

Nationalism and the Transformation of the State

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the recent conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East signal the return of geopolitics. This book challenges conventional approaches that ignore border change, arguing that geopolitics is driven by nationalism and focusing on how nationalism transforms the state. Using geocoded historical maps covering state borders and ethnic groups in Europe, the authors' spatial approach shows how, since the French Revolution, nationalism has caused increasing congruence between state and national borders and how a lack of congruence increased the risk of armed conflict. This macro process is traced from early modern Europe and widens the geographic scope to the entire world in the mid twentieth century. The analysis shows that the risk of conflict may be increased by how nationalists, seeking to revive past golden ages and restore their nations' prestige, respond to incongruent borders. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

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Nationalism and the Transformation of the State

*Border Change and Political Violence in the
Modern World*

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Preface

This book presents the findings of an ERC-funded project, which was funded by an Advanced ERC Grant “Nationalist State Transformation and Conflict (NASTAC).” Since the project started in November 2018 and until it officially ended in October 2024, we accumulated a major debt of gratitude to our supporters, collaborators, and colleagues, who have made this project possible.

This is very much a product of inspired teamwork within the International Conflict Research Group at ETH Zürich, to which all the authors belonged when the project started. In addition, postdoctoral fellow Guy Schvitz contributed as a co-author to the papers on which Chapters 4, 6, and 10 are based. All of the NASTAC project’s PhD students co-authored articles that were turned into chapters as well: Dennis Atzenhofer contributed in this capacity to Chapter 7, Paola Galano Toro was a co-author on the paper on which Chapter 4 is based, and Roberto Valli co-authored the paper that forms the basis of Chapter 9. In addition, Andreas Juon, Maria Murias Muñoz, Seraina Rüegger, and Yaron Weissberg offered valuable advice and coding support for the project. We are infinitely grateful for all these collaborators’ contributions, without which this project could not have been realized.

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Lars-Erik Cederman presented the core ideas of the book in a series of keynote talks, including the Border and Boundaries Conference at the University of Pennsylvania on April 28, 2022; the Conflict, Justice and Peace Platform at the London School of Economics and Political Science, March 21, 2023; the A. D. Smith Lecture at the University of Edinburgh, April 10, 2024; and the Network of European Peace Scientists Lecture in Dublin on June 12, 2024. We are indebted to the organizers for their kind invitations and feedback from the audience.

The book project has also profited from comments offered at numerous presentations of the papers that were turned into chapters of this book. In addition to annual conventions and conferences, these venues included the University of Barcelona, the University of Bern, the University of California at Berkeley and Irvine, University College London, the Juan March Institute at Carlos III University in Madrid, the University of Florence, Columbia University, the European University Institute in Florence, the University of Gothenburg, the Graduate Institute in Geneva, the University of Haifa, Harvard University, the Hertie School in Berlin, the University of Konstanz, the University of Lund, the University of Oslo, Oxford University, and Princeton University.

Joy Scharfstein played a central role in editing and improving our text. It has been a joy to work with Joy! We would also want to thank John Haslam, Carrie Parkinson, and their colleagues at Cambridge University Press for their unflinching support of this project.

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¹ Cederman 2024.

² Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2025.

³ Cederman et al. 2023.

journal⁴ for Chapter 8, and from the article “The Train Wrecks of Modernization: Railway Construction and Nationalist Mobilization in Europe” to be published in the *American Political Science Review*⁵ for Chapter 9. John Hopkins University Press granted us the right to reprint the article “Nationalism and the Puzzle of Reversing State Size” appearing in *World Politics*⁶ as Chapter 5. Finally, Sage Journals gave us the right to reuse material from the articles “Nationality Questions and War: How Ethnic Configurations Affect Conflict within and between States” and “‘Right-Peopling’ the State: Nationalism, Historical Legacies, and Ethnic Cleansing in Europe, 1885-2020,” both published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, as Chapters 7 and 10, respectively.⁷

⁴ Cederman, Pengl, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2024.

⁵ Pengl et al. 2025.

⁶ Cederman, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2023.

⁷ See Cederman, Pengl, Atzenhofer and Girardin 2024 and Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2024.

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, came as a shock to most observers despite the explicit revisionist claims made by President Vladimir Putin before the aggression.¹ Likewise, Hamas' murderous attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, stunned observers – including the Israeli government, which responded with massive violence and ethnic cleansing – and brought the Palestinian issue back to international attention. These events are far from the only major geopolitical upheavals that policymakers and scholars failed to anticipate. The collapse of the Soviet Union surprised not only Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev but also virtually all academic and policy experts. The words of John Lewis Gaddis, a leading historian who in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR commented on the profound sense of uncertainty in world politics, remain as valid today as they were in the early 1990s: “Surprise remains one of the few things one can count on, and very few princes have succeeded in avoiding it, however assiduous the efforts of their respective wizards, medicine men, counselors, advisers, and think tank consultants to ward it off.”²

Why these repeated surprises? Is it because world history is inherently chaotic, as Alan Bererchen writes,³ or are analysts and practitioners simply using the wrong conceptual map? Although much research indicates the latter, the point is not that wars of aggression or other geopolitical shocks can be accurately predicted – they cannot be forecast with any more precision than geologists can predict the exact timing and location of an earthquake.⁴ But we should expect that existing theories allow us to anticipate the very possibility of future events.

Most influential approaches to international politics fail to make sense of the “return of geopolitics” – the increased importance of power politics in recent years – that was ushered in by Russia's annexation

¹ Putin 2021, 2022. See also Stent 2022; Hill and Stent 2022.

² Gaddis 1992/1993, 5.

³ Beyerchen 1992/1993.

⁴ Tilly 1995; Cederman and Weidmann 2017.

of Crimea in 2014.⁵ Extending well beyond the example of Russia, other contemporary cases include the conflicting territorial claims of the Israelis and Palestinians;⁶ China's wish to reincorporate Taiwan; Serbia's neo-imperialist ambitions in the Balkans;⁷ and Turkey's Ottoman nostalgia, which has inspired territorial claims in neighboring countries.⁸

Crucially, these geopolitical developments do not merely raise the specter of large-scale political violence, although that is perhaps their most dangerous consequence. Most fundamentally, they also concern the stability of states' borders and even their very existence. Politicians on both sides of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict question the other side's right to statehood. Similarly, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its attempt to conquer and subjugate Ukraine constitute frontal attacks on the territorial integrity norm that outlaws land-grabbing wars.⁹ Even though this norm holds in most places, it has come under increasing pressure from revisionist nationalists, a tendency that has become even more acute since Donald Trump took over as US president in January 2025.¹⁰

To better confront these challenges, scholars and policymakers need to overcome the historical myopia that dominates current expert opinion. Rather than treating the return of geopolitics as a recent phenomenon characterizing the early twenty-first century, it should be seen as part of a macrohistorical process that created and transformed the modern state. Instead of treating states as stable, unchanging units, we need to understand their emergence, dissolution, and reshaping through border change because such historical transformations are at the heart of today's geopolitical challenges.¹¹ Thus, it may be more proper to talk of the return of *nationalist* geopolitics.

Adopting such a long-term perspective, scholars studying contemporary conflict and development have increasingly turned to the deep historical roots of state formation.¹² Serving as a starting point for much of this research, Charles Tilly's classic theory of state formation in Europe suggests that internal and external processes of institutional change interact with warfare. His famous formula, "war made the state

⁵ Mead 2014; Auer 2015; Trofimov 2020. Here, geopolitics is referred to in general terms as power politics rather than as a label for theories of geographic determinism, see Maier 2016, 135; and Nickel 2024.

⁶ Silberman 2013.

⁷ In 2020, Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin called for the creation of a "Serbian empire" in order to revive Dusan's medieval empire, see Vulin 2020.

⁸ Yavuz 2020. See also Trofimov 2020.

⁹ Zacher 2001; Hathaway and Shapiro 2017.

¹⁰ Simmons and Goemans 2021.

¹¹ Tilly 1995; Cederman 1997.

¹² See, e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Fukuyama 2014.

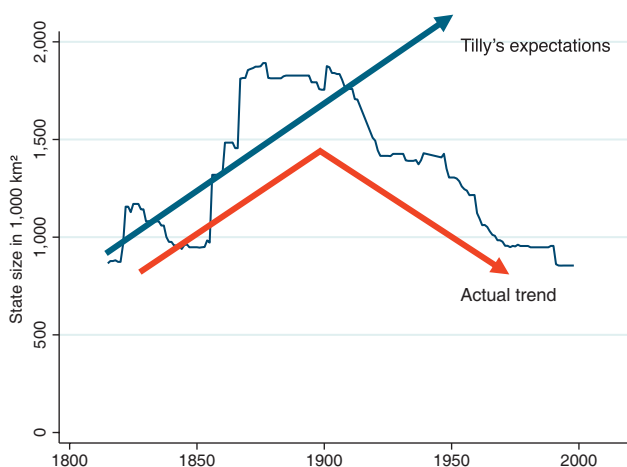


Figure I.1 Average territorial size of independent states.

Data from Lake and O'Mahony 2004.

and the state made war,” captures a Darwinian logic by which wars lead to the survival of ever larger and more powerful states.¹³

Yet history has shown that Tilly's logic does not extend to the twentieth century. Figure I.1 plots the average size of independent states in the international system since the beginning of the nineteenth century and shows that the average state size was halved over the course of the twentieth century.¹⁴ This trend is directly linked to the number of states. In 1816, after the Napoleonic Wars, there were about sixty states in Europe, many of which were small principalities and statelets in the central part of the continent. But even this multitude represents a massive reduction of politics compared to earlier centuries.¹⁵ And following the unification of Italy and Germany, at the outset of World War I in 1914, only about one-third of the states that existed 100 years earlier remained. This low point in the number of states was followed in the rest of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by a trend of imperial collapse and the rise of smaller successor states. This shift culminated in the late twentieth century with the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia, which

¹³ Tilly 1975, 42.

¹⁴ Here, we rely on global data that exclude colonial territories provided by Lake and O'Mahony 2004, 700–701, who adopt “a definition of sovereignty that focuses on recognition by other.” For our own analysis of state size in Chapter 5, we will use our own data, which are introduced in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Tilly 1990.

drastically fragmented the geopolitical map of Eastern Europe and further reduced average state size. In short, the earlier historical upward trend in state size turned dramatically downward in the first part of the twentieth century, ultimately reaching sizes in the post–Cold War period not seen since the early nineteenth century.

The global trend shown in Figure I.1 in many ways reflects the European experience – a decrease in state size followed by a steady increase in state numbers.¹⁶ Imperial conquest, which continued well into the twentieth century, was followed by decolonization, especially after World War II. In the postwar period, as the huge European colonial empires gave way to a multitude of much smaller independent states in Africa and Asia, the average scale of politics shrank significantly.

I.1 Nationalism and the Transformation of the State

In this book, we argue that nationalism increasingly caused the most momentous border change since 1789, a process that helps to explain contemporary geopolitical upheavals. As such, today's return of geopolitics can be best understood as part of a macrohistorical process that started with the French Revolution.

What revisionist politicians, such as the Russian, Palestinian, Chinese, and other leaders who challenge the current world order, have in common is that they are not only typical populist strongmen¹⁷ but also nationalists. Populists seek legitimacy directly from “the people” without interference from the rule of law or checks and balances.¹⁸ But the resurgence of geopolitics cannot be reduced to the unbridled, ruthless lust for power of particularly unscrupulous leaders. Rather, it constitutes a profound expression of ethnonationalist challenges to the current world order.

We seek to better understand the geopolitical challenges of the current century by analyzing how nationalism has influenced state formation and continues to transform the state. We do so by developing a theory of nationalist state transformation that we empirically test in a rigorous and systematic way. Beyond affecting a state's internal composition and institutional capacities, nationalism causes its external reshaping.¹⁹ Our theory focuses on the consequences of nationalism in terms of

¹⁶ Griffiths 2016.

¹⁷ Rachman 2021.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Müller 2016; Brubaker 2020.

¹⁹ Hintze 1975a.

macrolevel outcomes – border change and warfare – rather than explaining its emergence. This tack amounts to shifting the analytical focus away from nationalisms that “bark” to those that “bite.”²⁰

Our main argument is derived from Ernest Gellner’s classic definition of nationalism as a doctrine that requires congruence between the boundaries of states and nations.²¹ Contrasting the nation to the formal and territorial organization of the state, we follow Max Weber in defining the nation as “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own” and hence “tends to produce a state of its own.”²² Deviations from the congruence principle are likely to generate grievances and opportunities for key political actors, which in turn makes border change and conflict more likely. Seeking to rectify state-nation incongruence, nationalists generally attempt to change state borders either by enlarging the state’s territory or by splitting it up along ethnonationalist lines.²³ The result of such efforts to solve nationality questions is a gradual alignment of political and ethnonationalist boundaries, yielding governance units that increasingly approximate the nation-state ideal. This, we argue, provides a convincing answer to the puzzle of declining state size within and beyond Europe.

Importantly, efforts to overcome incongruence – seen by nationalists as a violation of the nationalist principle – have been a leading cause of both civil and interstate conflict since the French Revolution. While unification of ethnic kin previously residing in separate states into a new single state tends to be more peaceful, attempts to break away territory from states usually trigger violence as states staunchly defend their territorial integrity. As illustrated by Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and more recently its ongoing invasion of the remainder of Ukraine, irredentist situations that feature both integration and disintegration with ethnic settlements spilling over state boundaries are especially prone to civil or interstate war.

But incongruence viewed as a structural condition at a particular point in time is only part of the reason for geopolitical instability. Nationalist frustrations with diverging state and national borders tend to get more intense when contrasted with historical memories of happier times

²⁰ Beissinger 1998.

²¹ Gellner 1983, 1.

²² Weber 1946, 176. By conceptualizing the nation as a community, this definition of the nation is not objective, but based on subjective, often contested claims. Throughout this book, we will focus almost exclusively on ethnically defined nations since they are by far the most common and the most consequential nations in terms of border change and conflict. However, nations can also be nonethnically defined, See, e.g., Mylonas and Tudor 2023.

²³ As we will argue later, other possibilities include ethnic cleansing and assimilation.

characterized by a higher degree of congruence. Harking back to nineteenth century, Tsarist Russia, Putin's grievances following the collapse of the Soviet Union fall into this category and appear to at least in part motivate his desire to reintegrate Ukraine into Russia.²⁴ Likewise, Israeli and Palestinian nationalists invoke competing golden ages, dating back thousands of years in the former case and referring to a period before Israel's occupation in the latter.²⁵ China's desire to reunify the mainland with Taiwan is another example of this logic. Beijing views the island's reincorporation as a necessary step in its struggle to overcome the humiliating past of Western colonial domination. Such restorative nationalism seeks to regain state-nation congruence by reversing perceived injustices caused by foreign domination and division.²⁶

Our focus on historical dynamics extends to reactive nationalism, which signifies nationalist mobilization against the state's penetration into, and modernization of, its entire territory.²⁷ In and of themselves, structural conditions, such as incongruence, say little about the timing of border change and conflict. But technological developments, such as the railroad and the telegraph, influenced the timetables of nationalism.²⁸ And, while states in Western and Northern Europe mostly managed to successfully assimilate their populations after the French Revolution, further east, imperial elites' attempts to integrate their multiethnic populations often triggered backlash and revolt, the legacies of which continue to haunt the region.²⁹ The centrifugal forces unleashed by these secessionist waves offer the most powerful explanation for growth in the number of states in Europe and the rest of the world. Furthermore, the quest for congruence indicates where the risk of border instability and conflict is likely to occur in the future.

But a focus on states and their borders does not suffice to capture the congruence principle of nationalism because ethnic boundaries are as geopolitically consequential as state borders. While state-nation congruence results from border change, states' policies of assimilation and

²⁴ Putin's imperialist claims seek control over the whole of Ukraine and not merely the ethnically Russian population. This project potentially goes beyond strict ethnonationalist congruence but conforms with what we will refer to as dominant nationalism.

²⁵ Silberman 2013.

²⁶ Sometimes backward-projected, restorative claims go beyond current settlement patterns because they refer to past areas from which the group was evicted, thus overshooting state-nation congruence. Furthermore, particularly expansionist strands of imperialist nationalism also explicitly violate congruence by insisting on evicting other groups through ethnic cleansing. In Chapter 11, we will return to these cases under the heading of majority nationalism.

²⁷ Hechter 2000.

²⁸ Maier 2016.

²⁹ See, e.g., Alter 1989; Roshwald 2015.

ethnic cleansing contribute to the alignment of ethnic boundaries with state borders. Based on European data, our analysis reveals that fear of territorial losses motivated state leaders to engage in preemptive ethnic cleansing.

If state-nation incongruence increases the risk of civil and interstate conflict and sometimes motivates ethnic cleansing, it would be tempting to conclude that peace would follow if nationalists were given what they want. Indeed, the partitioning of multiethnic states along ethnic lines has often been proposed as a method of conflict resolution, and in theory, nationality questions could be addressed in this manner. But border change is not necessarily the only – or best – way to pacify ethnonationalist conflict. Rather, ethnopolitical compromise based on power sharing may remove ethno-political domination without the destabilizing side effects of border change, such as stranded revisionist losers and interstate disputes between newly partitioned successor states. Although there may be some cases in which partition is the only resolution – an Israeli–Palestinian two-state solution being a possible example – in most cases power sharing offers a robust and reliable path to peace.

I.2 Obstacles to Understanding the Subversive Force of Nationalism

Skeptics can be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing new or particularly surprising about these theoretical claims. But despite the intuitive appeal of these claims, disruptive geopolitical events, such as border change and conflict, surprise leading analysts and observers over and over again. This surprise is rooted in the continuing neglect of the dangerous consequences of nationalism. Ever since the French Revolution in 1789, nationalist upheavals have had the habit of shocking scholars and politicians alike. For example, despite increasing nationalist tension sweeping through the Habsburg Empire in 1848, Prince Klemens von Metternich ignored the signs and was promptly forced to resign.³⁰ Famous for his dismissive quip that rather than being a nation, “Italy is merely a geographical expression,” Metternich had been the leading architect of the restored state system that was designed to resist nationalism across the continent following the Napoleonic upheavals. After the great statesman’s resignation, there was little that could halt the surge of nationalism that ultimately put an end to the European land empires and set Europe on a path toward geopolitical chaos that produced two world wars.

³⁰ Taylor 1948, 61.

