

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE CLEAVAGES

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ABSTRACT

As majoritarian electoral politics and religious conservatism are rising in the major multi-ethnic South Asian countries such as India and Pakistan, the events of mob lynching, ethnic clashes, and targeting non-plural and minority communities are becoming more frequent. This article analyses which cleavages of marginalisation make some ethnic groups prone to violent social movements vis-à-vis others. Theoretically, through social constructivism and horizontal inequality, the study argues that socioeconomic condition, religion, and language are the three broad cleavages that influence political behaviour of ethnic groups. Explicating the theory about underlying versus facilitating conditions of ethnic-civil conflicts, this article examines the pre-requisites of ethnic conflicts. Thereafter, it evaluates which single cleavages and combinations of the above-mentioned cleavages increase the probability of conflict occurrence in the Indian subcontinent. The argument is empirically evaluated on a sample of 60 ethnic groups of the Indian subcontinent over the period of 1947-2013. We find that groups affected by reinforcing cleavages of religious and economic marginalisation, and religious, economic, and lingual marginalisation have engaged in active violence over the period of our study. Additionally, the reinforcing cleavages of language and economy, and language and religion are associated with sporadic violence. Apart from the combined effects, we find that the ethnic groups facing economic disadvantage alone can also engage in violence.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnic Groups, Political Behaviour, Marginalisation, Horizontal Inequality, South Asia.

Introduction

Terrorism and regional conflicts based on ethnic identities have become a source of persistent problem in various parts of the world. Militant organizations functioning as units belonging to a common ethnic group threaten the lives of an array of individuals in a region, including not only state officials of the particular region but also other rival ethnic groups. More than one-third of terrorist organizations in the world operate to advance the interests of ethnic groups, and ethnic forms of terrorism are considered most prevalent in terms of a number of attacks and casualties (Masters, 2008). Apart from common ethnic interests, religious intolerance is also visible in various parts of the world. While the trend of majoritarian politics is rising in every continent, the communal riots witnessed globally are being triggered based on religious and socioeconomic interests among the various warring parties. The Indian Subcontinent, too, is not an exception.

Due to its vast size and heterogeneous society and polity, India has been the subject of various conflicts between subnational regions and the central government.¹ India has a high rate of political violence, and over 90 per cent of all events are riots and protests. Additionally, Pakistan has the second highest rate of political violence and protests in South and Southeast Asia and it accounts for over 20 per cent of all politically violent events in the region. On the other hand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka too have been besieged with violence and protests over the last couple of decades. Series of political coups and the Chittagong Hill Tracts mobilisation perturbed the democratic stability of Bangladesh in the 1970s, 80s, as well as 90s. Sri Lanka too had been besieged with civil war since the 1980s until 2009 when the Tamil Eelam militants were finally defeated by the Sinhalese government. However, the key cleavages of marginalisation against the minority Tamils still loom large in this island state.

According to recent findings, 64 per cent of the civil wars has been fought along ethnic lines in recent decades globally (Denny and Walter 2014; Themner and Wallenstein 2012). Nevertheless, not all ethnic and religious groups are prone to violence and secessionist movements. Many of these ethnic and religious groups are integrated and cling to both their state and ethnic identity. Thus, the query remains, why do some ethnic groups adopt violence to fight against the state? This article examines this question and tries to explain which factors make some ethnic groups more prone to violence vis-à-vis others. While doing so, it elaborates the key idea of reinforcing versus cross-cutting cleavages of marginalisation that might lead to adopting violent practices among members of an ethnic group. Following ETH Zurich's Ethnic Power relations dataset² and EPR Ethnic Dimensions dataset³, this article thereby tries to categorize the ethnic groups and the causal factors leading to the use of violence by various ethnic groups of the Indian subcontinent.

Although there is debate among scholars about the most important causal factors behind the onset of the civil conflict, the more nuanced task is to determine how these factors exist in combination leading to the onset and severity of the conflict. The 'Minorities at Risk' (MAR) survey shows that

¹ Malone, D., & Mukherjee, R. (2010). Polity, security, and foreign policy in contemporary India. *South Asia's weak states: Understanding the regional insecurity predicament*, 147-69.

² Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rügger, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin. 2015. "Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Dataset Family." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7):1327-1342.

³ Bormann, Nils-Christian, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Manuel Vogt. 2017. "[Language, Religion, and Ethnic Civil War](#)." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(4): 744–71.

about 80 per cent of the politically active ethnic groups in the 1990s were disadvantaged because of historical or contemporary discrimination. 40 per cent of these groups (111 out of 275) surveyed face discriminatory policies and practices harmful to their material well-being⁴, but relatively few promote violent conflict. This study combines prerequisites of ethnic conflict into three broad cleavages – religion, culture, and socioeconomic condition, thereby theoretically arguing that these three broad cleavages of distinction and marginalisation influence group behaviour. A combination of these stated cleavages develops a continuum of peaceful to violent politics. The present literature only looks at the causality of one cleavage at a time, but in this paper, they have been studied individually, then combined in groups of two, and finally all together; which is a unique contribution of this article. Thereby, it assesses the causal weight of these cleavages by examining the effect of these combinations on conflict occurrence. The conflict pattern and causes in the subcontinent context are assessed by taking the local/sub-regional ethnic groups and factors into consideration.

