

## **Shared Ethnic Groups and Interstate Territorial Conflict**

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## **Shared Ethnic Groups and Interstate Territorial Conflict**

**Abstract:** We examine the outbreak and militarization of territorial claims over ethnic groups that are shared between nation-states, emphasizing characteristics of the shared group and the strength of the global territorial integrity norm. We find that irredentist territorial claims are more likely to begin and to be militarized when the challenger state's leaders can gain politically: when the group makes up a majority of the population, soon after one or both states achieved independence, and when the group is disadvantaged politically in the target state (particularly soon after the group's status worsens). Irredentist claims are less likely to begin or to be militarized when the global territorial integrity norm is stronger. We conclude with suggestions for research to improve our understanding of the linkage between shared ethnic groups and interstate conflict.

The frequent border changes that characterized the world of the 20th century have faded in favor of more static borders, as states are said to have accepted a global norm of territorial integrity (Zacher 2001). Yet, while much of the world seems content to maintain the territorial status quo, this phenomenon is hardly universal. The recent actions taken by Russia against its neighbor Ukraine, annexing the Crimean Peninsula and supporting ethnic Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, have been criticized by Western leaders for violating the territorial integrity norm. Russia has justified its actions by invoking another norm, that of "one nation, one state," claiming to be the representative state of all Russians. This norm, Russia argues, justifies its attempts to unify with and protect its ethnic brethren. These actions have led to serious concern in the West over the precedent that Russia's actions are setting, particularly in the Baltic region and other post-Soviet areas that include substantial Russian minorities.

This paper examines the origins and management of territorial claims with an ethnic component, investigating how these claims develop and whether they are limited by the territorial integrity norm. We develop and test a series of hypotheses on the possible connection between shared ethnic groups and territorial conflict. The results generally support our hypotheses, indicating that the size and status of shared ethnic groups affect territorial claims in systematic ways, and that global norms can reduce the risk of territorial conflict. We conclude with a series of suggestions for future research, calling in particular for a new focus on actions that fall short of making irredentist claims to territory.

### **Theoretical Development**

We follow Horowitz' (1985: 53) definition of ethnicity as an "umbrella concept" that "easily embraces individuals regardless of tribe, religion, race, [and] language," among other

factors, typically with a myth of common ancestry. This definition is widely used in recent work on ethnic politics (e.g. Posner 2005; Chandra and Wilkinson 2008).

The topic of territorial conflict rooted in ethnic irredentism has attracted considerable attention since the end of the Cold War (e.g., Ayres 2000; Saideman and Ayres 2000). Irredentism, or territorial claims based upon the presence of ethnic kin in the claimed territory, can be a useful tool for justifying expansionist goals (Kornprobst 2007). Conflict with an ethnic dimension has been found to be more violent or more difficult to settle than other types of conflict (e.g., Carment 1993; Davis and Moore 1997; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hassner 2003; Woodwell 2004).

Focusing on the international dimensions of ethnic conflict and insurgency, Salehyan (2007, 2008) noted the indirect influence that neighboring states can have by harboring refugees from internal disputes across borders, suggesting one method by which intrastate ethnic conflict can become internationalized. Other work studied the processes by which states internationalize intrastate ethnic conflict to further their own ends by providing direct military support to rebellious co-ethnics within neighboring states (Davis and Moore 1997; Salehyan 2010; Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham 2011; Saideman 2007). Researchers have also examined when internal conflicts become internationalized due to external support (Saideman 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Jenne 2004; Saideman, Dougherty, and Jenne 2005; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007). Internationalization is associated with characteristics of the disputed area and its constituent minority distribution (Weidmann 2009; Cederman et al. 2013), and the treatment of the disputed minority by the host state (Davis and Moore 1997; Saideman and Ayres 2000).

A great deal of research has addressed territorial conflict between states, although this literature has not always addressed irredentist claims specifically. Diehl and Goertz (1988)

highlighted the importance that territory plays in interstate disputes, and later work (Vasquez 1995; Hensel 1996; Huth 1996) argued that territorial issues are inherently more "salient" than other forms of interstate disputes because of their tangible and intangible value to states. This assertion has subsequently received a great deal of empirical support in studies connecting territorial claims with militarized conflict (e.g., Vasquez and Henehan 2001; Huth and Allee 2002; Walter 2003). Hensel and Mitchell (2005) attempt to disaggregate the various dimensions of territorial salience, showing that intangible salience -- such as the presence of ethnic kin in the claimed territory -- can increase the probability of militarized conflict.

Bearing all of this in mind, our theory examines the role of shared ethnic groups in territorial conflict. This seeks to go further than previous work by examining not just why certain groups enjoy foreign support (Saideman 2002a, 2002b), how internal conflict becomes internationalized (Salehyan 2007), or how interstate ethnic disputes lead to conflict (Davis and Moore 1997), but rather how these situations arise in the first place. This will be done through an examination of territorial claim onset and management, seeking to explore the process by which potential ethnic issues lead to the initiation and escalation of explicit territorial claims between states, as well as the possible dampening effect of international norms of territorial integrity.

### **Shared Ethnic Groups and Territorial Claim Onset**

The process of altering the territorial status quo begins with a challenger state making a claim to sovereignty over the desired territory. What has previously been unclear is exactly why leaders pursue ethnically based claims against their neighbors. We seek to outline the processes that lead to both the initiation and escalation of such claims.

A challenger state making a territorial demand generally requires some form of justification for its claim, to convince both the target state and the international community that its claims should be recognized. The peaceful transfer of territory might be acceptable to the international community but will likely be difficult to secure, given the high value that states typically place upon their territory. As such, most unilateral efforts to alter borders will be at least partly coercive in nature, and will need some basis for convincing the international community to accept the challenge to another state's territorial integrity. Claims are rarely phrased in terms of raw power or "might makes right," and even the more blatant territorial demands in recent years have generally been justified in terms of reversing colonialist wrongs (Venezuela's claim to the Essequibo region from Guyana), restoring historical sovereignty (Bolivia's demand for its former Pacific coast), or protecting one's ethnic kin (Russia's claim to Crimea).

