion in a given year and 0 if not.

To proxy threat capabilities, we develop a measure based on two factors that determine a group’s mobilizational potential to threaten the central government. First, the larger the size of a group, the more popular power it can wield and the larger the rebellion or uprising it can mobilize. To measure this, we use the group’s proportion of the state’s total population—Group size (Wimmer et al. 2009). Second, the more proximate a group is to the center of power, the lower the mobilizational costs necessary to seize control of the state apparatus. To measure this, we calculate the distance in kilometers between the capital city and the centroid of ethnic group’s

---

11 This measure captures the year a significant number of members of a given group became involved in a civil war with a minimum of 1000 battlefield deaths. (Roessler 2011) We also estimated models using measures of group rebellion onset from EPR 3.0, with substantively similar results.
homeland. These variables are normalized and the distance data is inverted so larger groups and closer groups have higher values. They are then combined to create a continuous Threat capabilities variable that ranges from 0 (least threatening) to 1 (most threatening). The variable, Ruler threat capabilities, measures the capabilities of the ruling group for a given year.

Using this coding of opposition and ruling group threat capabilities, we construct our key independent variable—the Balance of threat capabilities between the ruling group and a given opposition. For ease of interpretation, and because we do not expect the joint effect to necessarily be continuous, the balance of threat capabilities measure is captured through four interaction dummy variables (following Figure 1) based on whether the ruling group and the given opposition group have threat capabilities scores above or below the median for all groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Not surprisingly, LH dyads are least common, while HH and HL dyads (where the ruling group is strong) are most common.

Results are substantively similar when using the minimum distance between the capital and the group’s territory. See Online Appendix. For the geocoded EPR groups, see (Wucherpfennig et al. 2011).

The median value of Threat capabilities across all ethnic groups in our dataset is 0.0864. The median values of Group size and Centroid distance are 0.1 and 348, respectively.

What matters in expectation is not only the relative threat capabilities of the ruler and opposition but, when threat capabilities are asymmetric, whether it is the ruler or opposition that has the stronger threat capabilities. A pure continuous interaction term does not allow us to unpack this categorical effect, and risks inaccurately labeling asymmetric dyads with one exceptionally strong side as having mutually high threat capabilities.
• **High-high (HH) threat capabilities**: Ruler above median for all groups; opposition above median for all groups
  o \( N = 2,039 \) group-years, 34% of total
• **High-low (HL) threat capabilities**: Ruler above; opposition below
  o \( N = 2,410 \) group-years, 40% of total
• **Low-high (LH) threat capabilities**: Ruler below; opposition above
  o \( N = 592 \) group-years, 10% of total
• **Low-low (LL) threat capabilities**: Ruler below; opposition below
  o \( N = 965 \) group-years, 16% of total

In addition to models containing only these parameters, we include specifications containing a number of control variables that account for alternative explanations of elite bargaining, political violence, and governance outcomes.\(^\text{15}\)

• **GDP per capita**: income-level and state capacity; (lagged) natural log of GDP per capita in that state-year.
• **Log country population**: population size; (lagged) natural log of the total population of the state.
• **Log country area**: territory size; natural log of the territory in square kilometers.\(^\text{16}\)
• **Number of ethnic groups**: country’s ethnic diversity; number of politically-relevant ethnic groups at independence.
• **Institutionalized regime**: institutionalization of political power and the stabilizing effects of party rule (Magaloni 2008); dummy measure of whether a given country is governed by a single-party regime, multi-party regime, or democracy versus military government (Magaloni et al. 2013).
• **Former French colony**: France’s pro-active and interventionist foreign policies in their former colonies (Clapham 1996); dummy measure of whether a given country was a former French colony.
• **Cold War**: increase in externally-brokered powersharing governments in Africa since the end of the Cold War; dummy measure of whether the year is after 1990.

\(^{15}\) Unless specified, variables come from the EPR 3.0 dataset.

\(^{16}\) Country area data from CIA World Factbook.
• *Years since last coup:* previous successful coups (Londregan and Poole 1990); years since the last successful coup that occurred in the country (McGowan 2003).