Conflict and Cleavages

14 per cent of the ethnic minorities in the world have been involved in significant violence against the state (Gurr 1996; Fearon 2008).⁵ When violent conflicts are organised by identity, cleavages must be sufficiently important for the masses to prepare them to fight, kill, and even die. Personal motives are important, but without group motives and grievances, they may not be a principal driving force. Explicating the theory about necessary versus sufficient conditions of violent social movements, this article examines the pre-requisites of ethnic conflict and evaluates which single cleavages and combinations of cleavages matter the most for conflict occurrence and severity.

Theoretically, the causality of ethnic conflict can be explained by Primordialism, Instrumentalism, or Constructivism. According to Primordialists such as Horowitz, group allegiances and comparisons are a fundamental aspect of social life (Horowitz, 1985).⁶ Social constructivists also argue that ethnicities are frequently used instrumentally for political purposes, but their emphasis is on ‘making’ and ‘remaking’ of ethnic boundaries that must occur to make such instrumentalism possible.⁷ Nevertheless, both instrumentalists and constructivists recognize that there need to be some differences in behaviour, customs, ideology, or religion to make it possible to raise ethnic or other consciousness in an instrumental way.⁸ These distinct group level cleavages causing conflict are the focal point of this study.

What are Cleavages?

‘Cleavages’ include racial, political, and religious divisions in society. Stewart (2008) categorized cleavages into four areas: political participation, economic aspects, social aspects, and cultural

⁴ Harff, Barbara, and Ted R. Gurr. 2004. *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*. Boulder, Colorado Westview Press.

⁵ Seymour, Lee, and Kathleen G. Cunningham. 2016. "Identity Issues and Civil War." In *What do we Know about Civil Wars?* eds. T. D. Mason, Sara M. Mitchell. US: Rowman & Littlefield, 43-58.

⁶ Horowitz, Donald L. 2008. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁷ Stewart, F., and Kofi Annan. 2008. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸ Stewart, F., and Kofi Annan. 2008. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

aspects. She argues that these four broad categories are relevant to every society.⁹ I incorporate the additional cleavage of religion in this article.

According to Cederman (2011) and Stewart (2001), group level cleavages lead to collective identity formation. A cross-cutting cleavage exists when some characteristics of a group overlap or are in common with another group(s). For example, the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), who shared the common religion with the dominant majority of Pakistan - Muslims but spoke a different language than the Urdu speaking Muslims. In contrast, reinforcing cleavage occurs when identities have no overlapping or commonality across groups. For instance, if two groups speak different languages, follow different religions, and belong to different ethnic groups– they have much less in common, and their cleavages of difference are reinforcing. For example, the Sudanese Arabs and South Sudanese are religiously, culturally, and economically distinct from each other. The Sudanese Arabs (North Sudanese) are predominantly Muslim, economically better off than South Sudanese who are Christians and are culturally distinct too. The southerners were economically, socially, and religiously marginalised for decades.

Role of Cleavages

Cleavages divide people into various groups having similar characteristics and common identity. These work in combination to influence group behaviour. Therefore, one group may often feel distinct from another group and be distrustful or wary of the behavioural pattern of another group. If they share nothing (reinforcing all cleavages of distinction), or few things in common (cross-cutting cleavages of distinction), the intergroup proximity, bilateral exchanges, and trust shrink, giving rise to a void that is filled with mistrust and hatred, finally leading to communal or ethnic mobilisation.

Cleavages can also spur violence. According to Huntington and Lerner, the process of modernisation in developing societies causes rapid social and political mobilisation by breaking down the traditional order and expanding the communications and transportation networks.¹⁰ While this leads to a sharp increase in political participation in a multi-ethnic society, an equitable distribution of resource and socioeconomic benefits is hardly achieved due to lack of public service and public goods. Thus, some groups develop faster than others leading to a widening horizontal inequality between them. The Tamils and Sinhalese of Sri Lanka, and the dominant upper caste Hindus and scheduled tribes of India are few of the many examples. Following the logic that group level cleavages lead to collective identity formation, group-based discrimination and inequality leads to the common grievance and might spur group-based mobilisation and violence (Stewart 2008; Cederman 2011). For testing the likelihood of conflict, Stewart (2008) combined political, economic, and cultural cleavage together, and analysed the effect of lack of cultural recognition and equity on group mobilisation. In this article, I have combined group specific measures of religious, cultural, and economic marginalisation in all possible continuation to study their effect on conflict likelihood. They have been studied individually, then combined in groups of two, and finally all together. This is the unique contribution of this article in the field of conflict literature.