Among the most compelling justifications for conquest is liberating or uniting with ethnic kin. The most common scenario in which a state could justify the need for its own intervention would come if their co-ethnics are in a disadvantaged position relative to one or more other groups in the target state. If their co-ethnics enjoy privilege in the target state, or at least fair treatment, the impetus for lodging any sort of claim lessens considerably (Huibregste 2010).

Therefore, should a potential challenger state's ethnic kin be excluded from power or actively repressed by a potential target state's ruling elite, these kin may increase their calls for liberation. Such calls could bolster the legitimacy of intervention in the eyes of the challenger state's people (and the international community). This offers a moral justification that should increase the likelihood of an irredentist territorial claim to "liberate" their countrymen, and may even impose political costs on the challenger state should it fail to support its kin.

These costs can be tangible and severe, for particularly severe forms of oppression directly challenge the legitimacy of the state as representative and protector of its ethnic group, vividly demonstrating its failure to provide the security to its co-ethnics (a key source of state legitimacy). The social contract providing security to the residents of the challenger state is implicitly extended to its co-ethnics should it derive its legitimacy from an ethnic basis - and any failure to provide security for overseas kin is a direct challenge to its legitimacy as the representative state of its people. The presence of ethnic kin in a neighboring state presents a problem for leaders claiming to be the group's representative - how can they claim to represent all their kin when many live under the rule of another state? Leaders may thus face considerable pressure to rectify this problem; consequences for the failure to protect ethnic kin may range from political humiliation to electoral defeat.

Beyond any negative consequences, the positive consequences of an effort to integrate one's co-ethnics may be equally attractive -- already unpopular leaders, or those facing some other form of domestic crisis or difficulty, can benefit considerably from the strong domestic boost provided by an external conflict (Russett 1990). While empirical analyses of diversionary theory have shown mixed results (Levy 1989, 1998; Chiozza and Goemans 2003; Tarar 2006), research relating more directly to territorial and ethnic diversion has received greater support (Tir and Jasinski 2008; Tir 2010). This phenomenon may be particularly acute in the case of territorial claims related to ethnic kin abroad, which can offer leaders an outlet to appeal to the sense of duty to one's ethnic kin. For states which base their legitimacy upon leadership of the dominant ethnic group, irredentist conflict both solves the problem of competing legitimacy and provides a short term distraction from any domestic troubles.

This should serve as an especially effective tool to build legitimacy for young states, which may be struggling to build effective institutions and legitimacy to their citizens. With the "one nation, one state" model in mind, states may adopt the mantle of protector of the majority ethnic group as part of the nation building project. The state need not be young for this argument to apply, though, for even established states can go through periods of economic difficulty that could be diverted through action abroad. Moreover, this argument need not be limited to states made up almost exclusively of a single ethnic group. Even leaders of multi-ethnic states could make claims to territory populated by an ethnic group that is considered politically important in the multi-ethnic state or its ruling coalition.

The combination of moral imperative, domestic pressure, and political opportunity provided by oppressed co-ethnics should increase the likelihood that a state will initiate a claim over territory inhabited by its co-ethnics who do not have full political rights and/or representation. Furthermore, we suggest that once such a claim has begun, the challenger state will be more likely to threaten or use militarized action in support of its ethnic kin in the target state, as another way to gain political benefit and/or divert attention from other problems. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** *If a shared ethnic group is excluded from power in the target state, the potential challenger state will be more likely to begin and escalate a territorial claim over territory inhabited by the shared ethnic group.*

The status of the group may endure for years or decades with little meaningful change, representing a latent ethnic or territorial issue that leaders may not choose to activate, but rapid changes in political status can present an opportunity for action. Challenger states should be



more likely to intervene to protect their co-ethnics for the aforementioned reasons in situations where a sudden change has seen their co-ethnics shift from a position of power to one of disadvantage. Such rapid change could result from coups or uprisings (as in 2014 Ukraine), revolutions or independence movements (as in the early-1990s Baltic states), or even regular transitions to new ruling leaders or parties. The occurrence of such a change can raise the profile of the neighboring co-ethnics, amplifying the aforementioned justifications and pressures for claim initiation or military intervention.

Not only may the challenger state feel the urgency to intervene after such a change, but the affected co-ethnics may demand outside intervention. Exclusion will both disenfranchise an ethnic group and cause it to seek autonomy, but those who experience a sudden change toward disadvantage will be especially likely to make demands for autonomy or secession (Gurr 1993; Gurr and Moore 1997; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Siroky and Cuffe 2014). Should they not succeed, or understandably view efforts to reverse recent changes with pessimism, it is hardly unreasonable to look elsewhere for assistance.

**Hypothesis 2:** *If a shared ethnic group experiences a disadvantageous change in its status in the target state, the potential challenger state will be more likely to begin and escalate a territorial claim over territory inhabited by the shared ethnic group.*

Another type of change that might prompt intervention is the occurrence of political violence in the target state. While this is often intertwined with changes in the political structure or relative power of ethnic groups in the target state, as discussed above, this need not be so; the outbreak of violent conflict may even be a strategic choice by the minority or a response to violence from their oppressors. Ethnic groups that find themselves with cross border kin are

more likely to pursue violent conflict, knowing full well that this enhances their bargaining position and provides a potential route for realizing their goals of independence, autonomy, or union (Cunningham 2013). By adopting a violent strategy, disadvantaged minorities may hope for monetary, logistical, or other support from their ethnic kin, and are often successful in this goal (Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009).