In analyses of contemporary world politics, most experts seem to have learned little from Metternich's complacency. Liberal analysts and intellectuals have been particularly slow to grasp the gradual shift from globalization to nationalist geopolitics and instead put their faith in optimistic scenarios of a peaceful and integrated world.³¹ From this welfare-oriented and borderless perspective, Putin's assault on Ukraine appears irrational and truly puzzling.³² After the end of the Cold War, liberals anticipated that democratization would spread into Eastern Europe, even reaching Russia. Their general response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been to frame it as a battle between authoritarian and democratic rule.³³ And although liberal scholars have been right in their hope that the Western-dominated world order would secure peace among the world's leading powers and reduce ethnonationalist conflict in particular,³⁴ this order has now come under pressure from liberalism's internal and external enemies.³⁵

For their part, realist scholars – Metternich's intellectual heirs – often criticize liberals for being hopelessly naive about the power realities of world politics.³⁶ Some even accuse them of undermining the stability of the international system, for instance by provoking Russia through NATO's expansion.³⁷ Although realists are keen analysts of geopolitics, they tend to underestimate the subversive influence of nationalism because they view it as a force strengthening, rather than weakening, states' power within given borders.³⁸ Convinced that Putin would carefully maximize Russian security by prioritizing defensive measures, most realists expected Russia to refrain from moves beyond the annexation of Crimea.³⁹ It would seem that the main reason for the realists' underestimation of this type of revisionism is their blind spot regarding the power of ideology and nationalism's subversive, border-altering sway.⁴⁰ Putin is clearly concerned not only about NATO's expansion but also about

³¹ See, e.g., Fukuyama 1992; Ohmae 1990; Held 1995; Beck 2000. To some extent, this intellectual belief in the nation-state's obsolescence relates to "Western academics' own facility at escaping the bounds of the nation via international travel, research, and conferences," as argued by Roshwald 2022, 320–321.

³² For instance, the prominent energy historian Daniel Yergin has labeled Putin's action "irrational," Hogg 2022. See also Berman 2022.

³³ See Branko Milanovic's 2022 critique of liberal assessments of the war in Ukraine. See also Erlanger 2022.

³⁴ Gurr 2000a; Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017.

³⁵ Recent statistical investigations, such as Braumoeller 2019, cast doubts on whether political violence has declined more generally as claimed by Pinker 2011.

³⁶ See, e.g., Carr 1939.

³⁷ Mearsheimer 2014, 2018.

³⁸ See, e.g., Clausewitz 1984; Posen 1993a.

³⁹ Douthat 2022.

⁴⁰ Cederman 1997.

restoration of Russia's imperial grandeur.⁴¹ Because of their theoretical tunnel vision, today's realists risk being as surprised by current events as were their realist predecessors in 1848.

Given the lack of appreciation for nationalism in liberal and realist perspectives, it is natural to turn to the literature that specializes in nationalism. Offering an invaluable conceptual and historical background for our analysis, this literature proposes sweeping accounts of how nationalist politics transformed the modern world, but most of it fails to realize nationalism's full geopolitical impact. We argue that the literature on nationalism offers only limited guidance in the analysis of the roots of geopolitical instability for four main reasons.

First, the prevailing nonspatial theorizing in nationalism studies fails to treat nationalism as the inherently territorial phenomenon it is.⁴² This conceptual oversight makes it difficult to grasp the subversive power of nationalism vis-à-vis geopolitics. Although Gellner defines nationalism as a doctrine that requires congruence between political and ethnonational borders,⁴³ the link between violations of this principle and mass-based political behavior and macrolevel outcomes, such as armed conflict or border change, remains abstract and nonspatial in most of the literature.

Second, methodological statism – the tendency to treat the state as a natural, unexplained entity – further obscures processes of border change.⁴⁴ Subscribing to strongly constructivist principles, most studies of nationalism treat ethnic groups as caged inside fixed state borders and, as such, prioritize agency of the state over that of nonstate actors like ethnic nations.⁴⁵ In this view, governments are able to manipulate national identities within given state borders to reinforce their own power and maximize their chances of survival. Yet methodological statism of this kind obscures the limits and competition states face in shaping political identities as well as the fact that nationalist border change through secession and irredentism may end up shaping states in the image of nations.

Third, ahistorical modernism usually accompanies strongly constructivist stances. If state leaders are able to manipulate the ethnic map at their will, it follows that they are able to do so free from the ballast of the past while inventing fanciful, mythical justifications for their

⁴¹ Stent 2022.

⁴² Anderson 1988.

⁴³ Gellner 1983, 1.

⁴⁴ In Chapter 1, we will explain how this concept differs from the better-known and more general notion of methodological nationalism.

⁴⁵ Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990.

social engineering.⁴⁶ Ahistorical modernism insists on the irrelevance of nations' premodern or recent pasts and views empires in an era of nationalism as obsolete.⁴⁷ Yet nationalist narratives can be particularly destabilizing when they rely on historical facts that are framed and distorted to serve contemporary goals.

Fourth, scholarship on nationalism continues to be haunted by incomplete empirical validation. The nationalism literature proposes either sweeping historical explanations⁴⁸ or more selective validation based on qualitative country-based accounts of nationalist identity formation.⁴⁹ There are several, more recent extensions to the latter category,⁵⁰ but with few exceptions,⁵¹ such studies are usually limited to a single case, which leaves a considerable gap between the theoretical literature's claim to generalizability and the availability of systematic empirical evidence.

I.3 Overcoming the Obstacles to Understanding Nationalist State Transformation

In response to each of the weaknesses that characterize much of the nationalism literature, our approach to nationalist state formation rests on four principles, the first three being theoretical and the final one empirical.

The first priority is to represent state-nation congruence spatially by conceiving of states and nations in explicitly territorial terms, including their territorial boundaries. Overlaying these boundaries yields group segments nested inside states, which constitute the main sites of agency. Incongruence in terms of alien rule or ethnic division increases the probability of corrective action bringing about border change or conflict.

To overcome methodological statism, the second priority is to analyze how nationalism reshapes states through border-changing processes, rather than just freezing state borders. Assuming most ethnic groups to be relatively stable, long-lasting structures, our analysis demonstrates how changes in state borders are at least as important as, if not more important than, internal ethnic adjustments. Extending this analysis beyond Europe, we propose an integrated conceptualization of these processes, including secession, unification, and irredentism. This analytical sequence requires ethnically defined nations to be powerful enough

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

⁴⁷ Gellner 1983, 1996.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Brubaker 1992; Greenfeld 1992; Weber 1976; Colley 1992.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Beissinger 2002; Cermeño, Enflo and Lindvall 2022.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Wimmer 2013, 2018.

to resist states' attempts to influence identification within their territories or to alter their outer boundaries.

Third, to counter ahistorical modernism, we extend the spatial focus with explicit historical theorizing, which allows us to assess the consequences of restorative and reactive nationalism. A nation's putative ethnic roots play an important role in its self-definition. Rather than focusing on debunking historical myths and distortions, our priority is to identify how nationalist grievances are formulated as perceived violations of the nationalist principle in relation to past golden ages. We find that this restorative logic relies on a three-step narrative that starts with a golden age that is subsequently interrupted through conquest or some other trauma and followed by a populist appeal to restore the nation's glory. A spatiotemporal perspective also allows us to examine reactive nationalism. Whereas naïve modernization theories expect assimilating states to prevail, we follow the lead of more subtle modernist approaches that consider the possibility of backlash against the state's penetration of ethnically distinct peripheries.

Fourth, in contrast to the empirically incomplete coverage of the conventional literature, we analyze spatiotemporal data systematically, covering large areas and long time periods in a detailed manner. Specifically, such data resources allow us to conduct macrolevel analysis at the European and global levels rather than merely focus on specific countries or groups. Our approach is to digitize a number of historical maps depicting state borders and ethnic groups' settlement areas. The temporally open-ended nature of historical change assumed by these data circumvents the need to conceive of the nation-state as a teleological endpoint in history. Our methodological approach is mostly statistical, but ample case illustrations complement the analysis throughout the book. We have made an effort to protect the reader from excessive methodological detail. Thus, the empirical chapters convey the nontechnical intuition of our arguments and findings. A series of corresponding supplementary chapters, labeled S4–S10, provide all the information needed for empirical replication, including data descriptions and research designs.

I.4 Some Prefatory Considerations

Before turning to a summary of the book's structure, some clarification is warranted. First, because this book aims to study the consequences of nationalism rather than its causes, it is necessary to dissect rather than dismiss nationalist arguments.⁵² Doing so means that we make

⁵² Levinger and Lytle 2001.

ethnonationalist assumptions for analytical purposes, including adopting an approach that presupposes nations' boundedness and their spatial extension as well as the historical stability of their ethnic cores, whether such assumptions are factually correct or not. Since nationalists take crucial geopolitical decisions based on such assumptions, we cannot ignore their motivations. Failure to engage with the nationalist worldview by dismissing it as flawed or dangerous would deprive us of the data needed to anticipate trouble. But such engagement has to be balanced against the risks inherent in such analysis because as it could lead to a blurring of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "categories of analysis" and "categories of practice."⁵³ We strive to prevent such blurring, but there is always a residual risk that the mere use of a concept could affect political reality.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we think that the alternative of not taking nationalists seriously incurs larger risks. Indeed, our analytical use of ethnonationalist concepts and claims by no means implies that we endorse them. Our objectives highlight the need to understand nationalism to find peaceful solutions based on compromise and pragmatic solutions. Although our analysis shows that state-nation incongruence is an important driver of both civil and interstate conflict, it does not imply that responding to nationality questions through border change is the best way to prevent or reduce violence. On the contrary, our research shows empirically that sharing power within fixed borders often offers a more promising approach to conflict resolution.⁵⁵

Second, we are not trying to knock down constructivist and modernist straw men. This book makes a contribution to such theorizing. But both paradigms are broad tents, and our concerns relate to a tendency to adopt extreme positions of either that lead to unreflective accusations of primordialism or worse. Just because nations are constructed, and in many cases quite fluid in specific periods and places, it does not mean that one should extrapolate from successful melting pots within the United States or elsewhere to other settings.⁵⁶ Likewise, radically modernist claims that the world after the French Revolution constituted a tabula rasa unconstrained by deep ethnic roots are clearly overstated.⁵⁷ Nor does it imply, as some have argued, that virtually all nations require an ethnic core to be successful.⁵⁸ Since our main aim is to study the consequences of nationalism, we are less interested in the degree to

⁵³ Bourdieu 1991.

⁵⁴ Brubaker 2004, 31–33.

⁵⁵ Cederman, Girardin, Muñoz, Valli and Wucherpfennig 2024, Partition, Power Sharing and Peace: A Spatial Analysis.

⁵⁶ Connor 1994.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Gellner 1996.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Smith 1986.

which nationalist claims are based on objective historical facts but rather focus on whether nationalist claims that use available historical reference points are more effective in violent mobilization than those that rely almost entirely on fabrication and distortion.

Third, some may find our approach Eurocentric, and this for good reason. Our book focuses on Europe because nationalist ideology originally emerged there.⁵⁹ Still, beginning in the nineteenth century, nationalism continued to spread and evolve beyond Europe, exerting a revolutionary influence on the course of world history. Because nationalism exhibits a high degree of path dependence, any analysis of its consequences and diffusion beyond Europe must pay attention to its early development within the old continent. But this doesn't mean that one should extrapolate from its impact on European politics to the entire globe or ignore how the development of non-European nationalism has influenced nationalist ideology in Europe and beyond. That would be careless. Wherever possible, we attempt to extend our analysis to non-European parts of the world, but data challenges and scope limitations mean that much of this exciting agenda has to be left to future research.

I.5 A Brief Preview of the Book's Structure

Having introduced the main principles underpinning our approach, we preview the book's structure, which links the theoretical argument to a series of empirical analyses. Detailed synopses, including schemes that position each chapter within the overall theoretical framework, can be found at the beginning of each of the book's four parts. Part I reviews the previous literature (Chapter 1) and introduces our theory of nationalist state transformation (Chapter 2) and our empirical approach (Chapter 3).

Part II presents the empirical analyses that illustrate how states' borders have evolved from around 1500 CE through the current decade. Chapter 4 traces the development of states in early modern Europe. In it, we rely heavily on Tilly's of how war and state formation interacted in a dynamic process that reduced the number of states in Europe through persistent warfare.⁶⁰ Extending Tilly's perspective, Chapter 5 addresses the puzzle of why the average size of states started to shrink around the end of the nineteenth century in Europe and worldwide. We argue that nationalism triggered a set of specific border-change processes, including

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson's [1983] 1991 attempts to relocate its origins to creole pioneers in eighteenth-century Latin America have been largely dismissed, see, e.g. Centeno 2002; Doyle and Pamplona 2006.

⁶⁰ Tilly 1990.

secession, unification, and irredentism. Going beyond the focus on state size, Chapter 6 endogenizes states' shapes at the systemic level to trace the convergence of states and nations while controlling for other influences on borders.

Part III shifts from border change to patterns of armed conflict as the main outcome of interest. Chapter 7 takes a first step toward a systematic impact analysis by linking specific violations of Gellner's congruence principle, such as foreign rule and ethnic division, to conflict both within and between European states since 1816 and worldwide from 1946. Adding temporal depth, Chapter 8 evaluates the influence of past historical configurations, such as lost home rule or lost unity, on nationalist claim-making and conflict in post-Napoleonic Europe. Moving beyond mere structural analysis of configurations, Chapter 9 uses railroad maps to shed light on the link between modernization and the timing of reactive nationalist mobilization and conflict. As a complement to the previous chapters, Chapter 10 reverses the causal priority between nations and states by analyzing how governments employ ethnic cleansing and other types of one-sided violence to reduce the risk of nationalist conflict.

Last, Chapter 11 in Part IV summarizes the findings of the book and draws conclusions for future research and policy development.

You will find interactive visualizations for some of the chapters as well as complete replication materials in the online resources of the book available at <https://nastac.ethz.ch/>.

Part I

Setting the Analytical Stage

Consisting of three chapters, Part I reviews the literature, outlines the main theories and concepts, and introduces the main data used throughout the book.

Chapter 1 takes stock of, and criticizes, the literature on nationalism, devoting a section to each of the four gaps that were briefly discussed in the introduction. Readers less interested in the theoretical debates concerning nationalism can skip directly to Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 introduces the main theoretical framework as well as the core concepts supporting the empirical analyses. It starts by outlining our response to the four weaknesses of the nationalism literature, followed by a depiction of the causal scheme that constitutes the analytical core of the book. The chapter also discusses key causal mechanisms supporting this framework before turning to alternative explanations and extensions to the scheme.

Based on the theoretical and conceptual ideas introduced in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 prepares the ground for the empirical analysis contained in the rest of the book. The chapter opens with a motivation of our spatial, map-based approach while accounting for how ethnic groups are used as potential ethnic nations. The account includes detailed information on the data used to operationalize ethnic and state borders. This information allows us to define ethnonationalist segments that serve as the main units of analysis in most of the empirical chapters. The chapter ends with descriptive statistics on the convergence between ethnic and state borders in Europe, highlighting the extent to which ethnic groups adjusted to states and vice versa.

1 Nationalism and the State in the Literature*

In this chapter, we take stock of previous attempts to explain the return to geopolitics that occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century and their theoretical foundations. Following the discussion of the main explanatory paradigms offered in the introduction, we concentrate here on a more detailed critique of the nationalism literature, highlighting the four research gaps that we have identified: nonspatial theorizing, methodological statism, ahistorical modernism, and incomplete empirical validation.

Before we begin discussing mainstream theorizing of nationalism, we note that important research traditions cover state development and border change and their relationship to conflict. Pioneered by Tilly's seminal writings on war and state formation,¹ a rich literature on the state has emerged that has contemporary relevance for issues relating to state capacity and stability.² But the general reluctance of scholarship on conflict and state formation to study ideology explicitly has obscured the full transformative power of nationalism.³

Based on similar reasoning, realists often fall into the same trap. Unable to fully integrate nationalist politics into their theoretical framework, they typically write it off as irrational hypernationalism⁴ or conceive of it as a mobilizing resource within fixed state borders⁵ and an obstacle to liberal interventionist attempts to export democracy.⁶ The latter criticism comes into particularly clear focus in the case of Russia's interventions in Ukraine since 2014, which Mearsheimer views as entirely predictable and justified reactions to NATO's eastward

* This chapter draws on material from the article "Nationalism and the Transformation of the State" in *Nations and Nationalism*. Cederman 2024.

¹ Tilly 1985, 1990.

² See, e.g., Herbst 2000; Centeno 2002; Hui 2005; Thies 2005.

³ Stuurman 1995; Brubaker 2010.

⁴ Van Evera 1994.

⁵ Posen 1993a.

⁶ Mearsheimer 2018.

expansion in the early 2000s.⁷ But realists fail to realize that nationalist politics often frustrates the smooth operation of the balance of power, especially by changing borders and transforming the state. For instance, nationalism's emergence in the nineteenth century destabilized the European state system, especially through the unification of Germany and the weakening of the multiethnic empires. More recently, unaware that nationalism weakens not only liberalism but also realism, Mearsheimer's⁸ understanding for Russian counterbalancing against the West in Ukraine treats Ukrainians as pawns in a prenationalist era.⁹ Apart from its general insensitivity to the power of emotions and norms in world politics, realism's exclusive focus on the state distracts it from the geopolitical challenges that have continued to disrupt the state system since the French Revolution, with respect to a fundamental change in actor types, which Robert Gilpin labels "systems change."¹⁰ In particular, realists overlook that the nation, along with the state, represents agency in their own right and that no theory of modern conflict can be fully developed without tracing the explicit interactions between states and nations.¹¹ These theoretical weaknesses go a long way toward explaining why John Mearsheimer and his realist colleagues failed to grasp the full scale of Putin's geopolitical ambitions with respect to Ukraine in 2022 and why, unless they integrate nationalism into their theorizing, realists will continue to be surprised by the future consequences of nationalism.¹²

The literature on nationalism offers an explicit account of how nationalism transformed the modern world. The literature's vastness and conceptual maturity may give the impression that very little remains to be said about nationalist politics and its consequences. Indeed, to this date, the seminal contributions of Gellner and Benedict Anderson and of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger,¹³ all first published in *annus mirabilis* 1983, still define the theoretical gold standard. Reviewing the

⁷ Mearsheimer 2014, 2018.

⁸ Mearsheimer 2018.

⁹ In an unpublished paper that refers to nationalism and realism as "kissing cousins," John Mearsheimer 2011 argues that while nationalism and realism share many similarities, the former remains a foreign body in realist theory. The essay correctly identifies border-change processes as major effects of nationalism but fails to draw any profound conclusions for realist theorizing.

¹⁰ Gilpin 1981. Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011 introduce "nationalist systems change" as a special case.

¹¹ Cederman 1997.

¹² A related, popular literature, including Marshall 2015, argues that we are "prisoners of geography," but these publications make deterministic assumptions about geographic determinants that have been rejected by most academic geographers because they downplay human agency and institutional factors.

¹³ Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

contemporary literature on nationalism and populism, Rogers Brubaker claims that “the big historical questions – and the major answers to those questions – had been staked out already by an earlier generation of maverick intellectuals.”¹⁴ Similarly, Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor see little need to question the current theoretical consensus based on the classic contributions from the 1980s.¹⁵

This scholarly reverence uncritically accepts key assumptions that obscure the full destabilizing power of nationalism, in particular its disruptive geopolitical impact on state borders and conflict. In fact, the sizable body of scholarship on nationalism has relatively little to say about its consequences.¹⁶ This neglect applies in particular to the sources of geopolitical instability that have arisen since the French Revolution and continue to disrupt the world. As we suggested in the introduction, there are at least four reasons for this explanatory deficit.