Inequality, cleavages, and mobilisation

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Taras, R., & Ganguly, R. (2002). *Understanding ethnic conflict: The international dimension*. Longman.

Cleavages make a society deeply divisible. Thereafter, inequality often runs along the lines of cleavages as not every group develops equally in such a deeply divided society. This leads to discrimination not merely among individuals; but among groups. In such cases, groups become different from each other divided by cleavages, and members of one group are better off than members of another group. Consequently, grievance among members of the discriminated groups builds up against the members of better-off groups, further leading to ethnic mobilisation and violence. To explain the impact of marginalisation on group mobilisation, Gurr wrote

*“The more strongly a person identifies with an ethnic group that is subject to marginalisation, the more likely he or she is to be motivated into action. Factors other than shared grievances, including a shared religion, language, history and culture, and place of residence strengthen group identity. The greater the number of traits common to a group, the stronger the group identity and stronger is the motivation to involve in action.”*¹¹

The causal argument mentioned above can be summarized and visually explained through a chart given below



Figure 1: Impact of marginalisation on group mobilisation

Taking the argument forward, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favour insurgency. These include poverty— marking financially and bureaucratically weak states and also favouring rebel recruitment, political instability, rough terrain, and large populations.¹² The purpose of this research, is, however, not to analyse the facilitating conditions or triggers of conflict as done by Fearon and Laitin (2003) and focuses on assessing the causality of the underlying conditions of ethnic violence. Contrary to Fearon and Laitin (2003), we evaluate the causal relationship of group level marginalisation on the likelihood of conflict and identify the significant underlying necessary conditions of conflict – the cleavages of marginalisation.

¹¹ Harff, Barbara, and Ted R. Gurr. 2004. *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*. Boulder, Colorado Westview Press.

¹² Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American political science review*, 97(1), 75-90.

Explaining the Cleavages of Marginalisation or Discrimination

Religion is a common source of division or marginalisation and had been a predominant divisive cleavage in the subcontinent. Temples, churches, and mosques have not only been the houses of prayers. Traditionally, social exchange, cultural practices, and governance have been linked to religion. Group grievances can also emerge out of inferior treatment to religious practices of groups. Designating a national religion or being biased in favour of a sect of a religion can generate resentment among others in a heterogeneous society.

H2: Religiously marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

Economic inequality and associated active or passive repression have been the source of popular uprisings globally. The Maoist rebellion in the central Indian jungles is also primarily based on economic inequality between the sharecropper tribal and the upper caste economically better off populace. Since the end of colonial rule, the communists campaigned about false independence and argued that the transfer of power has only benefited the horizontally better off section of India. One may rightly defend that such claims are too simplistic, but we have to agree that the mineral-rich Indian inland repeatedly witnesses sporadic instances of violence between the state and the Maoists who are supported by poor tribal and villagers.

H2: Economically marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

Another major cleavage of marginalisation is language as group grievances often emerge out of the inferior treatment of minorities' cultural practices. Globally, language has been a symbol of identity and culture. The expression of distinct culture is observable in language or the mother tongue. The festivals, music, and literature in which people grow up, listen to and read define who they are in communitarian societies. For instance, the dominance of Urdu language and culture had been a reason for resentment in East Pakistan leading to the evasive language movement and the war of independence in 1971. Similarly, in the 1950s, India faced major language movements by Telegu, Marathi, and Punjabi speakers.

H3: Lingual-culturally marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

Are Reinforcing cleavages more dangerous than Cross-cutting ones?

The major story of this study revolves around the multidimensional cleavages, i.e., cross-cutting versus reinforcing cleavages. It can be argued that the resentments due to marginalisation on one cleavage (for example, only cultural marginalisation) are easier to address when two groups have many other things in common (for example, religion, political power, socioeconomic status). When two groups differ and/or are disadvantaged from each other based on any single cleavage, it means that they share some other common identities too. Having some connections with the other groups can change the attitudes of the people. They might celebrate common festivals, or speak a common language, which reduces the alienation, anxiety, and mistrust between them. The members of both groups in such cases have some shared identity and interests that lessens the feeling of discrimination, grievances, and alienation (Guelke, 2012).

The scenario changes when the groups are fully alien to each other. When the cleavages of marginalisation overlap with each other, it can further heighten the conflict and be more divisive (Guelke, 2012). When an ethnic group is wholly alienated from another group, shares nothing in common, and are disadvantaged in various aspects, it also means that some other group is enjoying

reinforcing cycles of privilege (Stewart, 2008). This makes it harder for the disadvantaged group to accumulate assets in the future. The horizontal inequality in such cases persists because of persistent asymmetries in social capital and overt (or implicit) discrimination or favouritism by nongroup members¹³.