Whether the violence was inspired by the minority group or by the target state's government, such violence will provide a strong justification for intervention by the challenger state. As the situation in the target state deteriorates into violent conflict, continual news of the violence will amplify the domestic pressures for intervention by making more apparent the plight of the co-ethnics, and military losses by the group could lead to severe crackdown and punishment. The result will be that the outbreak of violent conflict involving co-ethnics in the target state should increase the likelihood that the challenger state will take action, first by beginning a territorial claim to the area where its co-ethnics are in danger, and perhaps by escalating such claims to violent conflict.

**Hypothesis 3:** *If a shared ethnic group experiences violent conflict in the target state, the potential challenger state will be more likely to begin and escalate a territorial claim over territory inhabited by the shared ethnic group.*

While we have focused thus far on the status of the group in the potential target state, the group's status in the challenger state is of equal importance, for it is this state's leaders who initiate the claim and make the decisions regarding its potential escalation to conflict. Leaders in this state must decide whether beginning or escalating a claim over territory where their co-ethnics reside is worthwhile, considering the likely reactions of their domestic constituents. At

the extreme, such actions could please their domestic constituents and add new co-ethnics to the state, strengthening the base of supporters for the current leadership -- but there is also the risk that the constituents would reject the costs and risks of such a policy.

To the extent that the state's leaders derive legitimacy from claimed representation of an ethnic group, it becomes easier for states dominated by a particular group to justify territorial ambitions through the lens of "one nation, one state". This would not only justify the claim to a shared ethnic group but oblige it to offer protection. Should the shared group not be represented in the challenger state's ruling coalition, though, pursuing such policies may offer less domestic benefit and greater political risk. The result is that the political situation in the challenger state matters considerably, with the political position of the shared ethnic group serving as a strong predictor of the challenger state's willingness to pursue union with the target areas.

**Hypothesis 4:** *If a shared ethnic group is included in power in the potential challenger state, the state is more likely to begin and escalate a territorial claim over the area inhabited by the group.*

We must also consider the potential challenger state's demographic makeup. States claim legitimacy by being the representatives of their constituent ethnic group, under the principle of "one nation, one state." Were an ethnic group to be a minority within their own state, this source of legitimacy would be considerably less effective politically, and states in such a situation should be less likely to pursue claims to build legitimacy accordingly. Similarly, while states could attempt to liberate an ethnic group that makes up a small minority of their population, the political payoff would be greater when seeking to unify with members of a group that already makes up the majority of the state's population. As a diversionary tactic, appealing to a wider swath of the population should be much more effective -- so if the shared ethnic already makes

up the majority of the challenger state, it should be more likely to initiate a territorial claim over territory inhabited by co-ethnics abroad.

The demographic nature of the challenger state should continue to play a role in conflict initiation after a claim has begun. Having lodged a claim over territory inhabited by a shared ethnic group, a challenger state should be more likely to accept the risks of pursuing the claim militarily if the group dominates its population. Further, the leaders of a state with a majority of its population belonging to the shared group should enjoy greater domestic support for actions on behalf of that group, even if they themselves do not come from the group.

**Hypothesis 5:** *If an ethnic group comprises a majority of the population in the potential challenger state, that state is more likely to initiate and escalate a territorial claim over territory with a shared ethnic group.*

Another characteristic of the challenger state that may lead to initiation or escalation of an ethnically-based territorial claim is the age of the state. States which are newly independent may face considerable domestic pressure to unify with any ethnic kin to build legitimacy, as new leaders seek to build and strengthen their new state. In addition, newly independent states may feel a sense of urgency to unify with nearby ethnic kin, as their claims to representation of the ethnic group will have the most weight during the state's infancy, before another state can adopt this mantle or prove a superior alternative. Further, states may fear that separation from their ethnic group can result in gradual differences in culture or experience, adding an increased sense of urgency to any attempt to unify with neighboring kin. Separation, be it with two independent states or under the yoke of a different ethnic group, could gradually exacerbate or create differences between two groups, and with time union may fade as a viable strategy.

Most of this logic applies to target states as well, as younger states may be seen as vulnerable. Newly independent states may be struggling with the challenges of nation building and often face internal division as their former colonial ruler withdraws, making them a more tempting target for any potential challengers. This is enhanced by the same urgency to ensure that co-ethnics are not co-opted, disconnected, or slowly generate a distinct culture from a challenger's ethnic group. The result is that irredentist territorial claims should be most likely to begin or to escalate when younger states are involved as either the challenger or the target.

**Hypothesis 6:** *The more recently a potential challenger state has achieved independence, the greater the likelihood that it will initiate and escalate a territorial claim over a shared ethnic group.*

**Hypothesis 6a:** *The more recently a potential target state has achieved independence, the greater the likelihood that the potential challenger state will initiate and escalate a territorial claim over a shared ethnic group.*

Finally, we consider the relative strength of international norms regarding territorial revision. By initiating a territorial claim, the claimant state is openly challenging the territorial status quo, and a strong international norm against territorial revision will evoke international calls for caution and opposition to territorial aggression. While the international community may accept territorial changes and land swaps that are achieved through peaceful negotiations, there is still likely to be opposition to any territorial claims that might hamper interstate relations, lead to conflict, or even set a precedent encouraging other states to make their own demands.

As such, any claim initiation will risk reputational costs for the challenger, and may result in other states responding to maintain the status quo. The costs for lodging a territorial claim can

range from condemnation to potentially damaging international sanctions (as in Russian's annexation of the Crimea) to direct intervention and opposition by the international community (as in Iraq's invasion of Kuwait). Leaders considering the initiation of a claim must heed these risks, for economic sanctions and intervention can be crippling domestically, and international opposition can undermine foreign policy goals as well as domestic legitimacy.