First, most studies in this area generally fail to appreciate the extent to which nationalism is an inherently territorial phenomenon, which makes it difficult to properly conceptualize states’ and nations’ external shapes and conflict behavior relating to territory. Second, by focusing mostly on how states form nations rather than the other way around, which we refer to as methodological statism, most current research cannot account for how nationalist mobilization transforms the state – including its external borders. Third, much of the nationalism literature is dominated by radically modernist interpretations that dismiss historical legacies as irrelevant to modern nationalist politics, although these inheritances figure prominently in nationalist politicians’ claim-making. Fourth, while theorists of nationalism propose broad and sweeping arguments about macro change and countless studies analyze specific cases of nationalism, systematic empirical macro analysis still lags far behind scholars’ theoretical ambition. Thus, a complete understanding of how nationalism has transformed – and is still transforming – state borders and conflict patterns requires that all four research gaps be addressed. We discuss each one in turn.

1.1 Nonspatial Theorizing

The literature’s inability to fully account for the subversive power of nationalism derives from its failure to treat nationalism as an inherently territorial phenomenon.¹⁷ It is true that Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as a doctrine that requires congruence between political and cultural

¹⁴ Brubaker 2020, 48.

¹⁵ Mylonas and Tudor 2021. See also Storm 2018.

¹⁶ Vom Hau et al. 2023.

¹⁷ According to Sack’s 1986, 19, classic definition, human territoriality stands for “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena,

borders and argues that deviation from this ideal is likely to cause tension.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he and most other leading scholars of nationalism do not follow up these crucial insights with a systematic account of how specific geographic configurations can be linked to mass-based political behavior like large-scale conflict.¹⁹

In a pioneering study, James Anderson, a geographer, observes that a crucial aspect of nationalism, “which is often under-emphasised if not ignored is nationalism’s relationship to territory, and this, together with the related territoriality of the state, provides perhaps the most promising approach to constructing a general theoretical framework.”²⁰ Still, his invitation to theorize along these lines has been ignored by virtually all scholars of nationalism. More than two decades after Anderson, Alexander Murphy, another leading geographer, concludes that while some progress has been made to contextualize nationalism historically, the literature has still failed to conceptualize nations as inherently territorial:

Yet the endeavour to place states and nations in historical context has not been matched by an equal effort to place them in geographical context. As such, states and nations continue to be thought of primarily as institutional, rather than territorial, constructs.²¹

George White, also a geographer, explains why these oversights have serious implications for scholars’ assessment of nationalism’s disruptive repercussions:

What has been lacking in studies on nationalism is the strong recognition that nations derive their identities to a large degree from particular places and territories, and that control of these is often essential to maintaining a healthy sense of national identity. Failure to give full recognition to this aspect of nationhood has prevented a thorough understanding of the nature of many territorial conflicts.²²

One of the main reasons for nationalism scholars’ lack of attention to territoriality relates to how geographic ideas became politically tainted during the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, the work of prominent geographers, such as Friedrich Ratzel and Halford Mackinder, was used to justify European colonialism around the world. Most notoriously, this colonizing spirit served as an inspiration for Karl Haushofer’s school of *Geopolitik* and for other German geographers, who legitimized the Nazi quest for *Lebensraum* (living space) in Eastern

and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.” With respect to nationalism, see also Knight 1982.

¹⁸ Gellner 1983, 1.

¹⁹ For rare exceptions, see Weiner 1971; Miller 2007.

²⁰ Anderson 1988, 19.

²¹ Murphy 2002, 208. See also Kaiser 1994.

²² White 2004, 16.

Europe.²³ While national identity appears in some post-structuralist work on critical geopolitics in the 1990s, “the geographical contribution to studies of nationalism has been remarkably limited. This has left the field largely to sociologists and political scientists whose perspective, quite understandably, has not been primarily spatial or territorial.”²⁴

What is missing is a sustained analysis of nationalism as an explicitly spatial process that goes beyond its status as an abstract institutional principle. In fact, states and nations are inherently territorial entities, in terms of both their spatial boundedness and their social control. Following Max Weber’s classic definition, sovereignty entails that the modern state exercises unrivaled authority within its clearly demarcated territory.²⁵ In contrast to ethnic groups, nations, which Weber conceptualizes as culturally defined communities that possess or aspire to statehood,²⁶ are also constituted by their territory. Without an explicitly territorial approach to states or nations, Gellner’s congruence principle remains abstract and difficult to turn into an empirically meaningful theory.

More recently, students of conflict have produced work that draws explicitly on maps and geographic information systems, but this scholarship mostly analyzes ethnicity rather than nationalism. For instance, Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou find that groups that are divided by state borders are also more likely to experience civil conflict.²⁷ Along similar lines, Henk Goemans and Kenneth Schultz show that in sub-Saharan Africa, borders that divide ethnic groups are more likely to become disputed, provided the partitioned groups are in power on one side of the border and marginalized on the other.²⁸ Others turn their attention to the microlevel, including Songyin Fang and Xiaojun Li²⁹ and Andi Zhou and colleagues, who conduct survey experiments on historical ownership of territory and the framing of it for territorial claims.³⁰

Despite these scholarly advances, macrolevel research focusing on the territorial aspects of nationalism remains rare. Among the few exceptions, Nadav Shelef’s analysis of homelands is notable because it conceptualizes and measures crucial nationalist phenomena with the help of map material and in-depth case studies while establishing a

²³ Penrose 2002, 289–290.

²⁴ Penrose 2002, 290.

²⁵ Weber 1978.

²⁶ Weber 1978, 385–398.

²⁷ Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016.

²⁸ Goemans, Schultz et al. 2017.

²⁹ Fang and Li 2019.

³⁰ Zhou et al. 2025.

statistical link to conflict behavior at the macrolevel.³¹ Following Shelef's pioneering work, we aim to provide an even more comprehensive view of nationalism's transformation of borders and mass behavior.

1.2 Methodological Statism

Whether recognizing the territorial nature of nationalist ideology or not, virtually all scholars of nationalism accept Gellner's congruence principle. There are two main paths to nation-state convergence: Either national identities are brought in line with states through a process of right-peopling or states themselves adjust to their respective nations in a process of right-sizing.³² The strongly constructivist tenor of the contemporary literature privileges right-peopling over right-sizing because it views ethnic and nationalist identities as quite flexible and amenable to being manipulated by state leaders.

The dominance of constructivist theorizing in the literature on nationalism can be traced back to the early 1980s.³³ With the laudable goal of demystifying nationalism, the classic contributions from 1983 referred to in the introduction regard nations as socially constructed, modern artifacts that emerged in the late eighteenth century rather than materializing as natural, primordial structures.³⁴ Given the excesses of exclusive nationalism that culminated in the horrors of World War II, this is an important contribution. But the particular historical context of that war has led to a tendency among European and US intellectuals to characterize nationalist politics as inherently nefarious and driven by self-serving illiberal elites' attempts to manipulate their populations.³⁵ Should they be successful in the endeavor, these nationalist and populist politicians threaten the very foundations of multicultural cohabitation and social peace.

Although there is no reason to question the basic insight that all nations are constructed, the academic consensus has in many cases turned into stale orthodoxy. Its conception of the state resembles a lava lamp containing squishy, nonthreatening, semifluid material. In reality, the ethnic component is often more like real lava, perfectly capable of deforming or even destroying the lamp! Nevertheless, the lava-lamp

³¹ Shelef 2016, 2020.

³² O'Leary et al. 2001. Whereas right-peopling features change in the state's ethnonationalist composition through assimilation or ethnic cleansing within fixed state borders, right-sizing implies that its borders align themselves with unchanging ethnic nations.

³³ Fredrik Barth's 1969 revolutionary reconceptualization of ethnicity as a matter of constructed boundaries rather than primordial contents contributed to this development as well. See, e.g., Cederman 2002*b*.

³⁴ Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

³⁵ Lieven 2017.

approach to nation building has reinforced a tendency to give causal priority to states over ethnic nations because the latter are seen as malleable and subservient to contemporary, material needs. As tersely put by Hobsbawm, “For the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around.”³⁶

To a significant degree, this analytical prioritization reflects normative revulsion against the nationalists’ own argumentation and narratives, which are typically written off as primordialism.³⁷ The “p-word” is often used as invective to undermine even moderate criticism of constructivist scholarship rather than as an accurate characterization of such arguments. Such superficial posturing frequently sets up a theoretical straw man with ritual references to Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils as putative primordialists.³⁸ But closer scrutiny reveals that these classic statements by no means endorse primordialist beliefs in natural essences. Instead, the arguments dissect social actors’ convictions:

In most discussions, this crucial distinction between perceived “givens” and actual “givens” is elided. Primordialists are depicted as “analytical naturalizers” rather than “analysts of naturalizers.” In fact, on the primordialist account, it is participants, not the analysts, who are the real primordialists, treating ethnicity as naturally given and immutable.³⁹

Capturing the same nuance, Anthony Smith introduces the useful term “participants’ primordialism,” which helps to support analysis of how nationalist claims are often predicated on real-world actors’ beliefs in ethnically defined essences.⁴⁰

Furthermore, seminal contributions from the 1980s shifted attention from the study of ideas to a materialist and institutional perspective. In particular, the state-centric approach can be traced back to the influence of Marxist historical materialism in the work of Hobsbawm and others.⁴¹ Even the liberal theorizing of Gellner reveals echoes of Marxist structural materialism.⁴² This materialist undercurrent continues to affect contemporary social-science scholarship on nationalism. Rather than acknowledging the emotional impact of deeply rooted symbolic and

³⁶ Hobsbawm 1990, 10.

³⁷ Primordialists assume ethnicity to be a fixed and natural characteristic of individuals and communities.

³⁸ Geertz 1973; Shils 1957.

³⁹ Brubaker 2004, 83.

⁴⁰ Smith 1998, 158. See also Connor 1994; Gil-White 2001; Özkirimli 2017.

⁴¹ Hobsbawm 1990.

⁴² Gellner 1964, 1983.

cultural values, rationalist scholars view ethnic and national identities as little more than reflections of instrumental choices.⁴³

In their focus on material motives and power, these structuralist and rationalist scholars privilege the agency of the state over that of culturally defined nonstate actors. Viewing national identities as constructed and fluid, they argue that state leaders are able to manipulate and assimilate their populations, if necessary, by resorting to coercive means, including ethnic cleansing.⁴⁴ In this view, governments wield powerful instruments that influence the internal ethnic makeup of states within given borders.⁴⁵ To the extent that nationalism plays a role in processes of state formation, it primarily reinforces state power through enhanced resource extraction and military mobilization within given borders.⁴⁶ We return to these issues in Chapter 4, which analyzes how the state was transformed in early modern Europe before the arrival of nationalism.

In short, radical belief in the malleability of ethnic and national identities leads most scholars of nationalism to prioritize the right-peopling of states over their right-sizing. This could be labeled methodological statism, which stands for the tendency in the social sciences to naturalize the state. It is related to the notion of methodological nationalism, which refers to the “naturalization of the nation-state.”⁴⁷

Of course, we do not mean to imply that there is no literature on right-sizing states. Major studies that confront the challenge of border change theoretically and empirically do exist.⁴⁸ Still, this aspect of nationalism remains an understudied topic that is in urgent need of conceptual integration. Nor do we imply that right-peopling is unimportant. Since the nineteenth century, many determined governments have been able to manipulate their ethnic maps.

What is needed is a more constrained notion of constructivism that accounts for how “struggles to assert popular sovereignty and national identity could serve either to reinforce existing political boundaries, or to subvert and challenge them.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, constructivist literature on nationalism will fail to offer a complete understanding of the subversive

⁴³ See, e.g., Posner 2005; Laitin 2007.

⁴⁴ Mann 2005.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Mylonas 2012.

⁴⁶ Tilly 1990; Posen 1993a.

⁴⁷ Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 576. While students of nationalism are, of course, aware of nationalists’ challenge to state power, most empirical analysis, including that of Wimmer 2018, proceeds within the cage of the contemporary state. Thus, nation building is studied retrospectively from the standpoint of existing states. Other constraints imposed by data availability reinforce this statist bias.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Lustick 1993; Shelef 2020.

⁴⁹ Roshwald 2015, 309.

and destabilizing impact of nationalism unless it backs out of the theoretical one-way street that funnels attention to states affecting nations rather than the reverse.

1.3 Ahistorical Modernism

To reiterate, the failure to appreciate the nation's inherently territorial nature makes it difficult to account for how disjunctions between state and nation generate impetus for border alterations and, sometimes, even violent conflict. But because nationalism derives much of its power from comparisons with past configurations, an explicitly spatial perspective does not go far enough. Nationalist politicians draw heavily from the past when they promote changes to state borders, whether such efforts concern states' territorial expansion or reduction.

In a classic conceptual essay, Ernest Renan stresses not only the voluntary aspect of the nation as a "daily plebicit" but also the crucial role played by historical legacies:

A heroic past, of great men, of glory . . . , that is the social principle on which the national idea rests. To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation.⁵⁰

Through their blanket dismissal of "retrospective nationalism," most modernist scholars don't even try to gain a deeper understanding of how historical legacies affect nationalist identities and behavior. The groundbreaking contributions from the 1980s insist not only on nations' constructedness but also on the irrelevance of their premodern roots in today's world.

Rejecting over-romanticized renderings of nations' premodern origins, Gellner conceives of nationalism as a fundamentally modern phenomenon representing an entirely new type of social organization.⁵¹ To the extent that nations have ancient traits, he considers these to have little contemporary relevance. In a rhetorically brilliant statement, Gellner suggests that nations' legacies are no more useful than navels.⁵² Furthermore, some nationalist projects, such as Estonia's, seem to be effective even in the absence of a long-standing state tradition. Yet perhaps the most explicit myth-busting dismissal of nationalists' historical claims can be found under the heading "invention of tradition."⁵³ Delighting in puncturing nationalists' mythical reconstructions of their nations'

⁵⁰ Renan [1882] 1994, 17.

⁵¹ Gellner 1983.

⁵² Gellner 1996.

⁵³ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

allegedly ancient roots, Hobsbawm and Ranger's influential contribution analyzes cases in which nationalist politicians resorted to outright fabrication for instrumental reasons.⁵⁴

If Gellner and Hobsbawm and colleagues are eager to show that nationalists engage in instrumentalist fabrication and distortion of history, Benedict Anderson offers a primarily ideational and culture-driven interpretation that views nations as imagined communities.⁵⁵ But by stressing the constructedness of all social entities, this approach shifts the analytical focus to the act of constructing nations irrespective of historical facts: "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."⁵⁶

By stressing the constructed and historically contingent nature of modern nations, most recent studies of nationalism follow the footsteps of these classic contributions.⁵⁷ Rather than seeking origins in historical legacies, this literature focuses on how modern states have shaped, and still shape, national identities through nation-building policies, thus conceptualizing not only nationalism but also nationalist conflict, as fundamentally modern phenomena.⁵⁸

In contrast, Anthony Smith and other ethnosymbolist sociologists,⁵⁹ as well as historians,⁶⁰ claim that there may be more continuity to national communities than assumed by radical modernists.⁶¹ Paraphrasing Marx, John Connelly concludes:

[H]umans make their own nations, but not just as they choose. They live in communities and speak languages they help shape but have not manufactured. Nations never began as simple figments of imagination; instead, nationalists used building blocks of existing national chronicles and tales, interpreted to be sure, but never totally invented.⁶²

And Rogers Brubaker, a leading constructivist scholar, admits:

[T]he constructivist tenor in the literature and the emphasis on the shaping of the past to meet present needs, while undeniably fruitful, risk sliding into

⁵⁴ Hobsbawm 1990 admits that prenationalist structures that he refers to as "proto-nationalism" facilitated the formation of modern nations. Still he rejected the idea that the former constitute a necessary condition of the latter. Quite on the contrary, Hobsbawm insisted that national culture typically contains elements constructed by earlier periods of statehood, though only in case of "historical nations," rather than being reducible to premodern ethnic cores.

⁵⁵ Anderson [1983] 1991.

⁵⁶ Anderson [1983] 1991, 6.

⁵⁷ For reviews, see Calhoun 1997; Storm 2018; Mylonas and Tudor 2021.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Brubaker 1996; Brubaker and Laitin 1998.

⁵⁹ Smith 1986; Hutchinson 2017.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Geiss 2012; Bayly 2004; Connelly 2020; Walser Smith 2020.

⁶¹ See also Weyland 2021.

⁶² Connelly 2020, 21.

a voluntaristic overemphasis on the malleability and manipulability of the past in the hands of contemporary cultural and political entrepreneurs.⁶³

Ironically, it could even be that the modernist effort to debunk myths about historical continuity as nationalists' invention and fabrication ends up creating a new set of myths about the past. As Donald Kelly eloquently puts it:

Historians are forever claiming to be unprecedentedly critical—but critical rejection is a rhetorical topos ... as well as a rational claim. They are forever pretending to overcome myth, but at the same time adept at devising alternative myths. And they are forever finding and asserting novelty; but novelty and innovation, too, present an ancient trope as well as a modernist pose.⁶⁴

Again, the critical point here is not whether nations existed in pre-modern times, prior to the French Revolution – although most scholars would deny this idea – but rather, whether their historical legacies matter in the modern world. It could even be that the nationalists' retrospective allusions are almost entirely invented, which creates a puzzle because it is hard to see how altogether mythical narratives could ever gain enough popular resonance to make a difference.⁶⁵ The critical issue is whether the myths are perceived to be true.⁶⁶ But this realization requires a major shift away from the radical modernists' blanket dismissal of nationalists' retrospective claims to research that studies their factual basis. In particular, any assessment of nationalism's destabilizing effect on geopolitics needs to find out under what conditions these myths become consequential.

In addition to downplaying the validity of backward-looking arguments, modernist scholars also tend to overlook the continued relevance of imperialism in the modern world. While historical research shows how imperial ambitions often motivate contemporary nationalist politics,⁶⁷ most modernist scholars of nationalism subscribe to a unilinear history that typically regards empires as an obsolete developmental stage that has now been definitively and irreversibly superseded by nation-states.⁶⁸ Yet backward-looking historical claims and revisionist conflict are inherent in nationalist politics. They cannot be viewed as something that vanished with the disintegration of the great empires in the twentieth century,

⁶³ Brubaker 2004, 164.

⁶⁴ Kelley 1987, 337–338. See also Baár 2010, 290.

⁶⁵ Smith 1999.

⁶⁶ Connor 1994, 75.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Geiss 2007; Berger and Miller 2015; Cattaruzza and Langewiesche 2013.

⁶⁸ Emerson 1960; Gellner 1983; Wimmer and Min 2006; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010.

the collapse of the Soviet Union presumably being the final nail in the imperialist coffin.⁶⁹

These weaknesses in conventional interpretations of nationalism – a focus on myths rather than on factual aspects of nationalist narratives as well as the tendency to view imperialism as an archaic predecessor of nationalism – call for a more refined theoretical approach that acknowledges the importance of historical legacies. Although it has to be recognized that nationalist politics first emerged in the late eighteenth century, a complete analysis of nationalism's consequences requires us to take the nationalists' historical claims seriously. At the same time, researchers need to keep an open mind regarding the continued relevance of empires, as illustrated by post-Soviet Russia under the leadership of Putin.