• *Ongoing rebellion:* ongoing civil wars; whether there is an ongoing rebellion in the country in the previous year (Roessler 2011).

• *Year:* time trends; the year.

### 5.2 Results

The statistical results, presented in Table 1, provide strong support for the paper’s central argument that mutually strong threat capabilities are necessary for powersharing. The models estimate the likelihood that members of a given *non-ruling group* are: included in the central government (Models 1-4); lead conspirators in a successful coup (Models 5-8); or significant participants in initiating or joining an armed rebellion (Models 9-12).\(^{17}\) Since HH dyads are of primary theoretical interest, we estimate models isolating this type (with all others combined as the reference category) as well as models including all other types individually (with HH omitted as the reference category).\(^{18}\) Taken as the category of interest, HH dyads are significantly more likely to feature interethnic powersharing (models 1 and 3). Each other type of dyad individually (HL, LH and LL) is also statistically significantly less likely to lead to inclusion when compared

\(^{17}\) The differences in the number of observations in the powersharing models compared to the coup and civil war models is the coup and civil war data only go up to 2005.

\(^{18}\) Because we are interested in the balance of threat capabilities and the influence this has on the strategic relationships, rather than the individual threat capabilities of specific groups themselves, we do not include the separate, continuous threat capabilities variables in the specification. Including these individual capabilities scores for both ruling and opposition groups in robustness models does not affect the statistical or substantive results for our variables of interest.
to HH dyads (models 2 and 4). These comparisons—particularly the lower likelihood of inclusion of weaker opposition groups as indicated by the coefficients for HL and LL dyads—are consistent with the theorized bargaining dynamics. A group’s inability to credibly threaten the center reduces horizontal accountability and an equitable distribution of power. The negative and significant effect of the LH variable on ethnic inclusion suggests, further, that powersharing reflects not just a given opposition’s threat capabilities to demand inclusion, but rather results from the strategic interactions of the ruling group and opposition group and their joint threat capabilities. A strong opposition is a necessary but not sufficient condition for powersharing. Only when both the ruling group and opposition possess strong threat capabilities is powersharing self-enforcing.

The second part of the argument posits that while mutually strong threat capabilities produce self-enforcing powersharing, they merely shift, rather than resolve, the coup-civil war trap that plagues weak, ethnically-divided states. Strong rivals commit to powersharing even as it opens the door to future coups d’état. Relative to the prospects of a mutually costly civil war if any side was to try to rule unilaterally, trading power via coups is a preferable outcome. The ruler knows that should the opposition successfully seize power, it will nonetheless be unlikely to risk civil war and will be forced to restore powersharing in the future resulting in a marginal, rather than absolute, shift in rents from power. Consistent with this expectation, we find that successful coups are statistically significantly more likely in ethnic dyads characterized by mutually high threat capabilities (models 5 and 7), particularly compared to HL and LL dyads (models 6 and 8).  

19 Interestingly, exclusion, despite being quite common in LH dyads, does not have the same statistically significant effect on coup risk. One possibility is that the repressive apparatus
The final set of models tests the effect of the balance of threat capabilities on civil war risk. We expect the inverse of the results from the coup models. As strong rivals share power and accept coup risk, they reduce the likelihood either side will choose to militarily challenge the state from outside of the central government. Thus, we expect armed rebellion to be more likely in dyads in which at least one bargaining partner is weak, as rulers are much more averse to losing power and see exclusion as a means to increase the costs their rivals face to displacing them from power. The results are suggestive, though not conclusive. In the civil war models, the balance of threat capabilities variables also have the (expected) opposite signs; HH dyads are negatively associated, and other dyads positively associated, with the onset of rebellion. Statistical significance is mixed, though full models including all controls generally reach minimum significance thresholds (models 11 and 12).²⁰

necessary to repress the strong group and the need for personnel to fill that apparatus increases coup risk from the strong group. See further discussion in Online Appendix.