These conditions primarily lead to a civil war. The Chinese-Malay inequalities in Malaysia, the Tamils-Sinhalese inequalities of Sri Lanka are few examples of such cycles of deprivation. Hindi speaking animists and Christian scheduled tribes are both religiously and economically marginalised in India and have engaged in limited to severe violence since the 1950s. Our data covers 60 groups including Nagas, Kashmiri Muslims, and Baluchis who are marginalised by all three cleavages of religion, economy, and language and have engaged in sporadic violence (62.55 per cent) during 1947-2013.

This presence of sharp reinforcing horizontal inequalities and cleavages can either provide an intense motive for political mobilisation or make the marginalised ethnic groups incapable and too weak to even organise an effective political movement. However, if the political mobilisation happens, it often becomes violent with the power of identities binding people together as group leaders find violence is the only way to secure political power. And, in this manner, the groups facing reinforcing cleavages become prone to mobilisation and violence.

Hence, it is important to study the various probable combinations of reinforcement of cleavages. We study the cleavages singly, in groups of two, and finally altogether, which is a novel contribution to the literature. This leads to four more hypotheses.

H4: Economically and religiously marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

H5: The economically and lingual-culturally marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

H6: The lingual-culturally and religiously marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

H7: Lingual-culturally, religiously, and economically marginalised groups are prone to conflict.

Research Design

Spatial-Temporal Domain: Ethnic groups have some unique features and a network of connections amongst them within a geographical region. Although many studies are global, it is a deliberate decision to restrict the geographical focus of this study in order to deal with the sub-national variations and ethnic divisions that are unique to a region. Subnational variation in South Asia matters both in theory and for its empirical properties. Focusing on this region allows us to control for a number of factors including geography, history, and political system. Yet, we still have substantial variation in their empirical outcomes. Thus, India and her neighbours became a good test case for the theory. Another associated reason for selecting politically active ethnic groups of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is because they were one single country before the independence and partition of India in 1947. Naturally, the ethnic groups are spread across the

¹³ Stewart, F., and Kofi Annan. 2008. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

region and on both sides of the modern international border, and it shall be a challenge to justify our choice if all of them are not considered. For a similar reason, Sri Lanka is also included; because of the presence of a significant Tamil population there, and who is a notable ethnic group of south India.

Following ETH Zurich's Ethnic Power relations dataset¹⁴ and EPR Ethnic Dimensions dataset¹⁵, the unit of analysis is group year. The data consists of 60 ethnic groups of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The total sample of observation (N) is 3001 group years. The time frame for Bangladesh is 1972-2013 (as Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 December), and for others it is 1947-2013. A comprehensive study since 1947 is essential to include the language movements, the ethnic rebellions, and the class rebellions over time and space. As the data on the groups are available till 2013, hence the timeline of the study is until 2013. The panel logit model was run to study the presence/absence of conflict.

Dependent Variable: The paper analyses the occurrence of conflict defined by any battle-related death. The 'conflict occurrence' variable in this research is a bivariate index coded from the 'intensity' indicator of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)^{16,17}, where one and zero signify any battle-related deaths (presence of conflict) and no battle-related deaths (absence of conflict) respectively. The 'intensity' indicator in UCDP ranges from zero to two, where one signifies casualties between 25-999, and two represents full-scale rebellion with deaths greater than or equal to 1000 in a year. UCDP codes the protests and limited casualties (less than 25 deaths per year) as zero and makes small-scale conflicts beyond the ambit of analysis. However, this paper has bridged this gap by recoding the intensity indicator of UCDP. According to the UCDP codebook, variable 'start date' represents the date of the first battle-related death in the conflict and 'Startdate2' is when a given episode of conflict activity reached 25 battle-related deaths in a year. The battle deaths that are less than 25 (between 'start date' and 'startdate2'), are coded as one in our data to signify protests and limited casualties. Two describes riots and small-scale rebellions in which the number of casualties is between 25-999, and three represents full-scale rebellion with deaths greater than or equal to 1000. After creating the index ranging from zero to three, they were finally recoded into a bivariate index where one signifies any battle-related deaths or presence of conflict and zero signifies no battle-related deaths or absence of conflict.

Independent Variables: The Independent Variables are economic, lingual-cultural, and religious marginalisation respectively. The indicators are coded from Minorities at Risk (MAR) data¹⁸. We created the religious and lingual marginalisation index as the MAR data does not have a comprehensive index for group level religious and lingual marginalisation before 2004. The primary drivers of India's mass politics have been religion and caste on the one hand, and prices

¹⁴ Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rüeeggler, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin. 2015. "Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Dataset Family." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7):1327-1342.

¹⁵ Bormann, Nils-Christian, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Manuel Vogt. 2017. "[Language, Religion, and Ethnic Civil War](#)." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(4): 744-71.

¹⁶ Melander, Erik and Therése Pettersson & Lotta Themnér 2016. "Organised violence, 1989-2015." *Journal of Peace Research* 53(5).