1.4 Incomplete Empirical Validation

Having considered three theoretical difficulties that obscure the border-transforming and violence-generating impact of nationalism, we turn to an empirical research gap. In so doing, we again part company with Brubaker's assertion that all major questions about nationalism have already been posed and answered.⁷⁰ Likewise, there are reasons to be skeptical about Mylonas and Tudor's optimistic assessment that the classic contributions have produced insights that define "what we already know."⁷¹ On the contrary, what is striking about the literature on nationalism is how *little* we know because much remains to be empirically validated in a systematic way.

While Karl Deutsch pioneered systematic, statistical analysis of nation building and nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s,⁷² the foundational literature from the 1980s painted history with a very broad, essayist brush. All the same, there is an entire library of empirical studies of nationalist politics.⁷³ Going beyond the rather schematic and unsystematic use of historical evidence in the classic contributions from 1983, more recent qualitative macro studies trace the evolution of nationalist identity formation of specific countries either by qualitative comparisons⁷⁴ or by focusing on specific states.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ For critiques of modernist irreversibility, see Beissinger 2005; Kumar 2017.

⁷⁰ Brubaker 2020.

⁷¹ Mylonas and Tudor 2021, 112.

⁷² See, e.g., Deutsch 1953, 1969.

⁷³ For overviews, see Calhoun 1997; Breuilly 2013; Cederman 2002*b*; Storm 2018; Mylonas and Tudor 2021.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Breuilly 1982; Brubaker 1992; Greenfeld 1992; Hechter 2000; Hroch 1985.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Weber 1976; Colley 1992.

Much of the newer work has turned to microlevel analyses of single countries, homing in on how specific educational, linguistic, religious, and state-building efforts succeeded or backfired in nineteenth-century France and Prussia, colonial Mexico, the early twentieth-century United States, and contemporary France.⁷⁶ Following trends in the social sciences, this micro turn draws on advanced approaches to causal inference. These contributions provide important evidence on how specific state policies cause national integration or backlash, but say less about variation across contexts.

More recently, scholars have started to go beyond identity formation and nation building as the main outcome, turning to the mass-based politics of nationalism. Yet in this area, the literature remains fragmented into subliterations that cover specific outcomes, such as secession,⁷⁷ unification,⁷⁸ and irredentism.⁷⁹ Most studies that investigate the link between nationalism and violence are based on qualitative analysis.⁸⁰ There are rather few examples of systematic quantitative macrolevel research. Part of the problem relates to radically constructivist recommendations that discourage any analysis of essences or, for that matter, even ethnic groups, in favor of relational fields.⁸¹ Despite their metatheoretical attractiveness, these radical admonitions have so far yielded little systematic empirical knowledge and have generally been difficult to implement empirically even for their advocates.⁸² For these reasons, it is not surprising that the most promising studies so far adopt pragmatic, empirically viable assumptions based on ethnonationalist groups. In particular, Mark Beissinger's pioneering study of how nationalist mobilization contributed to the collapse of the USSR uses extensive qualitative and quantitative evidence to show that it is possible to study nationalism as mass politics with rigorous social-science methods.⁸³

From a broadly comparative perspective, Andreas Wimmer and colleagues have produced the most ambitious statistical studies of nationalism's consequences. Yet by shifting the focus fully to the country level, they are forced to make several analytical assumptions that prevent them from addressing the issues relating to border change and right-sizing of the state. In fact, their research suffers from all three aforementioned

⁷⁶ Blanc and Kubo 2024; Cinnirella and Schueler 2018; Fouka 2020; Fang and Li 2019; Abdelgadir and Fouka 2020; Garfias and Sellars 2021.

⁷⁷ Griffiths 2016; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

⁷⁸ Breuilly and Speirs 2005; Griffiths 2010.

⁷⁹ Saideman and Ayres 2000; Kornprobst 2008; Chazan 1991.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Mann 2005; Malešević 2012; Hutchinson 2017.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Brubaker 2004.

⁸² Özkirimli 2017, 213–214.

⁸³ Beissinger 2002.

theoretical biases that afflict the nationalism literature. First, instead of offering explicit spatial analysis of state and ethnic boundaries, these studies rely on highly aggregated nonspatial country-level data. Second, Wimmer and his team rely on data that are collected using the territory of backward-projected contemporary states as the unit of analysis.⁸⁴ While simplifying data collection, this approach is state-centric, introducing hindsight bias and blocking the tracing of actual changes in state borders over time.⁸⁵ Third, the theoretical approach harks back to the radical modernism of classic modernization theory. According to their diffusionist model, almost all units become nation-states, and once this happens, they remain so forever.⁸⁶ This irreversible light-switch formalization of modernization theory treats all nation-states, including the United Kingdom and Russia, as if they were equally unified and forever stable, having irrevocably transcended their imperial pasts.⁸⁷

To summarize, in this chapter, we discussed the four obstacles that stand in the way of a full appreciation of nationalism's geopolitical repercussions, namely, nonspatial theorizing, methodological statism, ahistorical modernism, and incomplete validation. We find that existing macro perspectives on nationalism offer either schematic and limited empirical coverage or they fail to overcome the theoretical obstacles that we explain here.

In Chapter 2, we build a new theoretical framework that questions standard assumptions about nationalism while exposing it to demanding empirical validation. The goal is to make future waves of nationalism a little bit less surprising than they have tended to be, as illustrated by the failure of nation building following the collapse of colonialism, the disintegration of the communist states after the end of the Cold War, and, most recently, the revival of nationalism in the early twenty-first century.

⁸⁴ Wimmer and Min 2006; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010; Wimmer 2018.

⁸⁵ Ironically, it thus falls into the trap of "methodological nationalism" as defined by Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, and by implication, it is also guilty of "methodological statism."

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Wimmer and Feinstein 2010; Hiers and Wimmer 2013.

⁸⁷ Unfortunately, this perspective obscures the fact that nation-states and empires not only coexisted but have also interacted well into the twenty-first century, see Malešević 2013. Furthermore, as argued by Beissinger 2005, it is blind to the return of imperialism, as it is arguably occurring in today's Russia and China.

2 A Theory of Nationalist State Transformation

This chapter introduces our theory of nationalist state transformation. Our main argument is that incongruence between the state and the nation increases the risk of border change and conflict. This theoretical perspective offers a view of past and current geopolitical change that differs from conventional approaches. In particular, realist thinking explains how power differentials between states drive border change. But this perspective is at best incomplete because, in the era of nationalism, state-nation incongruence becomes at least as important a determinant of states' sizes and shapes.

2.1 Overcoming the Weaknesses of the Nationalism Literature

As we have argued, the contemporary literature puts several obstacles in the way of a full appreciation of how nationalism produces geopolitical upheavals like border change and conflict. We have shown that with few exceptions, the usefulness of these studies of nationalism is limited by their nonspatial theorizing, methodological statism, and ahistorical modernism, and by incomplete validation of their main claims. In the following, we explain how our work addresses these weaknesses.

Representing State-Nation Congruence Spatially

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the contemporary era, nationalism's transformation of the state has to a large extent been about its reshaping. It follows that the state has to be viewed not merely as a functional institution in an abstract sense with its own self-contained trajectory but also as the result of spatiotemporal macro processes. In a classic statement, the German historian Otto Hintze argues in favor of such a morphological conception of the state: "External conflicts between states form the shape of the state." Hintze's conception assumes "this 'shape' to mean – by contrast with internal social development – the

external configuration, the size of a state, its contiguity . . . , and even its ethnic composition.”¹

Following Hintze’s lead, we introduce an explicitly territorial perspective on nationalist ideology. Indeed, Gellner’s congruence principle makes little sense unless states and nations alike are conceptualized as spatially bounded entities. Because the modern-state is by definition territorial, any other entity that aspires to be congruent with it would have to be so too.² Thus, in its pure form, nationalism entails a logic of double territoriality with respect to states and nations.

Far from happy with just any real estate, nationalists invariably advance claims to a particular piece of land. While prenationalist politics involved frequent transfers of territory as a result of peace agreements following territorial warfare, after the French Revolution, popular sovereignty began to replace territorial sovereignty.³ In the most obviously material sense, ethnic nations are spatially demarcated by their members’ current settlement areas. But the link to territory takes on a deeper, more emotional sense to the extent that this territory is conceived of as a homeland, which is generally defined as “a specific form of territoriality engendered by the rise of nationalism that asserts that a particular group of people (the ‘nation’) ought to control a particular territory because that land is part of who the people are.”⁴ Yet, because homelands are socially constructed, their scope can vary over time depending on nationalists’ ideological commitments.⁵ Notwithstanding the evident importance of homelands, our empirical analysis relies on an operational definition of nations’ boundaries in terms of the corresponding ethnic settlement areas.⁶ As such, we treat geographic clusters of ethnic populations as possible territorial building blocks for potential nationalist mobilization. Considering the structural potential for nationalist mobilization in a given geographic location rather than its actual realization, we cast a wider conceptual net than the important, but more endogenous and discursively constructed notion of homeland.

¹ Hintze 1975*a*, 160.

² In theory, congruence could be defined through nonspatial membership rather than through territorial scope, but it is difficult to think of any national entity of this type. Various non-territorial schemes have been proposed to manage co-habitation in multiethnic settings, such as those of the Austro-Marxists for the Habsburg Empire, see, e.g., Bauer 1907. But these by definition violate the logic of congruence, which requires a one-to-one relationship between states and nations.

³ Roshwald 2015; Shelef 2016.

⁴ Shelef 2016, 36.

⁵ See also Shelef 2020; Connor 2001; Penrose 2002.

⁶ See Chapter 3.

We turn to the consequences of violating the nationality principle. Gellner identifies two main types of violations of the congruence ideal.⁷ In essence, nationalism “requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that that ethnic boundaries within a given state should not separate the power-holders from the rest.” If the former situation features nations divided by state borders, the latter captures states that are split by ethnic boundaries and in which one ethnic group dominates the others. The ideal nation-state requires the absence of both these violations. Full state-nation congruence only holds if both *national unity* and *home rule* are achieved in a single sovereign state. Confronted with violations of self-determination through alien rule (rule by non-coethnic political elite), nationalists are likely to hold grievances that may lead them to question existing state borders and to push for secession. Likewise, *division* of the nation increases the probability of nationalist calls for unification and incorporation of nationalist kin. And because it is rare for incumbent state leaders to give up territory voluntarily, nationalist grievances increase the risk of internal and external conflict.⁸

Overcoming Methodological Statism by Studying Nations’ Impact on States

As we have argued, violations of Gellner’s congruence principle can be reversed in two ways: Either state borders have to be adjusted to the contours of ethnic settlements or vice versa, that is, right-sized or right-peopled, respectively.⁹ The former adjustments include border change through conquest, secession, and unification, while the latter feature ethnic cleansing, mass migrations, and assimilation. Clearly, history contains a multitude of instances that fall into either of these two categories. The nationalist convergence process caused major changes to state borders beginning with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and continuing since then with massive upheavals throughout the subsequent two centuries. Major events involving traumatic demographic shifts have reshaped the ethnic map of Europe. These events were

⁷ Gellner 1983, 1. See also White 2004, 36.

⁸ Chapters 7–9 in Part III analyze how some structural and historical configurations are more prone to generate civil and interstate conflict than others. These behavioral expectations are based on assumptions of who the primary actors are. Chapter 3 details how we arrive at the notion of territorially defined ethnonational segments by spatially interacting state and ethnonational boundaries. The segments will serve as major sites of agency in our theory, whether the segment controls or is dominated by the state’s government.

⁹ O’Leary et al. 2001.

triggered, especially in conjunction with large wars, by deportations, mass killings, and genocide in Europe and beyond.¹⁰

Our theoretical focus is on right-sizing, but we also consider right-peopling.¹¹ The former process requires that ethnically defined nations be powerful enough to right-size states' territories while mustering resistance to states' attempts to right-people them. While challenging radically constructivist beliefs, this perspective does not require us in any way to view ethnically defined nations as primordial. Nevertheless, recent historical research has shown that ethnic boundaries and identities may be more stable over time than had been assumed by mainstream social-science research.¹² Nor do we need to assume that ethnic boundaries are fixed forever, although there are good reasons to believe that in many cases nationalist mobilization contributes to locking in ethnicity.¹³ As Ian Lustick shows, the ideological equilibrium at the center of the state can become very rigid, especially if the leading group manages to impose a sense of hegemony that turns existing borders virtually incontestable (although this incontestability may not last forever).¹⁴ Pointing to disputes over Algeria, Northern Ireland, the West Bank, and Gaza, Lustick analyzes the conditions under which governing elites opt for state contraction rather than defend their current territory at any cost.¹⁵ Likewise, Shelef shows how state elites sometimes redefine homelands toward either contraction or expansion.¹⁶

Crucially, the locus of agency may lie not only with the government but also with nonstate actors, including nationalist movements seeking statehood.¹⁷ Furthermore, because our work focuses on the geopolitical consequences of nationalism, we apply what we referred to as participants' primordialism – the realization that nationalist claims are often predicated on real-world actors' beliefs in ethnically defined essences – in our analysis of nationalist motivations. What matters in the end is what nationalist leaders and, in particular, what their followers believe, rather than what is established as uncontested historical facts. We return to this

¹⁰ Mann 2005; Ther 2014.

¹¹ See Chapter 10 on ethnic cleansing. In Chapter 3, we show that far from being marginal, at least in Europe, changes to state borders were at least as important as modifications to ethnic boundaries.

¹² See, e.g., Weyland 2021; Connelly 2020.

¹³ Walker Connor 1994, 171, criticizes “the quite common practice of employing cases of successful assimilation that were culminated prior to the eighteenth century as precedent for cases today involving self-conscious ethnic groups.”

¹⁴ Lustick 1993.

¹⁵ Lustick 1993.

¹⁶ Shelef 2020.

¹⁷ Hechter 2000.

crucial aspect later in our discussion of restorative nationalism, but the point also applies to nationalists' contemporary claims to territory.

Following the French Revolution, conservative politicians in Europe led by Austrian Prince Klemens von Metternich attempted to put the nationalist genie back into the bottle. Yet under the influence of Napoleon's geopolitical onslaught, many intellectuals in the affected states started to identify with their ethnic groups in ways that put pressure on existing, mostly dynastically defined, state borders. This activity required considerable cultural standardization, identity activation, and, in some cases, the invention of new, high cultures erected on top of complex dialectical landscapes, especially in Eastern Europe.¹⁸ But most parts of Europe featured relatively well-defined language families that served as basic units in the process of nationalist mobilization around premodern ethnic cores.¹⁹

While state formation in Western Europe enabled mostly successful nation building around such cores, further east there was little congruence between states and nations. These disjunctions included the areas that would later become the unified states of Germany and Italy, which were populated by large ethnic communities fragmented by a multitude of tiny political units loosely organized under the heading of the Holy Roman Empire. In Eastern Europe, the situation was precisely the opposite. Polities constituted huge empires divided into a large number of ethnic groups – some of which were in the process of emerging as ethnic nations in the nineteenth century.²⁰ If in the west a lack of unity was the main concern, further east alien rule through imperial domination caused more serious problems.²¹

Driven by their desire for state-nation convergence, nationalists attempt to implement border change through specific processes, namely secession, unification, and irredentism. Our empirical analysis confirms that while ethnically fragmented states tend to experience secession, ethnic groups' territorial fragmentation into separate jurisdictions typically generates demands for unification. Representing a combination of secession and unification, irredentism presupposes both ethnic fractionalization of states and territorial fractionalization of ethnic nations.²²

There are of course processes leading to border change that are unrelated to nationalism, including nonethnic, imperialist conquest and externally imposed partition in the name of balance of power, such as

¹⁸ Connelly 2020.

¹⁹ Smith 1986.

²⁰ White 2004.

²¹ Alter 1989; Cederman 1997.

²² While tracing the evolution of state size, Chapter 5 defines and analyzes the extent to which ethnic nationalism drives these processes in Europe and beyond.

the division of Germany following World War II. In the end, our analysis confirms that especially in Europe, changing state borders to align with underlying ethnic geography have made a major contribution to state-nation convergence over the past two centuries.²³

*Confronting Ahistorical Modernism by Studying the Impact
of Restorative and Reactive Nationalism*

As an additional, crucial step in the exploration of nationalism's geopolitical impact, we extend the spatial perspective to an explicitly spatiotemporal one because nations' putative ethnic roots typically play an important role in their self-definitions. Indeed, the geographer Robert Kaiser observes, "Self-determination based on contemporary ethnodemographic settlement patterns is not likely to satisfy the nationalist whose claim to a region as part of the homeland is grounded in the 'primordial' past."²⁴ Echoing Ernest Renan,²⁵ James Anderson captures this logic well:

[A]s well as being both unifying and divisive over space, nationalism is also Janus-faced with respect to time, simultaneously backward-looking and forward-looking. A remote past – typically a fabricated heroic version of it – is used to highlight the inadequacies of the recent past and the present in order to point towards and mobilise support for the progress to a supposedly better future.²⁶

This analytical extension does not in any way reject the modernist conception of nations as relatively recent constructs, but it does suggest that nations are rarely constructed *ex nihilo*. Instead of merely fabricating narratives, nationalist entrepreneurs rely on usable history, that is, historical facts that are combined with myths and exaggerations to craft narratives that effectively rally support for political goals.

Under the influence of diffusing nationalist ideas, activists become increasingly conscious of how instances of state-nation incongruence fall short of politically independent or more unified situations in the past and start expressing grievances on this basis. After the French Revolution, the geopolitical success of the Western European great powers, especially France and Great Britain, inspired these efforts. Through this process, nationalist politics introduced a status hierarchy by which success could be measured not only in terms of current territorial control and raw military power but also in terms of past political and cultural achievements.

²³ We compare the effect of ethnicity on border locations with such nonethnic, geopolitical factors in Chapter 6.

²⁴ Kaiser 1994, 19.

²⁵ Renan [1882] 1994.

²⁶ Anderson 1986, 118.

According to this pecking order, there are “historical nations” and those “without history.”²⁷

In a pioneering analysis, the German historian Imanuel Geiss offers a helpful summary:

Modern nationalism was formulated mostly by urban intellectuals, cut off from the peasant masses, whom they, however, idealized as the true representatives of their [people]. Their demand for a national state along the line[s] of Western national states, harked back to a romanticized “national” history, taking, wherever possible, a powerful state, usually in the Middle Ages, as their historic precedent: Modern nationalism claimed to restore former empires or great power structure of the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Greeks, Germans, Italians, Serbs and Bulgarians. Restoring the glories of past Empires by modern nationalism made for an explosive mixture, because Empires by definition usually had expanded beyond the boundaries of a given “nation.”²⁸

Rather than focus on debunking historical myths and distortions, our priority is to identify how nationalist grievances are formulated as perceived violations of the nationalist principle in relation to past golden ages – historical periods that can plausibly be portrayed as times of national power and unity.²⁹ These high points were interrupted by historical trauma, for instance, conquest and occupation or the splintering of the national community into separate polities. Temporal comparisons of this kind often refer to recent history – recall Putin bemoaning the fragmentation of the Russian nation into post-Soviet republics – but they sometimes reach a long way back, as illustrated by Putin’s frequent references to Peter the Great or by the Serbs’ long-held frustration with Ottoman occupation from the Battle of the Blackbirds at Polje, Kosovo, which occurred in the fourteenth century.