Even if a state considers its irredentist claims just, a strong norm against territorial revisionism will hinder the realization of these goal. As such, during periods when support for territorial integrity is relatively weak, states should incur fewer costs for pursuing territorial claims, while stronger territorial integrity norms should see claims met with considerable cost and external pressure. (Zacher 2001; Hensel et al. 2009)

As with claim initiation, the willingness to escalate to armed conflict over a territorial claim should be influenced by the prevailing international norms. While norms of territorial integrity are thought to serve as an important barrier to claim initiation, the norm of territorial integrity is also explicitly intended to prevent armed conflict over territory. Any escalation to armed conflict should be likely to draw the attention (and opposition) of the international community. This means that while states should incur some costs for claim initiation, claim escalation should bear a greater cost, with the international community more eager to condemn conflict behavior and act in defense of a norm intended to prevent just such a situation.

**Hypothesis 7:** *A potential challenger state will be less likely to begin or escalate a territorial claim over a shared ethnic group when there is greater global support for the norm of territorial integrity.*

## Research Design

The first task that must be accomplished to test these hypotheses is the construction of a data set of dyads that share ethnic groups. We identify shared groups using the Transborder Ethnic Kin (TEK) data set (Cederman et al. 2013), which codes ethnically related kin groups that appear in more than one state. Starting from the list of shared groups in the TEK 2014 data set (Vogt et al. 2015), we created directed dyad-year observations composed of each pair of countries that shared a group (e.g. one observation with Syria as a potential challenger against Turkey over the Kurdish group that they share in 1960, and one observation with Turkey as a potential challenger against Syria over the Kurds in 1960). This allows us to study the possibility that either side could begin a territorial claim over the shared group in any year.

Using the TEK data, we have identified a total of 157 ethnic groups that are shared by multiple states during the 1946-2001 time frame that is covered by both the TEK data (which begins in 1946) and our territorial claims data (which ends in 2001). Each group is shared by between 2-22 states. To keep the analysis manageable and to avoid inflating our results by including cases that do not have any interaction, we limit our analysis to contiguous dyads, which is consistent with earlier work (Cederman et al. 2013). This restricts us to 631 contiguous pairs of states; an additional 578 noncontiguous dyads also share groups, typically involving such distant pairs as the United States and Middle Eastern states over Arabs or Poland, Russia, and Israel over Jews. As will be seen, 66 of the 68 potential territorial claims in our analyses occur in these 631 contiguous dyads, with only 2 claims in the 578 noncontiguous dyads. As we are interested in the possibility that either state in a dyad could begin a territorial claim over the shared group, we construct a directed-dyad-year data set covering a total of 37,795 observations.

## **Territorial Claims**

Our primary dependent variables, the outbreak and militarization of identity-based territorial claims, are collected from provisional version 1.02 of the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) Territorial Claims data (Hensel et al. 2008). We are only interested in territorial claims in which the challenger claims the territory at least partially on the basis of a shared identity with its inhabitants; we investigated each such claim to identify the ethnic group that was involved.<sup>1</sup>

For the 1946-2001 time period covered by the ethnic groups data, this produces a list of 66 territorial claims involving groups in the TEK data set, 58 of which began during this period and 8 of which began earlier and persisted into this time. Only two other territorial claims began in the 578 noncontiguous dyads that share ethnic groups, supporting our decision to focus on the 631 contiguous dyads.<sup>2</sup>

For our analyses of claim militarization, we examine the 1035 years during which these identity-based claims were ongoing. We use two related dependent variables to measure militarization. First is a dummy variable indicating whether or not at least one militarized interstate dispute (MID) began over the claim during the year in question, as compiled by the ICOW project from the Correlates of War project's master list of MIDs (Palmer et al. 2015). To make sure that our results are not driven by low-risk events where one state threatens force or builds up its forces but has no intention of taking military action, we run an alternative model for whether or not a fatal MID began over the claim during that year, which is also available from

<sup>1</sup> This information identifying ethnic groups in territorial claims will be released in the next version of the ICOW territorial claims data after acceptance of this manuscript for publication.

<sup>2</sup> These two non-contiguous claims are the claim by West Germany against Poland over former German territory, and the 1940s claim by Jordan against Lebanon as part of its brief effort to create "Greater Syria."



the ICOW data. At least one MID began in 148 claim-years (13.8% of the total), and at least one fatal MID began in 70 claim-years (7.1% of the total).

### **Group Characteristics**

We measure the population and political status of each group using the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data set, version 2014 (Vogt et al. 2015). Population is measured by the proportion of each state's total population that is accounted for by members of the group in question. Because of the difficulty of measuring the population of each ethnic group with accurate annual data, we simplify this by using a dummy variable to indicate whether the group in question makes up a majority of the state's population, although the results are quite similar with the continuous measure of population from the EPR data set.

The political status of the group in each state is also taken from the EPR data. For the purpose of testing Hypothesis 1, regarding groups that are excluded from political power in the target state, we create a dummy variable that indicates whether or not the group is either considered powerless at the national political level or faces active political discrimination. For Hypothesis 2, regarding disadvantageous political changes, we identify cases where the group in question experienced a change during either the year of observation or the previous year that moved it into these categories (i.e., moving from a situation of absolute or shared political power to being powerless or facing discrimination, or moving from powerless to discrimination). For Hypothesis 4, regarding political power in the potential challenger state, we create a dummy variable indicating whether the group enjoys absolute political power (where the group has a monopoly on executive political power or is considered dominant) or shared political power

(where the group shares executive political power as either a senior partner or junior partner with members of another group) in the challenger state.

### **Ethnic War**

Hypothesis 3 addresses the implications of current or recent ethnic war in the target state. This is included in the EPR data set, drawing from the Armed Conflict Data (ACD) data set. For our purposes, we combine secessionist and non-secessionist ethnic wars, producing a dummy variable that indicates whether or not an ethnic war involving the group in question occurred in the target state during the year of observation or the previous year.