¹⁷ Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand (2002) *Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset*. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5). Also see PRIO's webpage

¹⁸ Asal, Victor, Amy Pate and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 2008. *Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook Version 9/2008* online: <http://www.mar.umd.edu/data.asp>

and poverty on the other.¹⁹ Religion, language, and poverty have been the prime determinants of mass politics in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka as well. When politics in the subcontinent is itself a reflection of cross-cutting and reinforcing cleavages of religion, economy, and language, we can argue that marginalisation against groups based on these cleavages is in fact a combination of political discrimination with their respective cleavages of distinction. For instance, the animist and Christian Bodos are religiously and linguistically distinct from the dominant-plural Hindi speaking Hindus of India. Additionally, they have faced political discrimination ranging from passive neglect (one) to social exclusion (three) according to Minorities at Risk (MAR) data. Therefore, in this research, the measures of their religious and lingual marginalisation have been created as multiplicative indexes of respective distinctions and the levels of political discrimination.

The Religious Marginalisation variable is created as a multiplicative index of Religious Distinction and Political Discrimination indicators of MAR data. The ‘belief’ index (zero to two) in MAR represents religious distinctiveness of ethnic groups, in which zero determines same religion as the plurality group, one defines different sect within same religion as the plurality group, and two indicates a different religion than the plurality or majority ethnic group.²⁰ In this analysis, we have created a bivariate variable: groups that score one and two in MAR are recoded as one in this study, and other groups, which are not religiously distinct are coded as zero. The ‘poldis’ index ranges from zero to four in MAR, and we used the same scale to assess political discrimination of ethnic groups in this study. Thereby, a multiplicative index of political discrimination and religious distinction has been created for each unit of analysis – representing religious marginalisation.

The lingual-cultural marginalisation variable is created as a multiplicative index of lingual distinction and political discrimination indicators of MAR data. The lingual distinction is derived from the ‘language’ index of MAR data. Language, in MAR, determines different lingual-cultural groups of a country, ranging from zero to two. The value one signifies non-plural groups speaking multiple languages, at least one different from plurality group (Southern Sudanese in Sudan), and two defines non-plural groups speaking a different language from the plurality group language.²¹ Groups scoring both one and two are considered lingual-culturally distinct, as in the theory section I argued that language is a determinant of culture as well. The variable ‘lingual-cultural’ distinction is bivariate too, in which one indicates lingual-cultural distinction. Groups that score one and two in ‘language’ index are coded as one in our data. The ‘poldis’ index ranges from zero to four in MAR, and we used the same scale to assess political discrimination of ethnic groups in this study. Thereby, a multiplicative index of political discrimination and lingual distinction has been created for each unit of analysis – representing lingual-cultural marginalisation.

The third independent variable – ‘economic disadvantage’ is derived from ‘ECDIS’ index of MAR. This index ranges from zero to four, in which zero indicates no discrimination, one indicates neglect /remedial policies, two indicates neglect/no remedial policies, three indicates social

¹⁹ Varshney, A. (2019, February 28). The subject is national security. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved March 3, 2019, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-subject-is-national-security-india-pakistan-war-indian-military-pakistan-military-india-pakistan-conflict-lok-sabha-elections-5603796/>

²⁰ Asal, Victor, Amy Pate and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 2008. Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook Version 9/2008 online: <http://www.mar.umd.edu/data.asp>

²¹ Asal, Victor, Amy Pate and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 2008. Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook Version 9/2008 online: <http://www.mar.umd.edu/data.asp>

exclusion/neutral policy, and four indicates exclusion/repressive policy.²² We used this scale to study group level economic discrimination.

Four interaction variables with the three independent variables (religious, lingual-cultural, and economic marginalisation respectively) have been generated to test hypotheses four, five, six, and seven. These are the interactive terms derived from the combination of the individual variables mentioned above. The four interaction variables are

- LIN-REL (interaction of lingual-cultural marginalisation and religious marginalisation)
- LIN-ECO (interaction of lingual-cultural marginalisation and economic disadvantage)
- REL-ECO (interaction of religious marginalisation and economic disadvantage)
- LIN-REL-ECO (interaction of religious marginalisation, lingual cultural marginalisation, and economic disadvantage)

Control Variables

The research focuses on the underlying conditions of conflict, hence, controls the facilitating conditions. Regime type and group population are two of the many facilitating conditions²³ and are controlled in the statistical analysis. Polity score determines the regime type and the size index of ETH Ethnic Power Relations dataset determines population size.

It is often seen that larger groups are better able to mobilise, protest, and fight due to their numerical strength. Thus, the population ratio of various groups is an important factor of reference in ethnic and civil conflict. Hence, a size²⁴ variable of ETH is used in this paper. If a marginalised group is 10 per cent of the total population, the indicator codes it as 0.1, if a marginalised group is only 2 per cent of the population, then it is coded as 0.02 and so on.