The main issue is not whether nationalist narratives contain mythical aspects. They almost always do, as evidenced by the questionable backward projection of ethnic continuity for centuries, despite massive mixing through migration, assimilation, and intermarriage through the ages.³⁰ For our analysis of nationalism’s consequences, it suffices that these narratives have a mobilizing effect. In such cases, emotional resonance based on plausible stylized facts is more important than historical accuracy. In Chapter 8, we analyze how, by constructing long-term continuity of “our people” throughout the centuries, nationalist educators, intellectuals, and historians create a three-step narrative sequence that starts with the golden age, followed by a reversal that initiates a dark age

²⁷ Hobsbawm 1990, 73; Hroch 1985, 8–10.

²⁸ Geiss 2007, 94.

²⁹ Smith 1986.

³⁰ Geary 2002.

and ends with a call to action that aims to restore the nation.³¹ Specifically, this type of restorative nationalism seeks to overcome alien rule or division, which are conditions that can be relatively easily contrasted to supposedly independent and united episodes from the past, as long as peoplehood is projected backward based on historically dubious but frequently held assumptions about ethnic descent and continuity.

If nationalist arguments were entirely fictitious, there should be no correlation between previous historical structures and subsequent conflict. Our task is to investigate whether structural changes, such as a group's loss of sovereignty, correlate with an outbreak of subsequent armed conflict aiming at "righting" historical "wrongs." To do so, we don't have to assume that revisionist narratives are entirely factual. Our point is that specific historical configurations, often combined with half-truths and fabrication, can lend contemporary political claims the plausibility and resonance with target audiences that make mobilization and violence more likely.

The spatiotemporal perspective also allows us to study reactive nationalism. Whereas naive modernization theories expect assimilating states to prevail, we follow the lead of more subtle modernist approaches that consider the possibility of backlash. Reactive nationalism captures how nationalist minorities react to majorities' attempts to penetrate the state's periphery.³²

In our empirical analysis, we use the gradual expansion of the European railway network 1816–1945 to investigate how a key technological driver of modernization affected ethnic separatism. Combining new historical data on ethnic settlement areas, conflict, and railway construction, the analysis tests how railroads affected separatist conflict and successful secession as well as independence claims among peripheral ethnic groups.³³

Overall, our findings confirm that reactive nationalism was at work and call for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of European modernization on nation building than is offered by the current literature. That literature has arguably been strongly influenced by Eugen Weber's seminal study of state-framed nationalism in France but in many

³¹ Levinger and Lytle 2001.

³² Hechter 2000. Cederman 1997, chapter 7, offers an overview of sophisticated modernist statements acknowledging the possibility of backlashes. Deutsch 1953 argues that reactive nationalism becomes particularly likely if communication-induced social mobilization outpaces assimilation into dominant national identities. See also Gellner 1964.

³³ See Chapter 9.

respects, the French case is exceptional rather than representative of nation building in Europe.³⁴

Systematic Empirical Analysis Based on Spatiotemporal Data

Given the crucial role played by the territoriality of states and nations, validation of our theory of nationalist state transformation requires spatial representations of the boundaries of states and ethnic nations. As such, we rely extensively on geocoded data drawn from historical maps and atlases. In contrast to most recent research on ethnicity and nationalism, our analysis is pitched at the macrolevel, covering all of Europe and, in some research designs, the entire world. To trace the long-term evolution of the European state system, some of our analyses employ geocoded state borders reaching back to the Middle Ages, but our main European samples focus on border change and conflict since 1816, and our global analysis focuses on the periods from 1886 and from World War II.

2.2 A Theory of Nationalist State Transformation

Historical Context

Most scholars of international relations tend to view the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia as the foundational event that set the parameters of the international system. This interpretation has drawn plenty of fire from historians, who emphasize the fundamental changes that revolutionized European history beginning in the late eighteenth century.³⁵ In the latter view, the French Revolution and its aftermath were much more pivotal than the upheavals that followed the Years' War in the seventeenth century.³⁶ Although the Westphalian treaties alone hardly marked the defining moment of territorial sovereignty,³⁷ the shift from territorial to popular sovereignty represents a radical transformation of the state system.³⁸ As Ariel Roshwald argues, "It is the spread of the idea of popular sovereignty . . . that underlies the global standardization of nationhood as the foundation of legitimate political-territorial authority."³⁹ Rather than merely reinforcing Europe's emerging territorial states, which had hitherto derived their legitimacy from dynastic principles, nationalism

³⁴ Weber 1976.

³⁵ Osterhammel 2014; Bayly 2004.

³⁶ Osiander 2001; Buzan and Lawson 2017.

³⁷ See, e.g., Krasner 1999; Osiander 2001.

³⁸ Hinsley 1986; Calhoun 1997.

³⁹ Roshwald 2015, 309.

triggered a much more subversive transformation of statehood. According to Roshwald, “Struggles to assert popular sovereignty and national identity could serve either to reinforce existing political boundaries, or to subvert and challenge them.”⁴⁰

We study the interaction of states and ethnic nations as part of a macrohistorical process that started in Europe in the early nineteenth century and then spread to other parts of the world. Hintze summarizes this process succinctly:

States are created by war, colonization, conquest, and peaceful settlement, through amalgamation of different parts and through their separating from each other; and all this is bound up with an alternating process of intermingling and separation of races and civilizations, tribes and languages. The European peoples have only gradually developed their nationalities; they are not a simple product of nature but are themselves a product of the creation of states.⁴¹

This quote describes the unit-transforming nature of the process of state creation, with clear references to how the shaping and reshaping of states came to interact with the evolution of ethnic⁴² and national identities – the latter viewed as constructed from historical interactions rather than as primordial. Hintze’s summary captures our overall framework concisely. To be precise, we assert that nations not only are products of nationalizing states’ policies but also results of nationalist movements’ reactions to such efforts. More broadly, nations owe their very existence to the modern state system because nations are always defined in relation to existing or aspired-to-statehood.

Key Concepts

To grasp nationalist state transformation and its consequences, we base our analysis on the aforementioned definition of nationalism as “a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”⁴³ Systematic analysis of nationalism’s geopolitical consequences calls for clear and empirically viable definitions of political and national units. With respect to the former, our starting point is Max Weber’s classic definition of the state as a political organization that enjoys a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.⁴⁴ Obviously, this demanding definition represents an ideal type that is rarely fully satisfied. For that reason, we use Scott Abramson’s

⁴⁰ Roshwald 2015, 309.

⁴¹ Hintze 1975a, 161.

⁴² Given that ethnicity had not entered the terminology of social science, Hintze refers to this concept “races and civilizations, tribes and languages.”

⁴³ Gellner 1983, 1.

⁴⁴ Weber 1946.

leaner conceptualization of states corresponding to organizations “that maintain a quasi-monopoly of violence over a fixed territory.”⁴⁵ This approach to statehood resonates with Tilly’s pragmatic conceptualization of the state as a “coercion-wielding organization,” which we return to in Chapter 4.⁴⁶ By dropping the requirement of legitimacy, the definition becomes more easily operationalized in empirical terms.⁴⁷ It thus includes alternative forms of governance, such as city states and empires, as long as the units in question are characterized by reasonably clear territorial borders. Evidently, this requirement is something that developed in early modern Europe gradually until there were no more contested border zones or unclaimed areas.

Our formal and institutional definition of the state contrasts with Weber’s concept of the nation, which he defines as “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own” and hence, “tends to produce a state of its own.”⁴⁸ In this book, we limit our analysis to ethnic nationalism because it is the most common form of nationalism. It also has remained the most consequential type of nationalism in most parts of the world, with respect to both border change and conflict.⁴⁹ This restriction of nationalism to its ethnic variety calls for a definition of ethnicity. Again, we follow Max Weber’s lead in defining ethnic groups as cultural communities based on a common belief in putative descent.⁵⁰ Our focus on ethnic nationalism by no means implies that we regard ethnicity as a necessary or sufficient ingredient for nationalist ideologies and mobilization. As some nationalisms are nonethnic and not all ethnic groups aspire to independent statehood, the two concepts are clearly distinct.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Abramson 2017, 5.

⁴⁶ Tilly 1985.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Weber 1946, 176. Weber’s conceptualization of the nation depends directly on the state. The emergence of nations presupposes the existence of the state. By definition, there can be no nations independent of the modern state system. See also Cederman 1997, 16–19.

⁴⁹ Obviously, it is possible to define the nation more widely based on political beliefs and principles, such as Habermas’s 1996 notion of “constitutional patriotism.” Our decision to focus on ethnic nationalism does not reflect a normative priority, but rather an empirical assessment.

⁵⁰ Weber 1978, 385–398. This definition of ethnicity presupposes the existence of large-scale categorical identification that goes beyond direct lines of descent and therefore excludes clans. According to Barth 1969, ethnic identification is based on any combination of linguistic, religious, or somatic traits that are passed on from generation to generation.

⁵¹ Mylonas and Tudor 2023.

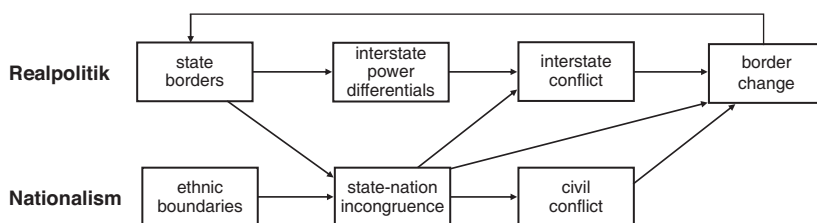


Figure 2.1 Nationalist state transformation: main theoretical logic.

From Realpolitik to Nationalism

Figure 2.1 provides a schematic overview of our theory's main logic. The way nationalism transformed the state can be best understood when compared to prenationalist state transformation, shown under the heading "*Realpolitik*." The upper row explains how configurations of state borders contain power differentials between states that trigger interstate war.⁵² In early modern Europe, these power inequalities typically resulted in border change through conquest. According to Tilly's famous bellicist account of how "war made the state and the state made war,"⁵³ this territorial redistribution entails a self-feeding logic whereby large states become even larger and many weaker entities get eliminated, shown by the positive feedback process pointing back from border change to state borders. We return to the mechanisms driving this process in greater detail in Chapter 4, including alternative peaceful paths to border change based on dynastic politics.

By intensifying interstate warfare, nationalist mobilization is capable of shifting power differentials without necessarily affecting state borders.⁵⁴ This intensification of power extraction can be viewed as a process that further accelerates Tilly's positive feedback process. But in its full scope, our theory of nationalist state transformation describes a parallel process that centers on the interaction of state borders with ethnic boundaries, shown under the heading "*Nationalism*." Analogous to realist logic that centers on interstate power differentials, in our logic it is discrepancies between ethnic and political borders that drive conflict and border change.

For the nationalist congruence logic to apply, ethnic boundaries need to be mobilized along nationalist lines. Beginning in the nineteenth

⁵² Here, we follow the lead of Gilpin 1981, who proposes a dynamic approach to balance-of-power theory that is driven by power differentials. His theory differs from more static, "homeostatic" interpretations of the balance of power, such as Waltz's 1979 neorealist theory. For an overview, see Levy 2002.

⁵³ Tilly 1975, 42.

⁵⁴ Clausewitz 1984; Posen 1993a; Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

century, ethnic groups in Europe transformed themselves into ethnic nations through the process of nationalist mobilization.⁵⁵ Particularly in Eastern Europe, these transitions featured extensive cultural engineering in a first stage, including language standardization and construction of narratives; followed by a phase of politicization, especially if the nationalist elites' access to power was blocked; followed in the final phase by mass politics.⁵⁶

Once mobilized and claiming statehood, nationalists typically become obsessed with state-nation incongruence. Such considerations are particularly pertinent if ethnic boundaries demarcate homelands, which are socially constructed areas that constitute the nation territorially.⁵⁷ Deviations from the nation-state ideal are then especially prone to producing tensions that may trigger border change or ethnonationalist conflict, both between and within states. In the latter case, nationalist challengers break away from multiethnic states through civil conflict. In contrast, interstate disputes are fought over the status of ethnonationalist kin.

We note that Figure 2.1 highlights the main moving parts of our theory rather than all the relevant aspects of nationalist geopolitics. Instead of operating in a strict historical sequence, beginning in the nineteenth century, the logic of nationalism often coexisted and operated in tandem with the logic of geopolitics. After all, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked not only the era of nationalism but also the high point of imperialism.⁵⁸ It should also be noted that particularly expansionist strands of nationalism sometimes overlap with imperialism to such an extent that they overshoot state-nation congruence. Thus, strictly speaking, Gellner's congruence-based definition of nationalism may be too restrictive to encompass such types of dominant nationalism.⁵⁹

Who are the actors driving the transformation of the state? Ultimately, they are individuals who view themselves as belonging to ethnic nations that sometimes operate within state borders and sometimes across them. Although the relationship between elites and masses is often complicated, our empirical analysis abstracts away from the internal dynamics of ethnic nations because detailed interactions of this kind are below our focus on the meso- and macrolevels. We return to these issues in the Section 2.3.

Our theoretical and empirical focus on ethnic groups risks reifying ethnic and, by implication, ethnonationalist groups. There are scholars

⁵⁵ Hroch 1985.

⁵⁶ Hroch 1985; Cederman 2002*b*. The Chapter 3 specifies how we use ethnic boundaries to operationalize mobilized nations.

⁵⁷ Shelef 2016, 2020.

⁵⁸ Osterhammel 2014. We return to this issue in Section 2.4.

⁵⁹ For more on dominant/majority nationalism, see, e.g., Bustikova 2014; Basta 2016; Juon and Cederman 2024 and Chapter 11. See also Kolstø 2019 on imperialist nationalism.

who reject the use of all groupist language in studies of ethnicity and nationalism.⁶⁰ But this critique misses its target in our case because it fails to take into account participants' primordialism – by which participants regard themselves as members of national groups. In fact, it generally renders impracticable any systematic analysis of ethnonationalist conflict.⁶¹ Without bounded ethnonationalist actors, Gellner's very notion of congruence loses its meaning.⁶²

Each ethnonationalist group is composed of segments dependent on its overlap with state borders. Groups' segments may vary in their access to state power. Dominant groups within a state are those segments that control the government.⁶³ By contrast, nondominant groups are those that are deprived of such access to power.⁶⁴

According to the nationalist principle, a powerless segment inside a multiethnic state is likely to have an incentive to break free from domination either through secession or through incorporation into a state run by its co-national kin. European history includes a long list of small nations that found themselves trapped inside multiethnic empires, including Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks under Ottoman rule during much of the nineteenth century. The second process features a state-controlling segment that strives to incorporate a kin segment from a neighboring state into its own state either through unification or irredentism. Interestingly, the German and Italian processes of unification in the nineteenth century featured both, as irredentism occurred in areas that remained under foreign control even after the first wave of unification, such as the Italian provinces of Trento and Veneto, which were subsequently incorporated into the new Italian state.

As this discussion shows, our theoretical argument locates agency at the level of ethnic segments rather than at the level of (often border-spanning) ethnic groups. Segments are social groups that do not necessarily act as collectives. In most cases, agency presupposes the existence of formal or informal organizations taking the lead in orchestrating collective action. Thus, we treat ethnic segments as a structural basis for political agency, a choice that reflects the fact that far from

⁶⁰ Brubaker 2004.

⁶¹ Özkirimli 2017, 213–214.

⁶² Gellner 1983.

⁶³ This concept often coincides, but should not be confused, with that of ethnic cores, which we have referred to as the historically dominant ethnic components of ethnic nations.

⁶⁴ Other ways to designate this distinction refer to included versus excluded groups, Cederman, Wimmer and Min 2010, or “ethnic groups in power” (EGIP) or “marginalized ethnic groups,” (MEG) Cederman and Girardin 2007. For similar terminology, see Mylonas 2012.

all ethnic segments become politically mobilized.⁶⁵ Whereas governmental institutions dominate such collective action in segments that control a state, nondominant segments under alien rule typically rely on social movements via various nonstate organizations, such as secessionist movements or political parties.

2.3 Causal Pathways from Incongruence to Geopolitical Outcomes

In this section, we look more closely at how state-nation incongruence triggers conflict and border change. Figure 2.2 highlights the causal pathways leading from incongruence to collective action manifesting itself as conflict and border change. (Here and in the figures later, the shaded boxes and bold arrows denote the analytical focus of the relevant discussion.) Rather than assuming deterministic causal linkages, we suggest that the causal chain is probabilistic and contextually contingent as it travels through the main stages of the causal pathway.

Whether its outcome is border change or conflict, the causal pathway can be broken into two main steps, the first being grievances and interests and, the second, mobilization. To begin, without revisionist motivations, there is little basis for nationalist collective action, especially as border change is likely to be resisted by incumbent state leaders. All things equal, we expect violations of the nationalist principle to increase the risk of geopolitical disruption because they provoke resentment among those who are powerless or divided.⁶⁶ Such grievances involve nationalist entrepreneurs articulating narratives that target nationalist

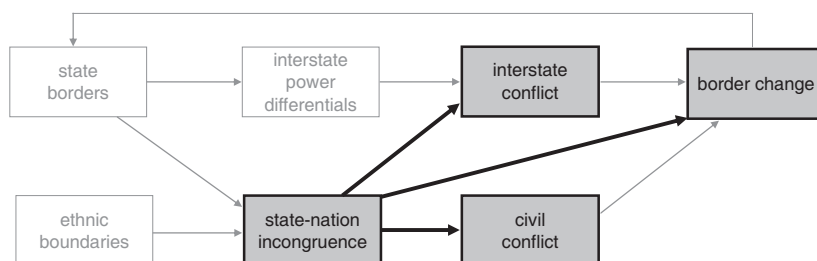


Figure 2.2 Causal pathway from incongruence to macro outcomes.

⁶⁵ In this sense, we treat ethnic segments as proxies for the real actors, see Chapter 3.

⁶⁶ Resentment is not the only emotion of relevance. Both fear and hatred may also be triggered. See, e.g., Petersen 2002; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

discrepancies by demanding either border change or changes in ethnic settlement areas.⁶⁷

In nineteenth-century Europe, most of these activists were white-collar professionals, including lawyers, journalists, historians, philologists, authors, and teachers.⁶⁸ Although grievances motivated most of these actors, some did not necessarily believe in a nationalist ideology themselves. Instead, these political entrepreneurs opportunistically used nationalist narratives to further their own power-related interests, which included the retention or assumption of political power or control over profitable territorial resources.⁶⁹ Primarily seeking to maximize geopolitical power, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck exploited the power of nationalism first to unify Germany in 1871 and then to maintain popular support for the incumbent authoritarian regime.⁷⁰ More recently, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević was originally a communist party bureaucrat who discovered the power of nationalism when he addressed the Serbian masses in Kosovo in 1987.⁷¹ Arguably, the extent to which leaders believe in their rationale for action may be politically irrelevant as long as mass grievances create sufficient support for the elite's projects.