### **Recent Independence**

Hypotheses 6 and 6a addresses the elapsed time since the challenger and target states achieved political independence. This is measured using version 1.0 of the ICOW Colonial History data set, which identifies the year when each state achieved independence.

### **Territorial Integrity**

Following Hensel et al. (2009), we measure the strength of the global territorial integrity norm by the average number of treaty commitments signed by states in the international system that carry territorial integrity obligations. Such treaties contain explicit guarantees of the territorial integrity of existing states, and are identified using the Multilateral Treaties of Pacific Settlement (MTOPS) data set

## **Control Variables**

We control for several factors that are typically identified in the interstate conflict literature as having a systematic impact on conflict behavior. Joint democracy, frequently found to reduce conflict behavior, is measured here by whether both states in a dyad have scores of 7 or greater on the Polity data project's scale, running from -10 (least democratic) to 10 (most democratic). The relative capabilities of the challenger state in a dyad are measured by the percentage of the dyad's overall power capabilities held by the challenger (i.e., dividing the challenger's total by the combined dyadic total), using the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score from the COW project's National Material Capabilities data set. Finally, we measure whether or not the two states share membership in at least one military alliance, using the COW project's military alliance data set; formal military allies should be expected to have more cooperative and less conflictual relations, all else being equal.

For the analyses of territorial claim militarization, we control for two aspects of the claim itself, which have been shown to have a significant impact on claim management in past studies (e.g. Hensel et al. 2008). First is the salience or value of the claimed territory, which is usually measured by a 0-12 index that incorporates six characteristics of the claimed territory that make it more valuable, with each measured for both the challenger and target states in the claim. Because we are only studying claims that have an identity element for the challenger, one of the six elements of the scale needs to be removed for each state, reducing this to a 0-10 scale here. Second is the amount of recent armed conflict over the claim, weighted by how recent each conflict event was; this variable is described by Hensel et al. (2008).

## Shared Ethnic Groups and Territorial Claim Onset

Our analyses begin with the onset of new irredentist territorial claims between two states that share an ethnic group. Hypotheses 1-3 address details of the shared ethnic group in the potential target state, Hypotheses 4-6 address details of the group in the potential challenger state, and Hypothesis 7 address the global territorial integrity norm. The results are presented in Table 1, and the marginal impact of statistically significant variables is shown in Table 2.

[Tables 3-4 about here]

Table 1 presents a logistic regression analysis of the onset of new territorial claims with an identity element for the challenger state. The results are largely consistent with our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, regarding the shared group's exclusion from political power in the target state, is not supported overall; indeed, when the group is powerless or the subject of discrimination, a new claim is significantly less likely to begin.<sup>3</sup> The main reason for this result, though, relates to Hypothesis 2, regarding disadvantageous changes in the group's political status.

When the group's status changes in a disadvantageous way, either leaving the group unrepresented in political power after it had been previously or subject to discrimination when it had not been previously, a new claim is significantly more likely to begin ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>4</sup> As the predicted probabilities in Table 2 indicate, when the group has been excluded from power for a protracted period, a new claim is 71.7% less likely to begin -- but when the group suddenly experiences exclusion or discrimination, a claim is 77% more likely to begin. Protracted periods

<sup>3</sup> Additional variables indicating whether the group has at least a share of political power or political autonomy fail to reach statistical significance if added to the model. The group's population in the target state is not statistically significant, either, whether this is measured by the proportion of the state's total population or by a dummy variable indicating whether the group make up a majority of the population.

<sup>4</sup> This result holds if this variable is split into separate dummy variables indicating whether such a change occurred in the year of the observation or in the previous year, rather than aggregating them together as reported here. Both variables are statistically significant and positive.

of discrimination or exclusion are thus not especially dangerous, as potential challengers recognize that the situation is unlikely to change in the near future, but sudden changes in status are much more likely to provoke an irredentist response. Similarly, a new claim is nearly five times as likely to begin when the shared group is involved in an ethnic war against the potential target state, consistent with Hypothesis 3 ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>5</sup>

Turning to group status in the challenger state, Hypothesis 4 suggested that new claims should be most likely when the group is represented in the potential challenger state's government, and Hypothesis 5 suggested that new claims should be most likely when the group makes up the majority of the potential challenger state's population. Hypothesis 4 is not supported ( $p < .44$ ), suggesting that the power status of the shared ethnic group in the challenger state has no systematic impact on the likelihood of a new claim. However, Hypothesis 5 is strongly supported ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the group's proportion of the population is quite important.<sup>6</sup> When the group is in power but only a minority of the population, Table 2 indicates that a new claim is found to be 30.2% more likely, but this lacks statistical significance. Of greater interest is that when a shared ethnic group makes up a majority of the challenger state's population but is not in power, a new claim is 933.5% more likely, and when in power and a majority of the challenger state's population, the probability of lodging a new claim increases 1,374.2%. What this suggests is that, within the challenger state, the demographic characteristics of the challenger's population are far more important than the power status of the shared group. The lack of significance for the power status of the group suggests that the domestic political benefits from claim initiation may

<sup>5</sup> Similar results are produced if armed conflict is limited to new cases of conflict, rather than years when earlier conflicts remain ongoing, or if this measure is replaced with a measure of the number of years in the past five when the group was engaged in armed conflict.

<sup>6</sup> This effect remains strong if this dummy variable for the group making up a majority of the state's population is replaced by a continuous measure of the group's proportion of the total population ( $p < .001$ ).

be minimal if a leader's ethnic group makes up a small proportion of the population, as in multi-ethnic states where externalizing ethnic claims could inflame or alienate other ethnic groups.