Results and Analysis

Table one represents the descriptive statistics of the cleavages of marginalisation. In addition, table two reports the occurrence (presence/absence) of conflict defined by any battle-related death. The panel logit model has tested it.

(Table 1)

(Table 2)

²² Asal, Victor, Amy Pate and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 2008. Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook Version 9/2008 online: <http://www.mar.umd.edu/data.asp>

²³ Harff, Barbara, and Ted R. Gurr. 2004. *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*. Boulder, Colorado Westview Press.

²⁴ Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rügger, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin. 2015. "Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Dataset Family." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7):1327-1342.

Individual effects of the cleavages

Among the sample of groups analysed in this research, only Shia Muhajirs are affected by religious marginalisation alone. Table one indicates that religious marginalisation as a cleavage alone is associated with 78.12 per cent violent conflicts across the timeline of the research. From Table two we infer that religious marginalisation has a significant positive effect on the probability of occurrence of conflict, and the effect was consistent across different model specifications. This means as a single cleavage, religious marginalisation can instigate violence, or in other words groups affected by religious marginalisation alone are likely to engage in sporadic instances of violent conflicts. For example, the spewing violence in Karachi by the Muhajirs, who demand their own province is an uprising by a non-plural religious group against the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and has claimed many lives. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan mentioned that 490 people were killed in Karachi in ethnic and political killings in the first six months of 2011.

Cultural/lingual marginalisation alone has no effect on the occurrence of conflict. On the other hand, economic disadvantage alone is associated with 83.01 per cent violent conflicts across the spatial-temporal domain of the research (table 1) and has a significant positive effect on the probability of occurrence of conflict (table 2). These were consistent across different model specifications. Among the groups analysed in this research, nine have been subjected to economic marginalisation alone. For example, the Pashtuns (both Shias and Sunnis) of Pakistan have been economically marginalised for decades despite facing no religious or lingual marginalisation, and they have been involved in sporadic instances of violence with a conflict intensity of one (less than 25 deaths per year) and two (25-999 casualties per year). The Pashtun ethnic clashes have claimed many lives over the decades and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan remains violence-laden even till date. The Maoist rebellion in the central Indian jungles is also primarily based on economic inequality between the sharecropper tribal and the upper caste economically better off populace.

The Maoist rebellion in India began as an armed peasant revolt in 1967 at the Naxalbari block of Siliguri subdivision in Darjeeling district, West Bengal. The movement was organised in the lines of the protracted people's war to maintain the support of the population and draw the state forces deep into the countryside where the militia aimed to bleed them through a mix of mobile warfare and guerrilla warfare. Although the Naxalite movement in India apparently seems to be an ideologically motivated radical communist uprising by some members of Communist Party of India (Marxists), a closer look at the mobilised participants explicates the ethnic component of it and the effect of economic marginalisation. For organizing the sharecroppers and tribes in 1967, the communists created peasants' cells throughout the Siliguri subdivision in Darjeeling District. In March 1967, the sharecroppers mobilised under the peasants' cells started seizing lands from landlords (*jotedars*), who owned relatively extensive tracts of land. In contrast to the property owners or *jotedars*, who were upper caste members, the sharecroppers or *bargadars* belonged to lower castes and tribes and were land-less tillers.²⁵ Although the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 was abolished after the independence of India, the erstwhile landlords continued to enjoy the socio-economic privileges that sustained the existing horizontal inequality between the groups. The Naxalbari uprising was suppressed in July 1967 when paramilitary was deployed by the government. The CPI (M) expelled many of its members supporting the uprising who organised themselves into the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). CPI (ML) remained at the center

²⁵ Iqbal, I. (2010). *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, state and social change, 1840–1943*. Springer.

of the Naxalite movement till 1975, gathering enthusiastic urban youth support as well as expanding to various scheduled tribes of the east, southeast and central Indian jungles.

The conflict in its present form began in 2004 after the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoists) or CPI-Maoists. The ongoing conflict has taken place over a vast territory (around half of India's 29 states) with hundreds of people being killed annually in clashes between the CPI-Maoists and the government every year since 2005.²⁶ Presently the Naxalites control territories through Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Jharkhand and are supported by poorest of the rural population and many tribes of this region.²⁷ The Naxalites utilise the persisting issue of socioeconomic inequality between the dominant groups of India and the aboriginal tribes to organise evasive support among the *Adivasis* in central and eastern Indian jungles.²⁸

The key contributions of this paper, however, are not only the individual effects of the single cleavages but also their interaction effects. Often the cleavages intersect with each other, and this paper explains the interaction effects in the next section.