But there is nothing automatic about the process. While some cases of state-nation incongruence produce calls for border revision or political violence, many others do not. The emergence of motivated elites supported by widespread grievances requires a minimum level of group identification, explicit intergroup comparisons, a shared evaluation of injustice, as well as "framing and blaming."⁷²

The next step in the process toward transformation is the leap from motivation to mobilization. For mobilization to succeed, the grievances need to be held by a significant number of a nation's members. Sometimes, as we have argued, collective action is predicated more on the material or geostrategic interests of the relevant elites than on their belief in nationalist narratives.⁷³ But even in such instrumentalist scenarios, national convictions and grievances need to be held by a sufficient number of (nonelite) followers because, without such resonance, it is highly

⁶⁷ Here, we focus on the former under the heading of right-sizing the state, but the next chapter and Chapter 10 will have more to say about calls for right-peopling.

⁶⁸ Hroch 1985.

⁶⁹ Some rationalist analysts even reject grievances as causes of conflict and border change, viewing them as a cover for purely material self-interest. See, e.g., Alesina and Spolaore 2003; Laitin 2007.

⁷⁰ Breuilly [1982] 1994, 110–111.

⁷¹ Silber and Little 1995, 31–32.

⁷² Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013, chapter 3. The latter point requires that nationalists frame their grievances in such a way that they attribute blame to a specific actor, typically a state-controlling out-group, see Benford and Snow 2000.

⁷³ Gellner 1983; Sambanis, Skaperdas and Wohlforth 2015.

unlikely that the nationalist project would enjoy enough popular support to effect geopolitical change.⁷⁴

Regardless of the motivations driving key actors, geopolitical change typically requires considerable mobilization of resources. In a classic statement that draws on sociologist Harrison White's notion of "catnet," Tilly posits that collective-action dilemmas can be overcome based on a combination of categorical and network-based coalitions.⁷⁵ The latter builds on interpersonal networks of trust and commitment, which is in line with the social movement literature.⁷⁶ In civil society, for example, networks organized around universities and religious institutions constitute crucial networks, although virtually any type of voluntary organization can serve this purpose. Nationalist organizations sometimes grow out of cultural associations, such as the German Turnvereine (gymnastics societies) in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ While often led by political elites, these entities vary in terms of the scope of their mass-based political support.⁷⁸

Categories also engender solidarity, especially if they are linked to large (or potentially large) collective identities. The historical novelty of nationalism derives primarily from such "imagined communities," constituted by people who do not know each other but who exhibit a high level of solidarity and willingness to make individual sacrifices for the group.⁷⁹ In a pioneering theoretical statement, Gellner argues that nationalism hinges on culture as opposed to structure.⁸⁰ Categorical identities are most powerfully established through state institutions like mass-based education, but mass media, religious institutions, and cultural organizations also play prominent roles.⁸¹

Reduced transaction costs and normative enforcement within such categorically defined coalitions help activists overcome constraints on collective action.⁸² In multiethnic states, such collective action could

⁷⁴ Benford and Snow 2000. Some insurgencies can be fought by a relatively small number of fighters, in which case the elite may be able to pay off those fighting rather than appealing to mass support, see, e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003. Still, winning the "hearts and minds" of the local population translates into valuable support for either side in the conflict.

⁷⁵ Tilly 1978. The abstract concept "catnet" combines categorical bonds with those based on direct relations in a network, see White 1992; Cederman 2002a.

⁷⁶ Tarrow 1994. In more recent research based on experiments in Uganda, Habyarimana et al. 2009 find that a "technology" of collective action supports cooperation in the provision of the public through threats of free-riders in closely knit social networks.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Breuilly 1996, 98.

⁷⁸ Eley 1991.

⁷⁹ Anderson [1983] 1991.

⁸⁰ Gellner 1964. See also Cederman 2002a.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Weber 1976.

⁸² See, e.g., Goldstone 2001, 164.

shift the balance of power from the incumbent to nonstate actors, prompting the latter to rebel and, in some cases, secede from the state. As we argue later, state-nation incongruence could potentially bring about an interstate war by upsetting the balance of power between states as well.

Beyond this rationalistic logic based on transaction costs and enforcement, it is important to recognize that nationalist grievances contribute to mobilization processes. The literature on social movements accounts for how political entrepreneurs articulate “injustice frames”⁸³ that underpin “collective action frames.”⁸⁴ The latter discursive constructs provide “a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.”⁸⁵ Such mobilization work complements rationalist mechanisms of collective action. Specifically, nationalist calls to action contribute to overcoming collective-action dilemmas. They do so by coordinating revisionist agendas through the creation of consensus on what needs to change and who is to be blamed, thus identifying focal points for collective action.⁸⁶ In subsequent chapters, we explore how revisionist frames that compare current situations to periods of past glory can help boost action readiness even further. Narratives of this type typically identify heroes and villains from the past and serve as powerful mobilization frames in the present.⁸⁷

We note that the causal pathway proceeds nondeterministically. Even where nationalists are highly mobilized, geopolitical upheavals may still not occur. Some multiethnic states offer their ethnonationalist minorities compromise deals, including far-reaching protection and influence through group rights, regional autonomy, or central power sharing. In the Habsburg Empire, for example, the Austrian–Hungarian compromise of 1867 (the *Ausgleich*), gave rise to the double monarchy that elevated Hungary’s status within the empire.⁸⁸ But if such compromises are not reached, violent mobilization and separatism are much more likely to develop, especially if the central state represses and threatens members of the minority in question. Likewise, state leaders may resist

⁸³ Gamson 1992.

⁸⁴ Benford and Snow 2000.

⁸⁵ Benford and Snow 2000, 615.

⁸⁶ Schelling 1980; Goemans 2006.

⁸⁷ See Chapters 8 and 10.

⁸⁸ In fact, within the Habsburg Empire, most other nationalities advanced relatively moderate claims to increased autonomy rather than fully fledged independence until rather late in the empire’s history, see, e.g., the schemes of “Austro-Marxism” proposed by Otto Bauer 1907 and Karl Renner 1918.

irredentist calls to incorporate conationals' settlements outside state borders if such territorial expansion is seen as too risky because it could trigger an unwanted war with the kin's host state.⁸⁹

Thus, the step from state-nation incongruence to grievances in favor of border change is a complex process that depends on many contextual factors. Indeed, myriad other factors influence key actors' grievances and interests, and mobilization may also be affected by exogenous geopolitical shocks and alternative causal logics. Nevertheless, assuming that such historical contingency does not block the main causal pathway, the links highlighted in Figure 2.2 could trigger border change and conflict.

2.4 Theoretical Extensions and Alternatives

As we hinted at earlier, an amended version of realist theory tells us how nationalist military mobilization can increase power differentials within fixed borders depending on how effectively states react to nationalism. Prussian reforms introduced conscription through the *Landwehr* (the territorial reserve army) after the Napoleonic Wars, ultimately outpacing French efforts in this endeavor.⁹⁰ But the ascendancy of Germany depended on more than internal institutional reform. In the end, the balance of power in Europe was upset by German unification, which allowed it to accumulate resources on a vast scale, thanks to territorial expansion. At the same time, fragmenting pressures exerted especially on the Habsburg and Ottoman empires contributed to their weakening. Thus, nationalist mobilization depended critically on the ethnic composition of the state in question. States with a high degree of state-nation congruence were able to implement a *levée en masse* (mass mobilization) much more easily than highly fragmented, multiethnic empires.⁹¹ Extending the scope well beyond Europe, Jason Lyall offers strong evidence that ethnically diverse states that treat their minorities poorly pay for their sins through disappointing fighting performance on the battlefield.⁹²

If interpreted as a hybrid effect involving both realpolitik and nationalism, this logic is contained in the amended theoretical scheme shown in Figure 2.3, which features a new, vertical arrow drawn from state-nation congruence to interstate power differentials. Highlighting the theoretically relevant links, the figure explains how nationalism may initially

⁸⁹ Horowitz 1985; Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009.

⁹⁰ Posen 1993a.

⁹¹ Spruyt 2017.

⁹² Lyall 2020. Drawing on several centuries of data, Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011 analyze how "nationalist systems change" destabilizes the balance of power, leading to more intense fighting.

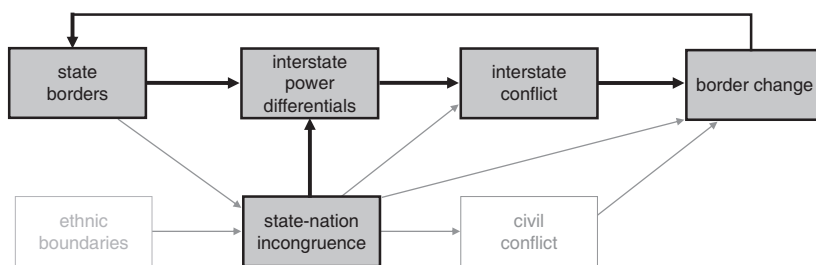


Figure 2.3 How state-nation incongruence destabilizes the balance of power between states.

upset the balance of power, potentially setting in motion a positive feedback effect that triggers not only interstate war but also border change. Following already existing connections, the impact of state-nation incongruence could also fuel coercive intervention through an irredentist logic, as demonstrated by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, or it could produce border change through nonviolent processes, such as voluntary unification.

In an imperialist extension of this logic, interstate conflict further provokes border change by setting off a chain of conquests that liberates itself from the initial nationalist logic, as instanced by Nazi Germany's land grabs in World War II. While the combined effect of nationalism and imperialism is potentially extremely disruptive, we do not analyze it explicitly in this book due to scope limitations. Nevertheless, we discuss interstate warfare and conquest in early modern Europe, primarily before the French Revolution, in Chapter 4. To the extent that we cover interstate disputes in the other empirical chapters, we limit our focus to irredentist conflicts.⁹³

Shifting the main logic from right-sizing to right-peopling, we additionally show how more fundamental deviations from the nation-state ideal feature feedback from conflict and border change to ethnicity. Highlighting three causal pathways, Figure 2.4 explains how civil and interstate conflict as well as border change sometimes modifies ethnic boundaries. The first possibility concerns the effect of interstate warfare on ethnic identification. In an innovative study, Nicholas Sambanis and colleagues argue that state leaders exploit victorious outcomes of wars as an instrument of nation building.⁹⁴ Their "second-image reversed" analysis is illustrated by how the Franco-Prussian war exerted a powerful integrating effect on ethnic identities within newly unified

⁹³ See especially Chapters 7 and 8.

⁹⁴ Sambanis, Skaperdas and Wohlforth 2015.

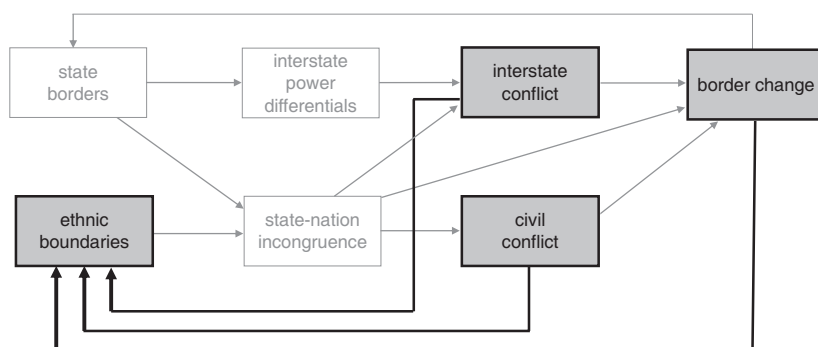


Figure 2.4 How conflict and border change affect ethnic identities.

Germany, bringing together provinces that had hitherto been dominated by their own regional identities. More generally, even the external threat of war is known to motivate states to engage in nation building. For instance, Keith Darden and Harris Mylonas find that states in competitive geopolitical environments, such as Indonesia, are more inclined to invest in mass education than those in more peaceful settings.⁹⁵ In other cases, governments react to geopolitical threats through “demographic engineering,” as illustrated by Chinese and Russian efforts to resettle members of border-straddling groups in response to Sino-Soviet tensions from 1959 to 1982.⁹⁶

Civil conflict can also affect ethnic identification in important ways (see the middle bold arrow in Figure 2.4). External threats are often linked to internal challenges to state power by rebelling groups that are perceived as fifth columns. Focusing on the Balkan history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mylonas shows how such groups were selected for particularly harsh treatment through repressive nation-building policies, including forced assimilation.⁹⁷ But ethnic change may also result from nondominant groups’ efforts to defend themselves when in conflict with the government. Michael Hannan’s analysis of reactions to modernization sketches such a logic.⁹⁸ In struggles between centers and peripheries in modernizing multiethnic states, power shifts in favor of the former change the conditions of peripheral mobilization toward ethnic realignment based on broader and

⁹⁵ Darden and Mylonas 2016.

⁹⁶ McNamee and Zhang 2019.

⁹⁷ Mylonas 2012.

⁹⁸ Hannan 1979.

more inclusive identities. Conversely, peaceful conditions allow nonstate challengers the luxury of adopting more narrow identities.⁹⁹

With or without armed conflict, changing state borders may directly influence ethnic identification (see the bottom bold arrow in Figure 2.4). Because of the aforementioned lock-in effect, governments find it harder to assimilate groups that have already been mobilized, especially if mobilization outpaces assimilation.¹⁰⁰ Darden argues that literacy through mass-based education constitutes a crucial turning point for the development of national identity.¹⁰¹ Thus, changing borders in less developed parts of the world is more likely to be followed by successful right-peopling than in more-developed areas characterized by more settled ethnonationalist identities. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, exogenously imposed borders have exerted a strong effect on ethnic identities. Illustrating this point, Daniel Posner analyzes how segments belonging to transborder ethnic kin groups follow widely diverging dynamics on either side of state borders in response to power dynamics within their respective states.¹⁰² He concludes that in ethnic identity formation, situational and instrumental considerations trump deeper ethnocultural cleavages.¹⁰³ Elsewhere, for instance in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, ethnonationalist identities proved more tenacious. Despite major efforts to construct overarching, primarily political identities, these countries fell apart along ethnonationalist lines.¹⁰⁴

The tenacity of nationalist identities implies that particularly unscrupulous governments may be inclined to use coercive means following border change. During and after World War II, expulsion, ethnic cleansing, and worse belonged to the standard repertoire of states wanting to right-people their expanding territories. Following the invasion of 2022, Russia's coercive efforts to impose Russian identity on the occupied parts of Ukraine continue this trend into the contemporary era, although it has so far met with limited success.

While the theoretical links shown in Figures 2.3 and 2.4 are undoubtedly important, they lie outside our main focus on right-sizing. But we

⁹⁹ Using a computational model, Cederman 1997, chapter 8, interprets shifts between inclusive South Slav (Yugoslav) identities and more narrow ones, such as Slovene, Croatian, and Serb identities, as a reflection of the power balance between Budapest at the center and the respective minorities in the Hungarian-dominated parts of the Habsburg Empire. For more on nationalist coordination, see Cederman 1997, 146–150.

¹⁰⁰ Deutsch 1953.

¹⁰¹ Darden 2009.

¹⁰² Posner 2005.

¹⁰³ Along similar lines, Müller-Crepon 2025 demonstrates that even subnational administrative boundaries transformed ethnic identities in sub-Saharan Africa by instigating assimilation and migration of local minorities.

¹⁰⁴ Bunce 1999; Snyder 2000; Beissinger 2005.

look at how state-nation incongruence put pressure on European states that responded to threats of secessionism and irredentism by instead engaging in right-peopling through ethnic cleansing in Chapter 10. This adds one-sided political violence to the main outcomes we investigate. Before further describing those analyses, we next lay the operational groundwork for the empirical parts of this book.

3 Operationalizing State-Nation Congruence

To lay the groundwork for the empirical analysis to come, this chapter explains how we operationalize and measure state-nation incongruence. Parts II and III then test the observable implications of the theory of nationalist state transformation that we introduced in Chapter 2.

3.1 Motivating Our Approach

A comprehensive, quantitative account of how nationalism affected border change and conflict across post-Napoleonic Europe would require data and methods beyond the reach of contemporary scientific resources. One would need to collect systematic and comparable information on the rise and spread of nationalist ideas and ideologies and elite-level and popular definitions of national communities and their boundaries, as well as insights into the degree to which perceived incongruence shaped individual actors' preferences, emotions, and decisions. While in many ways desirable, such an approach is infeasible due to more than constraints in terms of time and money. To begin, much of the necessary, relevant historical data have simply not been recorded, and archival and secondary sources provide an incomplete picture.¹ High-capacity states and movements in Western Europe, successful instances of nationalist mobilization, and writing by or about a select few "great men" are likely overrepresented.² Feasibility aside, comprehensive data of this kind would also run into analytical challenges. Rather than causing conflict and border change, nationalist ideologies and boundaries may themselves shift in response to recent or anticipated future political

¹ But see Shelef 2016, 2020, for a pioneering attempt to systematically trace shifting definitions of national homelands based on media discourse post-1945.

² Modern nationalism has rarely been an exclusively elite-driven and top-down phenomenon. A full understanding of its explosive consequences needs to complement elite-level processes with a healthy dose of history given later, as, e.g., Eley 1991 and Hobsbawm 1992 have argued.

upheaval. Such causal feedback loops could invalidate any inferences drawn from the quantitative analyses of this book.

Therefore, our strategy to (at least partially) circumvent these practical and analytical constraints is to restrict our focus to ethnic and linguistic boundaries as historically important building blocks of nationalism, especially in the European context.³ The practical advantage of this tack is that information on linguistic affiliations and population distributions has been collected in a systematic and comparable fashion since the mid nineteenth century. The main innovations in this regard were the introduction of regular population censuses and the increasingly sophisticated spatial illustration of ethnic population distributions on ethnographic maps.⁴ As we discuss in greater detail later, we rely on dozens of historical maps to derive explicitly spatial and time-varying data on ethnic boundaries. Combining ethnic boundaries with geographic information on state borders enables us to identify the regions across historical Europe where our theory expects state-nation incongruence to be perceived and acted upon.

In response to the problem of methodological statism, we assume that ethnic and linguistic boundaries are temporally more stable and harder to manipulate by self-serving political elites and cultural entrepreneurs than the salience of these and other identity markers in nationalist discourse and mobilization. If this assumption is true, using state-ethnic incongruence as a structural approximation of potential state-nation incongruence as perceived by elites and popular masses is less likely to be haunted by the issue of reverse causation described earlier. Making this assumption by no means implies a view of ethnicity as a natural, essential, and historically never-changing category. Ethnic groups, languages, and dialects are products of human history; their emergence and evolution were shaped by social, economic, cultural, and political processes in the past. The only claims we make are that some identifiable cultural raw material existed before the onset of modern nationalist politics and that such historical realities meaningfully constrained nationalist entrepreneurs in their efforts to politically activate, reshape, or even invent national boundaries. In short, we adopt a position of constrained constructivism – expecting nationalist mobilization to be more consequential where it resonates with the plausibly perceived realities of its target audience.⁵

Before we delve into details about data sources and operationalization, we note some obvious weaknesses and likely objections to this

³ Barbour and Carmichael 2000.