Similarly, Hypotheses 6 and 6a suggest that a new claim is much more likely soon after independence. The results in Table 1 strongly support this expectation for both Hypothesis 6 ( $p < .05$ ) and Hypothesis 6a ( $p < .01$ ), with a substantial impact seen in Table 2. Moving from the mean value across states in this study (a logged value corresponding to roughly 58 years of independence) to the minimum value (the year when the challenger state becomes independent) increases the predicted probability of a new territorial claim by 154.5%, and moving from the mean to the maximum value decreases this probability by 48.1%. This is consistent with the expectation that states are more likely to begin irredentist claims soon after independence, when the demands of state-building would seem to be helped by efforts to unify the state with nearby kinsmen. The impact of the age of the target state appears to be even more substantial, with a move from the mean to the minimum (the year the target becomes independent) increasing the probability of conflict onset by 1,031.4%. Moving from the mean to the maximum decreases the probability of concept onset a further 81.0%. This is consistent with our expectation and indicates that not only are newly independent states more likely to lodge territorial claims over shared ethnic groups, but new states are also more likely to be the target of such claims.

Finally, the global territorial integrity norm appears to have had a strong effect on the onset of new territorial claims, with new identity-based claims being significantly less likely when support for this norm has been greater ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>7</sup> As Table 2 indicates, moving from the mean value of global support for the territorial integrity norm to the minimum value increases

<sup>7</sup> The same result holds if this measure of global support for the territorial integrity norm is replaced with a dyadic measure of the number of territorial integrity treaties or institutions shared by the two states during the year of observation ( $p < .001$ ).

the predicted probability of a new irredentist claim by 231.5%, and moving from the mean to the maximum value reduces this probability by 52.1%. New irredentist claims have become quite unlikely as time has passed and global support for this norm has increased, even if many previous claims have continued.

The control variables produce generally expected results, although they often fall short of conventional standards of statistical significance. The two states' relative capabilities do not have any systematic impact ( $p < .33$ ), while the likelihood of a new irredentist claim is only weakly reduced by joint democracy ( $p < .07$ ) or sharing a formal military alliance ( $p < .06$ ).

### **Shared Ethnic Groups and Territorial Claim Militarization**

We now turn to the impact of shared ethnic groups on the militarization of irredentist claims. Table 3 presents a logistic regression analysis of the likelihood that an identity-based territorial claim will lead to the outbreak of militarized conflict, including any militarized conflict in Model I and only fatal conflict in Model II. The results generally support the hypotheses, although they are somewhat weaker than the results for new claim onset.

[Tables 5-6 about here]

Hypothesis 1 suggested that claims would be more likely to become militarized when the shared group is excluded from political power or subjected to discrimination in the target state. This expectation is supported for all militarized disputes ( $p < .01$ ), and much more weakly for fatal disputes ( $p < .06$ ). Table 4 shows that conflict of either type is more than twice as likely

when the group is excluded from power or discriminated against, with the probability of any MID increasing by 115.6% and the probability of fatal conflict increasing by 108.4%<sup>8</sup>.

The related expectation from Hypothesis 2 that militarization would be most likely after a disadvantageous change in political status receives much less support for claim militarization than for claim onset, both for all disputes ( $p < .07$ ) and fatal disputes ( $p < .17$ ). Hypothesis 3 on the likelihood of militarization with a recent history of ethnic war is not supported for militarized disputes overall ( $p < .95$ ) nor for fatal disputes ( $p < .56$ ).<sup>9</sup> The initial effort to make the claim seems to have more political benefits for leaders than facing potentially high costs and risks from militarization, even where there has been a sudden turn for the worse in the group's situation.

Limited support is obtained for the hypotheses related to the group's status in the challenger state. Hypotheses 4 and 5 suggested that militarization is more likely when the group is a part of the central government and when it makes up a majority of the state's population. Militarized disputes are no more likely when the group is in power, whether for all types of conflict ( $p < .20$ ) or for fatal conflict only ( $p < .89$ ). Militarization is much more likely overall when the group makes up a majority of the population ( $p < .01$ ), although fatal conflict is not systematically more likely ( $p < .14$ ).<sup>10</sup> As Table 4 indicates, this represents an increase in the probability of any form of conflict by 148% when a challenger state is comprised of a majority of the shared ethnic group, increasing to 240% when that group is also in power in the challenger

<sup>8</sup> Additional variables indicating whether the group has at least a share of political power or political autonomy in the target state, and whether the group makes up a majority of the target state's population, fail to reach statistical significance if they are included in the model. The proportion of the state's total population accounted for by the group has a borderline negative effect on all conflict ( $p < .05$ ) and fatal conflict ( $p < .10$ ), but this was not part of our theory.

<sup>9</sup> There is also no significant effect if this is limited to only new conflicts in the year that they begin, excluding previous conflicts that remain ongoing, or if this variable is replaced with a count of the number of the previous five years in which armed conflict occurred.

<sup>10</sup> Similar results are obtained if this is replaced with the proportion of the challenger state's total population accounted for by the group ( $p < .001$  overall,  $p < .06$  for fatal conflict).



state. It therefore appears that it is the demographic makeup of the challenger state, and not that group's power status, that impacts both claim onset and militarization.

Hypotheses 6 and 6a predicted that claims with newly independent challenger and target states would see more claim militarization. When the challenger is newly independent, the hypotheses are not supported for all forms of conflict ( $p < .14$ ) but are supported for more severe forms of conflict ( $p < .03$ ). Moving from the mean independence value (average of 58 years of independence) to the minimum (the year of independence) increases the probability of fatal conflict by 177%, while moving from the mean to the maximum value decreases this probability by 64.8%. Both militarized conflict overall ( $p < .001$ ) and fatal conflict ( $p < .05$ ) are more likely when the target state achieved independence relatively recently. The probability of conflict of all types increases by 209.2% by moving from the mean value to the minimum (the year of independence), and decreases by 68.3% when moving from the mean to the maximum value. The probability of fatal conflict similarly increases by 132.1% when moving from the mean value to the minimum (year of independence), and decreases 56.6% from the mean to the maximum. With the caveat that the age of the challenger state does not appear to impact low-level militarization, Hypotheses 6 and 6a are broadly supported, and newly independent states are more likely to escalate their territorial claims over shared groups.