Interactive effects of the cleavages

Among the groups studied in this research, the combination of religious and economic marginalisation affects four groups while the cleavage of language cuts them across. These groups are Bengali Hindus of Bangladesh, Christians of Pakistan, Punjabi speaking Hindus of Pakistan, and Hindi speaking Christian and Animist scheduled tribes of India. Table one reports that the groups affected by the combination of religious and economic marginalisation are associated with 74.4 per cent violent conflicts across the period of our research. When these two cleavages intersect, it has a significant positive effect on the occurrence of conflict as well (table 2). In other words, the groups that are both religiously and economically marginalised, despite speaking the same language as the dominant ethnic group are prone to conflict.

The Hindi speaking non-Hindu scheduled tribes of India (Animists and Christians) have sporadically revolted against the union government in central Indian jungles under the banner of Naxalite movements, despite sharing a common language with the plural Hindi speaking population. These tribes have been religiously and economically discriminated since the 1950s and have engaged in limited sporadic violence during 1950s and early 1960s. The conflict intensity increased during the Maoist rebellion in the late 1960s and since 2005. The Maoist movement is often seen as an ideological and class struggle, but their targeted groups of mobilisations have always been various scheduled tribes of India who face various cleavages of marginalisation. This makes us argue that the ethnic dimension is an important conjecture in the Maoist movements. The findings indicate that the combination of religious and economic marginalisation has the potentiality to cause protests and violence, even if the lingual cleavage cuts across the groups. The statistical findings of this research also show that as the intensity of religious marginalisation

²⁶ Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand (2002) Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5). Also see PRIO's webpage

²⁷ Garda, I. (2011, October 21). India's Silent War. Retrieved November/December, 2018, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeracorrespondent/2011/10/20111019124251679523.html>

²⁸ Garda, I. (2011, October 21). India's Silent War. Retrieved November/December, 2018, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeracorrespondent/2011/10/20111019124251679523.html>

moves up from level one (neglect) to level four (repression), the chances of economic disadvantage positively affecting the probability of conflict gradually go up from 7.5 per cent to 10.5 per cent.

Table one reports that the combination of lingual and economic marginalisation affects eight ethnic groups, and the groups affected by this cleavage of marginalisation are associated with 67.07 per cent of violent conflicts across the period of the research. However, the empirical results (model 2 of table 2) finds no statistical significance of the combined effect of lingual and religious marginalisation on the occurrence of conflict when economic commonalities exist across the groups. Similarly, according to model three of table two, we find no significant evidence of the combined effect of lingual and economic marginalisation on conflict when they share a common religion.

Furthermore, we finally find that the likelihood of conflict is probable when all the cleavages of marginalisation reinforce. Among the groups analysed in this research, the reinforcing marginalisation of economy, religion, and language affects twenty ethnic groups. These groups have been subjected to three ways marginalisation often and have been associated with 62.55 per cent of violent conflicts across the period of our research (table 1). The empirical results in table two also suggests that the probability of conflict occurrence is high and significant when a group is totally distinct and marginalised (economically, culturally, and religiously) from the dominant group.

Conclusion

The paper aimed to analyse the underlying conditions of conflict – the causal effect of religious, economic, and lingual marginalisation. One of our argument was that studying these cleavages alone is not enough as many groups are often affected by more than one disadvantages at a time. Additionally, the existence of various reinforcing and cross-cutting cleavages within society even make it harder to manage these conflicts. After a thorough analysis of the politically active ethnic groups of the Indian subcontinent, this research finds that the reinforcing cleavages significantly increase the probability of conflict in this region. The combination of religious and economic marginalisation, and the overlapping cleavage of religious, economic, and lingual disadvantage increases the probability of conflict, and although statistically insignificant; lingual and religious marginalisation, and lingual and economic marginalisation has instigated more than 60 per cent of violent conflicts across their respective spatial-temporal domain. Although reinforcing cleavages do lead to the occurrence of conflict, we found that cross-cutting cleavages also increases the probability of conflict occurrence. If any group experiences only economic marginalisation, despite having religious and lingual similarity, it may be conflict-prone. This strengthens the argument that economic disadvantage is an ordering principle in certain sections of the world. The interactive effect of religious and economic marginalisation also has a significant impact on conflict occurrence, thus proving that these two cleavages of marginalisation are the ordering principles in the Indian subcontinent. In brief, our empirical findings support the concept of horizontal inequality, which indicates that grievances develop due to group level marginalisation and unbalanced economic development.

This paper analyses the necessary underlying conditions of conflict besieging the Indian subcontinent. However, the presence or absence of facilitating conditions has an effect on behavioural patterns of the ethnic groups, which future research should address. Secondly, future

research may also address the disputes about common resources between two equally marginalised ethnic groups. Discrimination and cleavages are the basic necessary conditions for occurrence of the conflict. However, some other associated factors like societal norms, regime type, government response, and the reaction of majority groups sets the context and triggers the conflict, and in turn, often intensifies it. My future research would explore those areas for a more cohesive understanding of the ethnic-civil conflict.