²⁰This may be a result of a non-monotonic effect of civil war capabilities on actual civil wars. Up to a point, greater ability to launch a civil war presumably makes an opposition group more likely to do so. Beyond that threshold (we theorize), they are threatening enough to be included, and their likelihood drops. It could also be due to a few cases of civil wars between groups where both have high absolute threat capabilities, but there is a severe disparity in the relative levels, thus increasing strategic uncertainty, undermining powersharing and leading to civil war in accordance with our central argument. Rwanda and Burundi represent such cases. When taking into account the relative balance of threat capabilities, the dyadic variables are all statistically significant. See additional discussion and test of the effect of relative capabilities in Online Appendix.
Table 1: Balance of Threat Capabilities and the Likelihood of Ethnic Inclusion, Coups and Civil War by Non-Ruling Groups in Africa, Independence-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ethnic Powersharing</th>
<th>Successful Coup</th>
<th>Rebellion Onset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH threat capabilities</td>
<td>1.32*** (0.30)</td>
<td>0.83*** (0.31)</td>
<td>1.94*** (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HL threat capabilities</td>
<td>-1.32*** (0.37)</td>
<td>-0.72** (0.29)</td>
<td>-3.39*** (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH threat capabilities</td>
<td>-1.04* (0.57)</td>
<td>-1.12* (0.65)</td>
<td>-0.61 (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL threat capabilities</td>
<td>-1.53*** (0.64)</td>
<td>-0.93 (0.70)</td>
<td>-1.75** (0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.54** (0.22)</td>
<td>0.56** (0.23)</td>
<td>-0.34 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log country population</td>
<td>-0.07 -0.08</td>
<td>-0.02 0.06</td>
<td>-0.26 -0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log country area</td>
<td>-0.39 -0.39</td>
<td>-0.11 -0.13</td>
<td>-0.025 -0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of ethnic groups</td>
<td>-0.08 -0.06</td>
<td>-0.24** -0.19</td>
<td>0.09 0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized regime</td>
<td>0.94** (0.37)</td>
<td>0.91** (0.37)</td>
<td>0.32 0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former French colony</td>
<td>0.57 (0.64)</td>
<td>0.39 0.51</td>
<td>-0.06 -0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>0.07 (0.19)</td>
<td>0.03 0.04</td>
<td>0.81 0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since last coup</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.19)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.20)</td>
<td>-0.12 -0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing rebellion</td>
<td>0.02*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.02*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.02* (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.02*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.02*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.02* (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>-42.53** (16.57)</td>
<td>-41.68** (23.32)</td>
<td>-41.96* (23.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5991</td>
<td>5991</td>
<td>5779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>states</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pseudo r²</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p<0.10    **: p<0.05    ***: p<0.01
These results are substantively important as well. Figure 3 reports predicted probabilities of inclusion, successful coups, and group rebellion (from Models 4, 8 and 12) using the Clarify statistical software and keeping all control variables at their mean levels (King et al. 2000). The substantive results line up closely with the expected results predicted in Figure 1. For dyads in which both the ruling and opposition group possess civil war threat capabilities above the median of all groups in the sample (quadrant II), the likelihood of the opposition group being included in the central government is 59%, compared to 33-42% in other dyads (HL, LL and LH). Meanwhile, coup risk in HH dyads is 5 fold higher than in LL dyads, and 10 fold higher than HL dyads, and civil war risk is reduced by 25-70 percent.

**Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Powersharing, Coups and Armed Rebellion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong Opposition</th>
<th>Weak Opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong Ruling Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1:</td>
<td>(P(\text{Powersharing})): 58.8%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Powersharing})): 41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P(\text{Successful coup})): 1.0%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Successful coup})): 0.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P(\text{Armed rebellion})): 0.6%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Armed rebellion})): 0.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weak Ruling Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2:</td>
<td>(P(\text{Powersharing})): 33.4%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Powersharing})): 37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P(\text{Successful coup})): 0.6%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Successful coup})): 0.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P(\text{Armed rebellion})): 1.5%</td>
<td>(P(\text{Armed rebellion})): 1.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Summary