⁴ Hansen 2015.

⁵ Snow and Benford 1988.

approach. First, the assumption about sticky ethnic boundaries and constrained constructivism may be rejected as historically implausible and conceptually inconsistent with the dominant modernist paradigm.⁶ As far as plausibility is concerned, the best available evidence from linguistic and historical scholarship suggests that many of the European languages or dialects drawn upon by later nationalisms were split from their respective roots hundreds and sometimes thousands of years before the nineteenth century.⁷ Regarding compatibility with modernist theory, even the most renowned pioneers of that paradigm acknowledge the (at least occasional) relevance of “culture,” “barriers to communication,”⁸ and “popular proto-nationalism.”⁹ We make minimalist assumptions about the relevance of ethnic building blocks. In contrast to ethnosymbolism,¹⁰ we do not require a strong sense of group consciousness and internal cohesion, nor do we assume continuity between premodern cultural symbols and practices on the one hand and modern nationalist narratives on the other. Some shared identity markers may be enough for ethnicity to matter.

Second, some readers may perceive our empirical approach to be too static and structural to address the most interesting open questions about the causes and consequences of modern nationalism. Relying on ethnic groups and their relatively sticky boundaries could be seen as standing in the way of investigating the timing of nationalist mobilization,¹¹ changing definitions of national communities and their boundaries, or the contextual conditions and actor constellations that make mobilization for conflict and border change most likely.¹² Fully aware of these limitations, we remain convinced that the systematic application of our simplified structural approach yields relevant insights that go beyond existing work on nationalism, conflict, and border change. In addition, several of our analyses combine structural conditions with contextual factors, which allows us to tackle issues of timing and changes of ethnic boundaries.¹³

Third, our approach is likely to simultaneously over- and underpredict some important consequences of nationalism. Many ethnic groups have failed to “bark” and never developed national consciousness.¹⁴ At

⁶ Mylonas and Tudor 2021, 2023.

⁷ Bouckaert et al. 2012; Chang et al. 2015; Barbour and Carmichael 2000.

⁸ Gellner 1964, 1983.

⁹ Hobsbawm 1992.

¹⁰ Smith 1986.

¹¹ Mylonas and Tudor 2021.

¹² Shelef and Koo 2022.

¹³ See Chapters 8–10.

¹⁴ Gellner 1983, 43.

the same time, some varieties of nationalisms are clearly nonethnic but still have real historical “bite.”¹⁵ Strong ethnic bonds are neither necessary nor sufficient for the formation of modern nationalism, as Gellner famously argues with reference to the Estonian national awakening.¹⁶ But accepting these premises does not imply that ethnicity is causally irrelevant or inessential for nationalism, as Gellner¹⁷ and his most sympathetic readers sporadically seem to infer.¹⁸ Rejecting plausible causes of nationalism based on cherry-picked examples requires strong assumptions of deterministic causation that are at odds with social realities and constructivist notions of historical contingency. Under probabilistic views of causation, general conjecture drawn from exceptionally rapid national awakenings dissolves into non sequiturs. For what it is worth, our probabilistic take on shared ethnicity as one (but not the only) root of national consciousness remains perfectly consistent with everything Gellner has to say about the Estonians.¹⁹ While Estonians may not have had any ethnic consciousness, or even a name for their group, Estonian dialects were spoken in the Baltics a good millennium before Johann Gottfried Herder and homegrown writers like Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald began to activate and transform linguistic commonalities along nationalist lines.²⁰

Despite these three important limitations, our structural approach seems productive when it comes to addressing the four main gaps in the nationalism scholarship identified in Chapter 1. Geographic data on ethnic and state borders capture the inherent territoriality of nationalism. Using ethnic groups as likely building blocks of nationalist mobilization for border change allows us to move beyond methodological statism. We steer clear of ahistorical modernism by using historical sources as the raw material of our data collection efforts. The temporally open-ended nature of historical change reflected in these data prevents us from conceiving the nation-state as the teleological endpoint of a history read backward, a mistake that arises when today’s states are projected into the past. In addition, both our Europe-wide and global measures allow for a systematic evaluation of our theory.

Combining geographic information on state and ethnic borders enables us to operationalize Gellner’s congruence principle in explicitly territorial terms.²¹ Because many ethnic groups are split by state borders

¹⁵ Mylonas and Tudor 2023.

¹⁶ Gellner 1996. See also Section 1.3.

¹⁷ Gellner 1996.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Mylonas and Tudor 2023.

¹⁹ Gellner 1996.

²⁰ Raun 2002.

²¹ Gellner 1983.

and most states contain more than one ethnic group, the intersection of ethnic and political geography results in ethnic segments – consistent and comparable units of analysis – nested within states. For each unit, we can identify whether the two requirements for nationalist congruence – home rule and national unity – hold. Wherever political borders cut through an ethnic settlement area, all constitutive segments of the group suffer from division. And where ethnic boundaries separate different ethnic segments within the territory of the same state, some are likely to find themselves under alien rule. As argued in Chapter 2, the former constellation can be expected to produce calls for unification, whereas the latter is likely to spur secessionist demands. Irredentist demands can arise where division meets partial alien rule. With these contours in mind, we turn to a more detailed description of our data sources and operationalization choices.

3.2 Ethnic Groups in Space and Time

Based on our understanding of ethnic groups as nations-to-be outlined in Chapter 2, we turn to their measurement. The problem to be addressed is that existing ethnic-group datasets are either nonspatial, such as the Minorities at Risk dataset,²² or they do not offer sufficient historical depth, as is the case with *Atlas Narodov Mira*,²³ the World Language Mapping System,²⁴ and GeoEPR data.²⁵

To fill this gap, we introduce a new dataset, Historical Ethnic Geography (HEG) that provides coverage of Europe from the nineteenth century to today.²⁶ Compared to existing data, the HEG data combine information from many ethnographic maps while also capturing local ethnic diversity. In addition, and importantly for our purposes, the data are time variant, based on historical information, and independent of changing state borders. Before describing this new data resource, we offer a brief discussion of how its first important ingredient – historical maps of ethnicity – originally emerged.

Historical Ethnographic Maps

In a public lecture held on January 18, 1871, the day after the coronation of German Emperor Wilhelm I, Georg Mayrzahl described the

²² Gurr 1993.

²³ Bruk and Apenchenko 1964.

²⁴ WLMS 2006.

²⁵ Vogt et al. 2015.

²⁶ Europe is defined expansively to include the Caucasus, the Levant, and Northern Africa. We follow this expansive definition to include the Ottoman Empire in our sample.

population of the newly unified Germany in numerical terms.²⁷ As recounted by Jason Hansen, Mayrzahl, an economist and statistician, reported the demography of the German Empire's forty million inhabitants by gender, mortality and age, and religion, while in particular drawing attention to the difference between citizens of the new state and "members of the German nation."²⁸ He noted that among the former were eight percent for whom German was not their mother tongue. According to his account, one-third of all fifty-three million *Völksgenossen* (German nationals) were living outside Germany's new political borders.²⁹

If Mayrzahl had had access to a modern slide deck and projector, he would likely have made his point by showing an enlarged map of German speakers across Europe. He probably would have projected a map akin to the ethnographic map of Germany and its neighbors produced by geographer Heinrich Kiepert four years earlier (Figure 3.1). At the time this map was drawn, Kiepert had spent decades researching the geography of German language borders with census data and ethnographic field research in the German-French Alsace.³⁰

Having made their first appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century, maps like Kiepert's aimed at documenting the geography of Europe's ethnic diversity. The proliferation of ethnic maps was driven by two major developments. The first involved technological innovations like the development of ever-more detailed census questionnaires, the appearance of precise geographical maps, and the invention of new printing methods and synthetic dyes. These made it possible to categorize populations based on language and religion and to represent their settlement areas on increasingly precise maps. Second, the rise of nationalism and the pursuit of self-determination created a demand for maps that identified and located various ethnic groups in Europe.³¹ Initial efforts by German and Austrian geographers in the 1840s were quickly followed by the efforts of cartographers from Russia, the Balkans, and other parts of Europe. Together, they formed a scientific community dedicated to classifying and mapping ethnic groups.

For the most part, ethnic maps were drawn based on census data at the level of towns or districts. Other maps, in particular those from the mid nineteenth century, were based on philological research, travel reports, local ethnographic research, and older historical maps.³² Most

²⁷ Mayrzahl 1871.

²⁸ Hansen 2015, 16–18.

²⁹ According to calculations from 1860.

³⁰ Hansen 2015, chapter 3.

³¹ Kertzer and Arel 2002; Hansen 2015.

³² Dörflinger 1999; Hansen 2015.

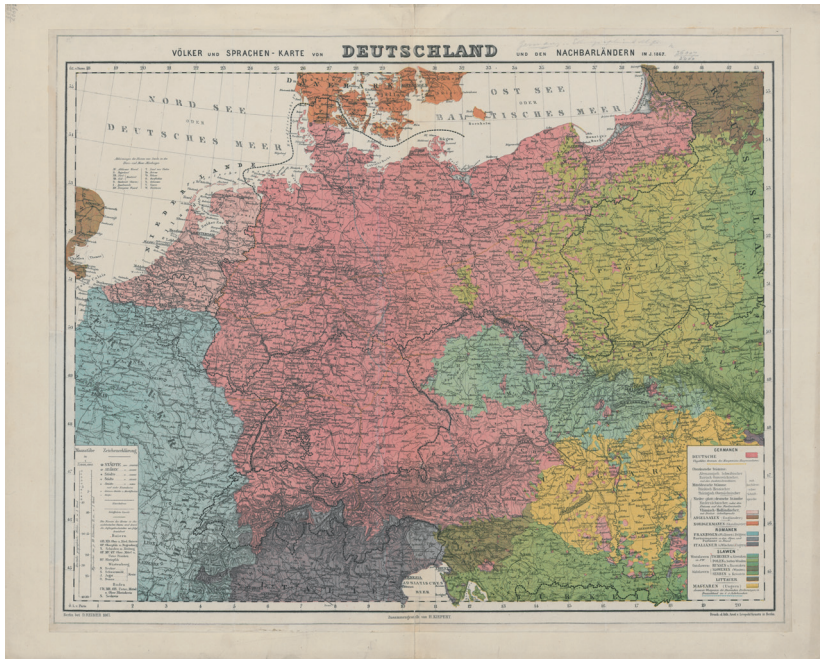


Figure 3.1 “Peoples and Languages of Germany and Neighboring States.”

Source: Heinrich Kiepert 1867.

ethnic cartographers relied on native language and mother tongue as the defining attributes of ethnic groups.³³ The production of ethnic maps was generally viewed as a scientific endeavor, motivated by enlightenment-era ideals of measuring and classifying the natural world.³⁴ The cartographers, therefore, sought to establish common standards and provided detailed justification for their boundary drawing.³⁵

But ethnic maps and census data were also used politically. States and nationalist movements disseminated ethnic maps to influence public perception of national homelands and their boundaries.³⁶ These efforts were most evident at the 1919 peace conference at Versailles following World War I, where all parties relied on their own maps to support their

³³ Cadiot 2005; Hansen 2015.

³⁴ Livingstone, Withers et al. 1999.

³⁵ Dörflinger 1999; Hansen 2015.

³⁶ Herb 2002; Anderson [1983] 1991. See Branch 2013 for parallel consequences of mapping states.

demands.³⁷ At the time, this use of maps already raised concerns about political manipulation, especially when the stakes were as high as at Versailles, where the end of the war was negotiated. US geographer Isaiah Bowman noted:

[e]ach one of the Central European nationalities had its own bag of statistical and cartographic tricks. [. . .]. It would take a huge monograph to contain an analysis of all the types of map forgeries that the war and the peace conference called forth.³⁸

Yet while the means of trickery were manifold, the scope of the attempted manipulation was limited. Because the cartographers largely relied on similar data and methods, they could not arbitrarily invent ethnic boundaries without jeopardizing their reputation.³⁹ Instead, most attempts to manipulate maps and census data involved the subtle use of politically convenient criteria, such as the choice of sources, population thresholds,⁴⁰ and the underlying list of ethnic groups.⁴¹ Although ethnic categorizations may have additionally affected ethnic consciousness,⁴² such ethnic malleability was restricted as well. For example, while unifying German dialects into one self-conscious group was possible, more salient and sticky linguistic divides between mutually unintelligible languages were very difficult, if not impossible, to manipulate significantly.

Collecting Data from Historical Ethnic Maps

Cognizant of potential caveats in using historical ethnic maps to support our data collection, we cast as wide a net as possible. We looked for ethnic maps in various online collections, as well as in major map collections like those in the US Library of Congress, the British Library, and the National Library of France. Our search yielded a (digital) mass of 350 map scans, although many failed to deliver on their promise and had to be discarded because they did not depict ethnic groups, were of poor quality, had low spatial detail, or were otherwise flawed. We also screened maps for obvious political biases but identified only very few

³⁷ Palsky 2002.

³⁸ Palsky 2002, 113.

³⁹ Hansen 2015. Blatant manipulation had consequences, as when geographers boycotted the journal *Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen* due to its nationalist editor Köhler 1987, see Herb 2002.

⁴⁰ Hansen 2015.

⁴¹ Hirsch 1997; Cadiot 2005. For example, Kertzer and Arel 2002 note that Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian nationalists used alternative linguistic criteria to claim parts of Macedonia.

⁴² Kertzer and Arel 2002; Anderson [1983] 1991.

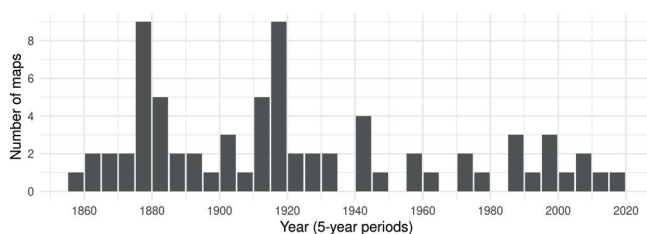


Figure 3.2 Digitized maps by year of creation.

Note: Binned into five-year periods.

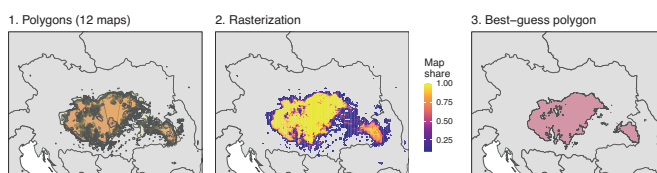


Figure 3.3 Generating polygons for the Hungarian settlement area in the HEG dataset.

cases.⁴³ The remaining seventy-three maps fulfilled our quality criteria. They were drawn by cartographers from across the continent, covered various parts of Europe at different times (see Figure 3.2), and used sometimes diverging categorizations of ethnic groups.

Having digitized map scans of the ethnic settlement areas allowed us to combine all usable maps into one joint, time-varying atlas of historical ethnic geography. This was done in three steps illustrated by the example of maps of ethnic Hungarians in Figure 3.3.

First, we harmonized the raw data, unifying the names of ethnic groups to decide which groups our final data would contain. This step addresses problems that arise where the levels at which groups are mapped differ between sources. For example, one map may show ethnic “Bavarians” and other German dialects, whereas different maps only show ethnic “Germans.” Such problems can be solved by turning to the level at which such groups are most frequently mapped (“Germans” in this particular case). Because maps are not available for every single year and group, we had to define time periods in which any one

⁴³ Biased maps included a map from 1918 by the Lithuanian National Committee with a clearly oversized Lithuanian settlement area compared to twenty-four other maps of the same area, as well as maps drawn by German nationalist and national socialist Paul Langhans who edited the journal *Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen*, which was in turn boycotted by contemporary geographers for its political biases.

map was valid. Doing so involved systematically searching for episodes of large-scale ethnic change, most of which were due to genocide or mass displacement, as junctures that invalidated earlier maps for a given group.

Second, we spatially overlaid groups' settlement areas across all maps from a given time period by using a grid. Such rasterization produced a unified map for each group that shows the share of historical maps depicting a group as living in a particular grid cell. The resulting data from this triangulation has the advantage of combining the information across all available maps. It also enables us to depict local ethnic diversity where maps either disagree in their assessments or show overlapping ethnic settlement areas (as is often the case).

Third, we produced "best-guess settlement areas" that assume that a group lives in a location if at least half the maps suggest it is so for each group in a given time period. This move not only simplifies our spatial analysis but also reflects nationalists' concerns about national homelands – a territorial concept that is inherently binary since any one location either belongs to the homeland of a nation or not, although it can, of course, belong to more than one nation. Although national homelands are socially constructed areas that can, therefore, be contested at the margin, we use our data on ethnic settlement areas as a proxy for the concept in most of our analyses.⁴⁴ The 50 percent threshold ensures that our settlement areas include the core of national homelands claimed on the basis of ethnic settlement patterns and do not reflect any areas in which only a few members of a group happen to have been found by a single cartographer.⁴⁵

Going beyond HEG's coverage of Europe, one could, in principle, apply the same procedures to construct a new, global dataset of historical ethnic geography. But such a data project would hardly be feasible due to the lack of high-quality ethnographic maps for many parts of the world before World War II. Instead, our global analyses are relatively limited in their aims as they primarily test the generalizability of our European findings. Given the lack of global historical ethnic data going back to the nineteenth century, our explorations of nationalist state

⁴⁴ Shelef 2016.

⁴⁵ Including such areas through a "maximalist" approach would risk overexpanding a group's settlement area to the point where even the most committed nationalists would be troubled to construct a national homeland on its basis. It would also expose our measurement to greater potential political biases from single maps, which the threshold reduces significantly.

transformation beyond Europe are based on a back-projected version of the *Atlas Narodov Mira*⁴⁶ and the GeoEPR dataset.⁴⁷

Solutions to the Pitfalls of Mapping Ethnic Groups

To reiterate, measuring ethnic geography across all of Europe over 140 years comes with several caveats. First, political biases pose the most important potential problem associated with the HEG data, especially where politically motivated cartographers produced maps that reflected their expansionary goals rather than the ethnolinguistic reality. As explained earlier, we address this risk at various points of the data collection – dropping maps with overt biases, averaging across maps to reduce the influence of outliers, and relying on a conservative 50 percent threshold coding of ethnic settlement areas. These measures significantly shrink the room for biases that have enough geographical weight to substantively affect our results.

A second caveat is the risk of reverse causality. The panel nature of the data addresses a simple form of this problem where state borders induce ethnic change. Yet a more complex version of this bias emerges where territorial claims lead to the shaping and reshaping of ethnic identities so that these claims then become self-fulfilling prophecies. This risk concerns some analyses more than others. Overall, we find little evidence that such dynamics bias our results, which are robust to relying on only the earliest (and thus, least likely reversely caused) maps from before 1886 or examining the effects of groups that are ethnolinguistically so distinct that it would have been nigh impossible to construct them out of thin air to substantiate territorial claims.