The global territorial integrity norm slightly reduces conflict overall ( $p < .08$ ) and has a somewhat stronger effect in reducing fatal conflict ( $p < .05$ ), weakly supporting Hypothesis 7.<sup>11</sup> The probability of fatal conflict increases by 74.9% from the mean value to the minimum during this period of study, and decreases by a further 39.5% between the mean and the maximum value. This suggests that this norm not only affects the likelihood that states will make new

<sup>11</sup> A dyadic measure of the number of territorial integrity commitments shared by the two states in the dyad has no systematic impact on militarization for either type of conflict.

territorial claims, as seen earlier, but that it affects their decision about the management of existing claims at least to the degree that it decreases the likelihood that they will engage in more severe forms of conflict.

Turning to the other variables in the model, the salience of the territorial claim has no systematic impact in either model ( $p > .10$  or worse), although it must be remembered that every case in this table has a relatively high salience value because of the presence of the identity concern, which is left out of this calculation of claim salience. A greater history of recent armed conflict over the claim significantly increases conflict of both types ( $p < .001$ ), consistent with past research, while joint democracy decreases conflict ( $p < .001$  overall and  $p < .09$  for fatal disputes) and neither relative capabilities ( $p < .24$  for both models) nor military alliance ( $p < .86$  or worse) has any systematic impact.

### **Discussion**

This paper has examined the connection between shared ethnic groups and territorial claims. Here we have focused on how shared ethnic groups affect the likelihood that a territorial claim will begin, as well as the likelihood that it will become militarized. The results have suggested some important lessons, but much remains to be done in future research in this area.

Beginning with the status of the group in the potential target state, new claims are much more likely to begin when there has been a recent disadvantageous change in the group's status or a recent ethnic war involving the group in the target state. However, if a group is powerless in the target state, a new claim is significantly less likely to be initiated. This suggests that recent events can have a powerful impact on challenger decisions regarding new claims; should a shared group suddenly be removed from power or face some significant change in their status,

the challenger can point to these changes as justification for a new claim, even if a long history of exclusion can become entrenched and unlikely to generate new challenges.. Militarization of the claim, by contrast, is more dependent on the power status in the target state, with recent changes in ethnic status only weakly related to claim militarization. Having already lodged their claim and made clear their dissatisfaction with the status quo, decisions for militarization appear to depend upon the status of the shared group, especially for low level conflict.

Of further interest is the role of ethnic war, which increases the likelihood of new claims, but not claim militarization. This is contrary to our expectation that an ethnic war within a target state would provide a potential challenger with the justification to intervene to protect its co-ethnics. One potential explanation is that states are hesitant to intervene in disputed territory with an ongoing insurgency or chaotic security situation, fearing that doing so may lead to the challenger inheriting the disorder and having to bear the costs of security and order. A persistently poor security situation in a neighboring state could provide a challenger with convenient propaganda without having to actually bear the costs of improving the situation. The challenger may prefer to provide arms and materiel to their co-ethnics with the hopes of securing victory without necessitating a potentially costly invasion and occupation.

Turning to the group's status in the challenger state, new claims and militarization are both more likely when the group makes up a majority of the population, but the group's power status does not have a systematic impact. Should a shared group not make up a majority within the challenger state, the lodging of a claim would not garner much support, and the group's addition to the challenger state could disrupt the current ethnic balance. It appears that leaders' political strategies in multi-ethnic states are different than in states with a dominant ethnic group, and they are much less likely to take actions that might endanger their control at home.

Newly independent states are also more likely to begin and (for the most part) militarize irredentist claims, as well as to be the target of these actions. New claims and fatal conflict are most likely soon after the potential challenger state's independence, declining substantially as the state develops a longer history of statehood and policies focus on the state's internal matters rather than its claims to ethnic representation abroad. This holds true for a target state's independence too, with newly independent targets seeing an increase in new claims and all types of conflict and claim militarization. For new states, irredentist claims offer the chance to consolidate domestic support around ethnic representation, as well as to modify borders before the post-colonial borders become enshrined and co-ethnics abroad develop separate identities and loyalties; the weaker results for low level conflict than for fatal conflict support the urgency of this need to act quickly after independence. The results for newly independent target states support this sense of urgency to act quickly before the co-ethnics grow apart from the challenger state, likely compounded by the perceived weakness of newly independent states as they begin the process of nation-building and the sense that the new state is much more vulnerable than the colonial power that had previously ruled the area.

Finally, both the onset and severe militarization of territorial claims have been less likely when there is stronger international acceptance of the territorial integrity norm. This supports the idea that as the international community has sought to delegitimize changes in the territorial status quo, states are less willing to violate these international norms. The results are much stronger for lodging new claims and for severe conflict, which speaks to the strength of territorial integrity norms in discouraging new claims and more severe forms of conflict, although the norm may not be as effective at ending ongoing claims or preventing low-level militarized threats.

These results offer a great deal of support for our hypotheses, helping us understand the origins and management of an important category of territorial claims. Irredentist territorial claims are only one possible outcome when states share an ethnic group, though. When a challenger state is displeased with the status or treatment of its co-ethnics abroad, annexing the territory where those kinsmen live is only one option available to leaders. The challenger might choose to support the political independence of its kinsmen without annexing them under its own sovereignty, or it could choose to support demands by group members for greater autonomy or political, civil, economic, or cultural rights. Future research would do well to collect and study data on these and other similar actions that states can undertake behalf of their kinsmen, particularly for recent years where the territorial integrity norm has strengthened.