Overall the quantitative results provide systematic evidence consistent with the empirical pattern seen in the qualitative cases. The balance of threat capabilities between the ruling group and a given opposition group, as measured by a combination of a group’s size and distance to the capital city, has a robust and consistent effect on ethnic powersharing: when the ruling group and opposition group both have high threat capabilities, inclusion pertains. Notably, this holds despite the fact that powersharing also brings an elevated coup risk. Even as these groups trade control of the executive via coups, no one group leverages its control of sovereign power to try to permanently or forcefully exclude the other, helping to avert what would be devastating civil wars.

In contrast, when the opposition is weak and unable to credibly hold the ruler to account for reneging on powersharing, exclusion results. This significantly lowers coup risk, though at the cost of a marginally higher risk of civil war. Rulers seem to calculate that the strategic benefits of ethno-political exclusion outweigh the strategic costs and are willing to tolerate the potential threat of an armed rebellion. For weak ruling groups bargaining with strong groups, they are between a rock and a hard place—both powersharing and exclusion are potentially strategically costly as they lead to coups and civil war, respectively. In these situations the evidence shows that rulers also aggressively pursue exclusion, perhaps calculating the opposition’s ability to seize power in a civil war is more uncertain than in a coup in which they already control a significant share of the state.
6. VALIDATIONS AND SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

The statistical tests in the previous section provide strong support for the threat capabilities theory of powersharing. Employing a parsimonious measure of the distribution of societal power based on a group’s size and geographic distance to the capital city, we are able to account for the durability of powersharing and a ruler’s willingness to accept coup risk versus civil war risk. But relying on ethnic geography as a measure of threat capabilities is not without limitations.

Ethnicity’s constructivist foundations, which accept that ethnic boundaries (and groups) are not fixed and that individuals possesses multiple identities whose salience is situational (Chandra 2012), pose two potential challenges to the credibility of the empirical results. First, identifying a stable and objective set of politically-relevant ethnic groups is difficult, as a number of different ethnic and ethno-regional cleavages in a country could be seen as salient and lead to competing units of analysis (Fearon 2003). For example, in Uganda one could categorize Northerners as a single ethno-regional grouping or disaggregate the region into distinct ethnic groups (e.g., Acholi, Alur, Kakwa, Lango, Lugbara, Madi and Teso). Which coding one chooses has material consequences on the groups included in the sample and the threat capabilities scores assigned to those groups. Second, competition for state power and the coups and civil war that arise from this could shape the existence and intensity of a country’s ethnic divisions, making identifiably different ethnic groups endogenous to political structures and events (Fearon 2000; Eifert et al. 2010).

To address both of these concerns and mitigate the problems that may arise from ethnicity’s endogeneity to post-colonial politics, we check the sensitivity of the findings to alternative means of selecting relevant ethnic groups and their boundaries. The results are highly robust to both alternative statistical analyses.
6.1 Using Data from Fearon (2003) and Ethnologue as an Alternative Measure of Ethnic Geography

For an alternate set of ethnic units of analysis, we re-run the analysis using data from Fearon’s (2003) dataset of ethnic and cultural diversity across the globe, which provides information on the relative size of all ethnic groups that make up at least 1 percent of the population in 160 countries. While this dataset provides an alternative list of relevant ethnic configurations in sub-Saharan Africa, it does not provide any data on the geographic location of the ethnic groups or their relative access to state power. For the latter—a group’s representation in the central government—we carefully match one-by-one the ethnic groups in the EPR dataset with the list of ethnic groups in Fearon’s dataset to identify whether the groups corresponded to each other as exact matches, partial matches (in which the Fearon group was a subset of the EPR group or vice versa), or no match. Groups we could not match were dropped from the analysis.