South Asia is a hotspot for economic development and global security in the twenty-first century. In recognition of the increasing connectivity of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the US Pacific Command has also been renamed to US Indo Pacific Command. If not an uninterrupted peace, at least a manageable governance is essential for such a region to thrive politically and economically. However, with every country besieged with the domestic and bilateral political charade, such tranquillity is a utopia. The 14 February 2019 Pulwama attack in Indian Kashmir by *Jaish-e-Mohammed* brought India and Pakistan, two nuclear powers and sworn enemies on the brink of an all-out war. This incident once again pointed out that the realist approach of perceiving issues of ethnic conflict through a prism of national security is unreal.

In his seminal work on nationalism, 'Imagined Communities', Benedict Anderson argued that the nation is 'an imagined political community'.²⁹ In this sense, the nation is a cultural construction because most members of a nation would probably never meet their fellow members but will retain the strongest emotion for their shared national membership.³⁰ In the subcontinent, the idea of 'state' has evolved much after the idea of group-specific nationalisms. The feeling of Telegu, Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali, Bodo, Mizo, Balochi, or Kashmiri nationalism dates to centuries while the 'states' of India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan are barely seven decades old, with Bangladesh being younger. Hence, it is essential to understand the inherent behavioural pattern of these ethnic groups through a constructivist prism in order to manage the conflicts, and to attain long-term stability.

This research has a group-specific focus and instead of a realist approach, undertakes a constructivist approach of analysing group level marginalisation. Thus, it adds value and makes it explicit that reinforcing cleavages of disadvantage increase conflict. Additionally, the paper suggests that socioeconomic equitability is necessary for long-term stability and states should prevent ethnic groups from becoming religiously and economically alienated.

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²⁹ Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books.

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Appendix

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Categories of Marginalisation (1947-2013)

	No Marginalisation	Religious Marginalisation	Linguacultural Marginalisation	Economic Disadvantage	REL--ECO	LIN--ECO	LIN--REL	LIN--REL--ECO
Category Percentage for Conflict Occurrence	10.31%	78.12%	NA	83.01%	74.4%	67.07%	60.52%	62.55%
Category Percentage for Low Intensity Conflict (Level 1) ³¹	7.8%	46.9%	NA	51.9%	67.4%	30.5%	18.4%	29%
Category Percentage for Mid Intensity Conflict (Level 2) ³²	1.92%	15.6%	NA	25.0%	6.0%	35.4%	42.1%	26.9%
Category Percentage for High Intensity Conflict (Level 3) ³³	0.56%	15.6%	NA	6.1%	0.9%	1.2%	0	6.6%
Groups	22	1	NA	9	4	8	2	20
Total Years	1251	32	NA	212	215	407	76	1055
No Conflict Years	1122	7	NA	36	55	134	30	395
Cumulative Number of years for Conflict Occurrence	129	25	NA	176	160	273	46	660

³¹ Recoding the Intensity indicator of UCDP Battle Deaths Data, Level 1 signifies 1-25 deaths (per years) in our study.

³² Recoding the Intensity indicator of UCDP Battle Deaths Data, Level 2 signifies 26-999 deaths (per years) in our study.

³³ Recoding the Intensity indicator of UCDP Battle Deaths Data, Level 3 signifies 1000+ deaths (per years) in our study.

Table 2: Conflict Occurrence – (0-1) (1947-2013)³⁴

	Panel Logit model with No interaction (1)	Panel Logit model with interaction between lingual- cultural and religious marginalisation (2)	Panel Logit model with interaction between lingual- culture and economic disadvantage (3)	Panel Logit model with interaction between religious marginalisation and economic disadvantage (4)	Panel Logit model with interaction between language-culture, religion and economic disadvantage (5)
Religious marginalisation	0.407* (2.35)	0.594** (2.97)		-1.194*** (-5.80)	0.180 (0.64)
Lingual Cultural marginalisation	-1.433*** (-7.77)	-0.920*** (-4.92)	-1.269*** (-6.32)		0.354 (0.85)
Economic disadvantage	1.482*** (9.34)		1.419*** (6.98)	0.773*** (4.53)	1.558*** (5.67)
LINREL Lingual-cultural and Religious marginalisation		0.068 (1.33)			
LINECO Lingual cultural and Economic marginalisation			0.0744 (0.98)		
RELECO Religious and economic marginalisation				0.229** (3.12)	
LINRELECO Religious, cultural, and economic marginalisation					0.209*** (4.61)
Size	-11.66*** (-3.69)	-12.67*** (-3.78)	-11.56*** (-3.80)	-12.65*** (-3.94)	-12.42*** (-3.84)
Polity score	0.013 (0.84)	0.0131 (0.87)	0.014 (0.94)	0.022 (1.48)	0.013 (0.86)

Notes: *N* = 3001. Standard errors in parentheses. *** is significant at .001. ** is significant at .01. * is significant at .05

³⁴ Effects of country dummy variables were tested in the models but have dropped them in the final table, as they did not show any significant effect. Their inclusion did not affect the results on the key variables.