Such data collection would also allow the study of how states assist their kinsmen during and after territorial claims. A state may choose to begin a new territorial claim for territory where its ethnic kin reside (as Finland initially did after losing Karelia to the Soviet Union). Alternatively, it may choose to support the independence of the people in question rather than annexing them for itself (as Albania has done with Kosovo), or it may choose to support their demands for greater rights or autonomy (as Austria has since losing South Tyrol to Italy). There are likely to be systematic differences in the conditions under which each of these options might be chosen, such as the way that the territorial claim ended (with negotiated settlements potentially being more stable in the long run than imposed victories), the relative power of the challenger (as a lack of credible military options may increase the likelihood of supporting political demands), and the strength of the territorial integrity norm (where irredentism and even supporting secession might be less likely when support for the norm is stronger).

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**Table 1: Onset of Territorial Claims over Shared Ethnic Groups**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Coefficient (S.E.)</u>
Group status in target:	
Powerless/discriminated	- 1.26 (0.57)**
Recent decline in status	1.83 (0.57)***
Ethnic war in target:	
Current or previous yr	1.74 (0.37)***
Group status in challenger:	
Absolute/shared power	0.26 (0.34)
Majority of population	2.43 (0.35)***
Years since independence:	
Challenger	- 0.23 (0.10)**
Target	- 0.60 (0.12)***
Territorial integrity norm	- 1.00 (0.27)***
<i>Controls:</i>	
Challenger cap.s	- 0.56 (0.57)
Joint democracy	- 1.90 (1.05)*
Military alliance	- 0.66 (0.35)*
Constant	- 2.53 (0.66)***
N:	36,677
X <sup>2</sup> :	241.97 (11 d.f., p<.001)

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 2: Marginal Impact on Claim Onset**

Condition	Prob. of Claim Onset	Change from Baseline Prob.
Group excluded from power in target:		
Baseline: not excluded from power	.00017	
Excluded - no change in status	.00005	- 71.7%
Excluded - recent change in status	.00029	+77.0%
Ethnic war in target:		
Baseline: no ethnic war	.00017	
War in current or previous yr	.00095	+477.0%
Group status in challenger:		
Baseline: minority, not in power	.00017	
Minority, absolute/shared power	.00022	+30.2%
Majority, not in power	.00189	+933.5%
Majority, absolute/shared power	.00245	+1374.2%
Years since challenger independence (logged):		
0 (minimum)	.00042	+154.5%
Baseline: 4.07 (mean)	.00017	
6.91 (maximum)	.00008	- 48.1%
Years since target independence (logged):		
0 (minimum)	.00188	+1031.4%
Baseline: 4.07 (mean)	.00017	
6.84 (maximum)	.00003	- 81.0%
Territorial integrity norm:		
1.33 (minimum)	.00055	+231.5%
Baseline: 2.34 (mean)	.00017	
3.277 (maximum)	.00008	- 52.1%

**Table 3: Militarization of Territorial Claims over Shared Ethnic Groups**

	Model I: Any MID over claim	Model II: Fatal MID over claim
Variable	Coeff. (S.E.)	Coeff. (S.E.)
Group pol. status in target:		
Powerless/discriminated	0.81 (0.32)***	0.76 (0.40)*
Recent decline in status	- 0.61 (0.34)*	- 0.55 (0.40)
Ethnic war in target:		
Current or previous yr	0.02 (0.29)	0.21 (0.36)*
Group status in challenger:		
Absolute/shared power	0.35 (0.27)	0.05 (0.34)
Majority of population	0.97 (0.31)***	0.56 (0.38)
Years since independence:		
Challenger	- 0.15 (0.10)	- 0.31 (0.13)**
Target	- 0.35 (0.10)***	- 0.25 (0.13)**
Territorial integrity norm	- 0.37 (0.21)*	- 0.56 (0.28)**
<i>Controls:</i>		
ICOW claim salience	0.07 (0.06)	0.05 (0.08)
Recent MIDs	0.53 (0.07)***	0.57 (0.11)***
Challenger cap.s	0.60 (0.50)	0.76 (0.64)
Joint democracy	- 4.15 (1.27)***	- 1.38 (0.80)*
Military alliance	- 0.03 (0.32)	- 0.08 (0.45)
Constant	- 1.99 (0.81)**	- 1.45 (1.10)
N:	1035	1035
X <sup>2</sup> :	185.74 (13 d.f., p<.001)	91.49 (13 d.f., p<.001)

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 4: Marginal Impact on Claim Militarization**

Condition	Model I:	Model II:	
	Any MID	Fatal MID	
	Probability of MID	Change from Baseline	Change from Baseline
Group excluded from power in target:			
Baseline: not excluded from power	.03670		.02572
Excluded - no change in status	.07913	+115.6%	.05360 +108.4%
Excluded - recent change in status	.04450	+21.3%	.03151 +22.5%
Ethnic war in target:			
Baseline: no ethnic war	.03670		.02572
War in current or previous yr	.03743	+2.0%	.03162 +22.9%
Group status in challenger:			
Baseline: minority, not in power	.03670		.02572
Minority, absolute/shared power	.05151	+40.4%	.02704 +5.1%
Majority, not in power	.09103	+148.0%	.04425 +72.1%
Majority, absolute/shared power	.12492	+240.4%	.04647 +80.7%
Years since challenger independence (logged):			
0 (minimum)	.06080	+65.7%	.07147 +177.9%
Baseline: 4.07 (mean)	.03670		.02572
6.91 (maximum)	.02202	- 40.0%	.00905 - 64.8%
Years since target independence (logged):			
0 (minimum)	.11346	+209.2%	.05969 +132.1%
Baseline: 4.07 (mean)	.03670		.02572
6.84 (maximum)	.01165	- 68.3%	.01116 - 56.6%
Territorial integrity norm:			
1.33 (minimum)	.05286	+44.0%	.04498 +74.9%
Baseline: 2.34 (mean)	.03670		.02572
3.28 (maximum)	.02644	- 28.0%	.01555 - 39.5%