Of the 35 countries covered in both datasets, EPR identifies 217 ethnic groups and Fearon identifies 292 ethnic groups. The key difference in the datasets is the level of aggregation they choose to demarcate ethnic group boundaries; EPR tends to identify the relevant boundaries at a higher level of aggregation than Fearon. In the case of Northern Uganda mentioned previously, EPR codes the relevant social boundary as Northerners (Langi, Acholi, Teso, Madi, Kakwa-

---

21 The following sub-Saharan African countries are excluded from the data analysis: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Lesotho, Mauritius, Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Swaziland, and Tanzania because the countries do not meet the size criteria (a population of at least 1 million and a surface area of at least 500,000 square kilometers as of 2005), ethnicity is considered to be of low salience, or a newly independent country.
Nubian, Lugbara, Alur) whereas Fearon’s dataset includes each of these sub-groups as individual units.\textsuperscript{22}

We were able to match 237 ethnic groups from Fearon’s dataset as corresponding to a similar ethnic configuration in the EPR dataset.\textsuperscript{23} Of these, 135 groups, or 57\%, represent perfect matches with EPR groups and the rest represent partial matches, in which the Fearon groups are nested in a broader EPR group or vice versa. The high degree of consistency between the two independent attempts to systematically identify relevant ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa represents a nice validity check of the EPR dataset, which is increasingly used in the study of civil war.

To calculate a group’s threat capabilities using Fearon’s groups as the unit of analysis, we need additional information on the group’s location (Fearon does report the relative group size, the other component of threat capabilities). For the perfectly matched groups, we calculate this data from the polygons created by the GeoEPR-ETH dataset. For partially matched groups (which often represent subset of larger EPR groups), however, we need additional information on each ethnic group’s homeland or geographic area. To identify these areas, we rely on the maps from Ethnologue, which reports spatial concentrations of ethnic groups in many African

\textsuperscript{22} Though the EPR, taking into account identity changes, recategorizes the relevant ethnic groups over time as region becomes less salient and ethnic identities more so.\textsuperscript{23} Most of the 55 ethnic groups in Fearon that are un-matched with groups in EPR are due to EPR considering these groups as politically-irrelevant. There were 12 EPR groups that we could not match to Fearon’s dataset. Overall of the matched groups, there were 237 Fearon groups to 205 EPR groups.
countries. With the size and distance data, we then recalculated the balance of threat capabilities for the ruling group and a given opposition group and place each group in the relevant dyad. The groups break down as follows:

- **High-high (HH) threat capabilities**: $N=2,463$ group-years (32%)
- **High-low (HL) threat capabilities**: $N=2,267$ group-years (30%)
- **Low-high (LH) threat capabilities**: $N=1,176$ group-years (15%)
- **Low-low (LL) threat capabilities**: $N=1,705$ group-years (22%)

Using Fearon’s data on ethnic groups leads to a similar set of HH dyads but a higher number of LH and LL dyads (a result of its tendency to rely on lower levels of group aggregation). To identify powersharing, coups, and group rebellion, we rely on the same data sources as above, and conduct additional research when necessary to identify whether a given subgroup was a participant in a coup or rebellion.

Table 2 reports re-estimated logistic regression models with all controls (models 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, and 12 from Table 1) using the dyads defined by Fearon’s groups as the unit of analysis. Results are almost identical to those using the EPR ethnic group configurations. Ruling groups are significantly more likely to include a given rival into their central government when both possess strong threat capabilities, significantly reducing civil war risk but increasing coup risk.

---

Table 2: Balance of Threat Capabilities and the Likelihood of Ethnic Inclusion, Coups and Civil War using Ethnic Configurations from Fearon (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Powersharing</th>
<th>Successful Coup</th>
<th>Rebellion Onset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH threat capabilities</td>
<td>1.12*** (0.37)</td>
<td>0.72** (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HL threat capabilities</td>
<td>-0.68** (0.33)</td>
<td>-1.38*** (0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH threat capabilities</td>
<td>-1.66*** (0.55)</td>
<td>-0.08 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL threat capabilities</td>
<td>-1.73*** (0.55)</td>
<td>-0.45 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.17 (0.22)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log country population</td>
<td>0.22 (0.23)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log country area</td>
<td>-0.46* (0.25)</td>
<td>-0.47* (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic fractionalization</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
<td>(1.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized regime</td>
<td>0.77** (0.31)</td>
<td>0.74** (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former French colony</td>
<td>1.28** (0.57)</td>
<td>1.22** (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>0.04 (0.29)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since last coup</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.02)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.02 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>-39.59 (28.11)</td>
<td>-30.29 (27.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6549</td>
<td>6549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>states</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pseudo r²</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p<0.10   **: p<0.05   ***: p<0.01

6.2 Restricting the Analysis to Group Configurations at Independence

The second potential concern is that the results suffer from endogeneity bias as competition for state power leads to changes in ethnic geography consistent with the purported hypotheses.

Although plausible, this critique encounters significant theoretical and empirical limitations.

Theoretically, while the effect of civil war on ethnic divisions is well discussed in the literature,
there is almost no research suggesting endogenous construction of large identity groups from coups. Why these forms of violent conflict would have opposite effects on the construction of identity is not obvious.

Similarly there are contradicting theories of whether access to power and the rents that come from power should lead to group enlargement (Posner 2005) or group narrowing (Bates 1983; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Caselli and Coleman 2013). According to the EPR dataset, the active cases of fractionalization in post-colonial Africa are consistent with the latter group-narrowing hypothesis, which biases the results against us. The EPR dataset codes 15 instances of larger ethnic coalitions splitting into smaller ethnic divisions (with 37 resulting groups), of which 93% (all but one) occurred when the group was in, or coming into, power. Ethnic recombination is less common, with only 5 incidents (from 12 original groups).

Nonetheless, to limit the potential bias that may arise as ethnic configurations change during the post-colonial period, we re-run the analysis only with the ethnic configurations as they exist at independence, which reduces the total observations by about seven percent. By only including groups as they exist at independence, it will exclude any incidences of fractionalization and amalgamation as a result of post-colonial politics.

The results are reported in Table 3. The results are nearly identical, especially on the effect on powersharing and coup risk, increasing our confidence that the empirics are not merely driven by post-colonial changes in ethnic geography.
7. CONCLUSION

One of the enduring puzzles in political science is why ethnic politics leads to large-scale political violence in some countries but is largely peaceful in others. This is especially true in Africa. While ethnicity is politically salient in most countries, only some (e.g., Sudan,
Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chad) have been wracked by high levels of ethno-political exclusion and civil war, whereas others (e.g., Ghana, Malawi and Benin) have been characterized by ethnic powersharing and durable ethnic peace. In this paper we have advanced a theory to account for credible powersharing in Africa in the absence of strong political institutions or external guarantors. Counter-intuitively, we argue that ethnic powersharing is a positive function of the civil war capabilities of both the ruling and rival groups—that is, their mobilizational potential to forcibly seize power when they are excluded from the central government. When both are strong, both prefer to accept the risk of coups to the risk of civil wars and neither is willing to systematically exclude the other from government; continuous, if fluid, powersharing emerges. Extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence supports our theoretical argument and provides novel empirical insights into the outcome of the coup-civil war trap across post-colonial Africa. Overall this paper is one of the first to offer an integrated and parsimonious theory to account for how the distribution of societal power leads to durable powersharing in Africa. In doing so, it also unpacks the strategic relationship between coups and civil war. Coups are significantly more likely from groups that can credibly demand inclusion with the threat of a strong civil war.

If the exclusion-civil war equilibrium is partially determined by a country’s ethnic geography, what then is the way out? Are these countries not doomed to further cycles of ethno-political exclusion and devastating civil war? Interestingly, in recent years there has been a qualitative decline in large-scale political violence across sub-Saharan Africa (Straus 2012): from the end of Ethiopia’s long-running wars to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan’s war with the SPLA to peacebuilding in Liberia and Mozambique. What accounts for this peaceful trend? To what degree does it reflect that these states are finally escaping the coup-civil
war trap? Future research will address these questions and consider the policy-implications of the threat capabilities theory of powersharing.
REFERENCES