Third, if taken at face value, the HEG dataset tends to underestimate ethnic diversity in many contemporary Western European countries, particularly in urban settings. This underestimation is because the ethnic maps we use as source material, for the most part, depict regionally concentrated groups and not the spatially dispersed, multiethnic populations that descended from migrants who came to Europe after World War II.⁴⁸ While this constraint clearly limits the data's value in studying some forms of contemporary nationalism – particularly its anti-immigrant

⁴⁶ Bruk and Apenchenko 1964.

⁴⁷ Wucherpfennig et al. 2011. We use a geocoded version of the *Atlas* called the Geo-Referenced Ethnic Groups (GREG) dataset by Weidmann, Rød and Cederman 2010. The atlas has seen much use in the social sciences, although its data quality has drawn criticism, see, e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003. Since the back projection comes with a significant danger of bias from reverse causality, we complement our main validation exercises with analyses based on data restricted to the post-World War II period.

⁴⁸ E.g., Dražanová 2020.

variety – we do not expect our argument about the nationalist reshaping of states to apply to the “new” minorities in Europe’s nation-states. This limited scope is simply due to their dispersed settlement patterns and the lack of a homeland within their host states that these groups could plausibly claim even if politically mobilized. Their political mobilization mostly focuses on political inclusion rather than separation.

3.3 States and Ethnic Segments within Them

States’ territories and changing borders constitute the second important ingredient in our analyses. When intersected with our data on ethnic settlement areas, state borders define ethnic segments, which serve as our main unit of analysis. As clarified in Chapter 2, ethnic segments should be seen as structural proxies for the real actors since many ethnic segments remain unmobilized. The following sections introduces our data on state territories as well as the derivation of ethnic segments.

States and Their Borders

The mapping of states is as difficult as the concept of statehood is contested. We build directly on the minimalist definition of states, which was introduced in Chapter 2, as organizations “that maintain a quasi-monopoly of violence over a fixed territory.”⁴⁹ This conceptualization recognizes states as organizations with a government, typically centered in a states’ capital and territory delimited by borders. When focusing on Europe, we consider only state territories on the European continent and not their overseas colonies. But in our global sample, our definition of states leads us to include contiguous and overseas colonies as regular parts of their territories.⁵⁰

With these conceptual issues in mind, we draw on and extend several existing datasets on states and their territories. To reach sufficient historical depth for our main analyses, we build on three datasets. The first, CShapes 2.0, covers all sovereign states and their colonial dependencies around the world from 1886 to 2017.⁵¹ Furthermore, the *Centennia Historical Atlas*⁵² and Scott Abramson’s border data cover Europe beginning

⁴⁹ Abramson 2017.

⁵⁰ We do not follow the conventional “saltwater rule” that differentiates colonial holdings from the metropolitan core territory. This would introduce a theoretical inconsistency in our treatment of nationalists seeking independence of a national homeland that is separated from the state’s capital by salt water, a river, mountain ranges, or solely an ethnic boundary.

⁵¹ Schvitz et al. 2022.

⁵² Reed 2008.

in the Middle Ages.⁵³ For our main analyses of European state territories, we combine and harmonize these datasets into our own CShapes Europe dataset, which covers all state territories and their capitals from 1816 to 2017 (see Figure 3.4). Further analyses expand our focus to a global sample either by using the CShapes 2.0 dataset since 1886 or by increasing its historical reach to premodern and early modern Europe using Abramson's data from 1100 to 1790.

In using these datasets, our main and most contentious assumption is that a state's quasi-monopoly of violence was realized in a uniform manner across the entirety of the state's territories at any given point. This assumption represents, of course, a simplified picture that can diverge starkly from reality in some regions and eras. Regionally, low levels of state capacity lead us to overestimate the degree of state-nation incongruence where states are weak and unable to rule, extract, and homogenize. We return to this important nuance in a number of analyses. First, the analyses of violent conflict between states and ethnic minorities conducted in Chapters 7–9 confirm that states do not hold the quasi-monopoly of violence at all times. Instead, they are frequently challenged to the point of losing control over some of their territory altogether, which our border data register as border change. Second, zooming in on regional variation in state capacity more directly, Chapter 9 assesses the effects of railroad expansions as one of the most important dimensions of direct rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

We derive ethnic segments by combining ethnic settlement patterns with historical state borders. This analytical step directly follows our territorial conceptualization of state-nation congruence in that we simply overlay state borders with our ethnic map. Doing so produces ethnic segments as the spatial intersections between ethnic groups and state territories, both of which can vary over time. This implies that each ethnic segment is part of a larger ethnic group and of a state territory. Figure 3.5 illustrates the operationalization of ethnic segments by using Belgium as an example. The stylized map shows three ethnic segments – Dutch (Flemish), French (Wallon), and German – nested within the territory of the Belgian state. All three segments are simultaneously nested within broader ethnic groups whose settlement areas extend far beyond the Belgian state territory. As such, the Dutch, French, and German segments in Belgium are clear cases of ethnic division.

⁵³ Abramson 2017.

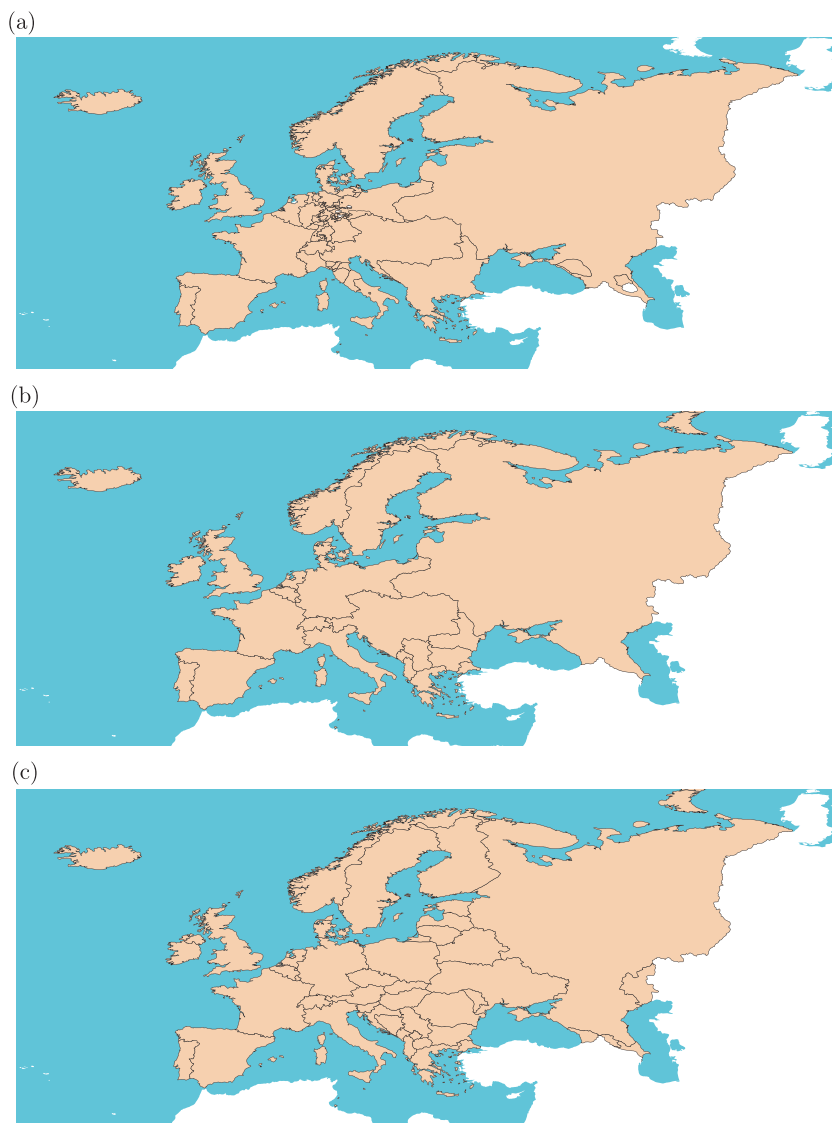


Figure 3.4 European state borders. (a) European states in 1816. (b) European states in 1914. (c) European states in 2017.

Data source: CShapes Europe.

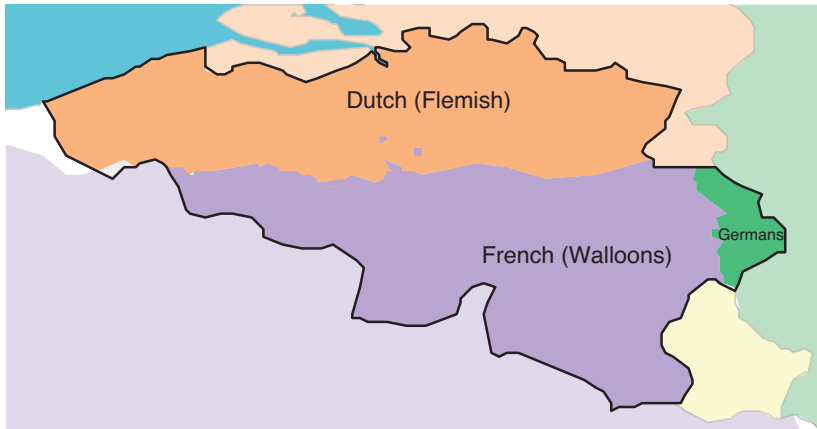


Figure 3.5 Belgian examples of ethnic segments as units of analysis.

Ethnic Segments and Dominant versus Nondominant Groups

Chapter 2 introduced a crucial distinction among ethnic segments dividing them into dominant and nondominant groups. An ethnic segment is the dominant group of a state if it controls that state's government.⁵⁴ All other segments in a state are nondominant groups under alien rule. For the most part, we encode this political dominance geographically by assigning dominant status to the largest ethnic segment that overlaps a state's capital. Figure 3.5 illustrates these points. The Belgian state is clearly divided along ethnic lines, and during historical periods of French (Walloon) dominance, Belgian Germans and Dutch (Flemish) appear as nondominant segments under alien (i.e., Walloon) rule.⁵⁵ For global analysis of the post-1945 period, the Ethnic Power Relations dataset provides more precise information by encoding ethnic groups' access to executive power in their respective countries' governments.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ We use the notion of a dominant group if one group dominates the access to executive power in a state as a *Staatsvolk*. Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013 use a broader notion of power access contrasting "included" to "excluded" groups or alternatively as "ethnic groups in power" and "marginalized ethnic groups," see Cederman and Girardin 2007.

⁵⁵ While usually correct, there are historical exceptions. For example, Vilnius, the coordinates of the capital of independent Lithuania in the 1990s, are "missed" by the Lithuanian settlement area by some 500 meters and instead attributed to the Belarusians. In cases like this, we rely on secondary sources to correctly identify politically dominant groups.

⁵⁶ Vogt et al. 2015.

3.4 Border Change and Ethnonationalist Conflicts within and between States

Two main characteristics of nationalist state transformation are at the center of our theoretical and empirical attention: border change and armed conflict within and between states that arise as precursors to or as consequences of border change. We study these outcomes with newly collected data that are aligned with our ethnic segments.

Border Change

The predominant way of measuring border change in the literature employs lists that record when territory changed hands and the states involved.⁵⁷ But these lists are nonspatial, making it difficult to trace the extent to which ethnic geography shaped border change or to understand how ethnic segments have been affected by it. We, therefore, code border change spatially by relying on our geocoded state borders, which enables us to trace territorial transfers between states through space and time.

As we further elaborate in Chapter 5, we differentiate between three main types of border change. *Secession* involves a transfer of territory toward a newly created state. *Absorption* comes with a transfer of the entire territory from one state that ceases to exist to another state. *Territorial transfer* leads to a change of territory from one state to another while both states continue to exist.

Importantly, we further distinguish between ethnic and nonethnic variants of such border change by overlaying the territory that changed hands with our ethnic segments. Secession becomes *ethnic secession* if the territory is settled by a nondominant group in the old state. Absorption turns into national *unification* if both states are dominated by the same dominant groups. Territorial transfer amounts to *irredentist* border change if the transferred territory is settled by an ethnic nondominant group in the former state that dominates in the receiving state.

Conflict

In post-Napoleonic Europe, many cases of border change came about as a consequence of violent conflict between or within states. Yet there were at least as many cases of conflict and mobilization that did not result in border change even if that was the goal of one of the parties, just as some border change occurred as a result of nonviolent mobilization

⁵⁷ Tir et al. 1998.

(most notably the breakup of the Soviet Union). To analyze how violent and nonviolent mobilization relates to state-nation incongruence, we differentiate between civil war, interstate militarized disputes, and nationalist territorial claims.⁵⁸

Civil War. We collected data for each ethnic segment and year between 1816 and 2017 that encodes whether an ethnic civil war had started. For years before 1945, we started with rosters of civil wars based on lists provided by Kristian Gleditsch⁵⁹ and Meredith Sarkees and Frank Wayman.⁶⁰ For the post-1945 period, this data collection effort relied on existing data from Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO)⁶¹ linked to ethnic groups via the ACD2EPR dataset.⁶²

Militarized Interstate Disputes and Wars. To analyze interstate conflict in Europe since 1816 and across the globe since 1946 for our main analyses, we relied on the dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) dataset provided by Zeev Maoz and colleagues.⁶³ These data code dispute initiation at the level of directed country–dyad years.⁶⁴

Territorial Claims between States. To measure irredentism, we use data on the onset of territorial claims between a claimant and target state with coverage from 1816 until 2001. Using data collected by Bryan Frederick, Paul Hensel, and Christopher Macaulay,⁶⁵ we identified claims that relate to territory that includes “significant portions of ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other identity groups linked to the challenger state.” We expanded this prior coding to explicitly identify the specific ethnic segment in state B that is targeted by the claimant state A.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ See Section S7.1 for further details.

⁵⁹ Gleditsch 2004.

⁶⁰ Sarkees and Wayman 2010.

⁶¹ Gleditsch et al. 2002.

⁶² Wucherpfennig et al. 2012.

⁶³ Maoz et al. 2019.

⁶⁴ In Chapter 4, we look at interstate wars in premodern Europe that were compiled in Peter Brecke’s list of interstate wars. Brecke 1999.

⁶⁵ Frederick, Hensel and Macaulay 2017.

⁶⁶ Additional types of political violence and nonviolent mobilization are discussed in subsequent chapters. These include self-determination movements in Chapter 6 and episodes of ethnic cleansing in Chapter 10.

3.5 Right-Sizing, Right-Peopling, and the Homogenization of States

By describing our data, we offer a synoptic account of the nationalist state transformation that has occurred in Europe since the mid nineteenth century. Conceptualizing this transformation as an increasing alignment between state borders and ethnic geographies, our account highlights border change as an important driver of this transformation. This overview adds to existing literature that has predominantly focused on states' efforts to right-people their populations through ethnic cleansing and assimilation.⁶⁷

Prior empirical studies differ in how they capture the nationalist transformation of states and ethnic groups that results from border change or conflict. Focusing on states, most analysts measure states' ethnic homogeneity over time. They expect the formation of nation-states – in particular those driven by secessionism – to come with greater levels of ethnodemographic uniformity.⁶⁸ Other scholars focus on ethnic groups and the degree to which they are divided by state borders. Processes of nation-state formation through unification and irredentism in particular increase groups' territorial unity inside the same state.⁶⁹

Each of these classic concepts captures one of the two core dimensions of state-to-nation alignment. Yet neither measure tells the whole story. For example, central Europe featured many ethnically homogeneous German states. Once unified, ethnic Germans were less fragmented by state borders but lived in states that were slightly more ethnically diverse than before. Conversely, the dissolution of the Soviet Union increased the ethnic homogeneity of states in Eastern Europe but led to the political fragmentation of ethnic Russians.

First, to operationalize state-to-nation congruence in a unified and one-dimensional manner, we add a third, information-theoretic measure of the mutual information the geography of states and ethnic nations provide to each other. This measure increases when ethnic settlement areas are less divided by state borders and as states become more ethnically homogeneous. Offering a single indicator for states' alignment with ethnic groups and vice versa, the measure combines the two dimensions that make European nation-states.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ O'Leary et al. 2001.

⁶⁸ E.g., Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999; Wimmer 2018.

⁶⁹ E.g., Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022. Both concepts are commonly measured via Herfindahl's concentration index, which denotes the chance that two individuals drawn from the same state belong to the same ethnic group or the chance that two group members live in the same state. For further details, see Chapters 5 and S5.

⁷⁰ *Mutual information* measure from information theory that assesses the amount of information one partitioning A (ethnic settlement areas) carries about another partitioning

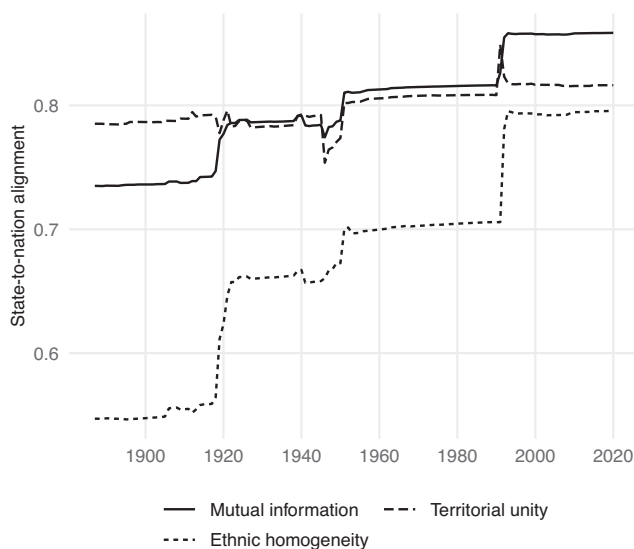


Figure 3.6 Increasing state-to-nation congruence, Europe 1886–2020.

We next measure the ethnic homogeneity of states, territorial unity of groups, and mutual information between states and ethnic nations in our data on European state territories and ethnic geography for each year between 1886 and 2020.⁷¹ All three measures range between zero and one, with one denoting full alignment between states and nations on the respective dimension. Figure 3.6 shows the resulting trends of increasing state-to-nation alignment. The results reveal that states' ethnic homogeneity increased from 0.55 (which approximately corresponds to today's United States) to 0.80 (which is close to contemporary Sweden). Ethnic nations' high levels of territorial unity have remained comparatively constant, reflecting that there are more ethnic groups than states and that many of those groups have no state of their own. Combining both dimensions, our measure of mutual information increases from 0.74 in 1886 to 0.86 in 2019.

B (states) of the same set of points. These points are the centroids of a hexagonal grid that covers the European landmass. Our normalized mutual information (MI) metric is defined as

$$MI(A, B) = H(A) - H(A|B), \quad (3.1)$$

$$MI_{norm}(A, B) = \frac{MI(A, B)}{(E\{A\} * E\{B\})^{.5}}. \quad (3.2)$$

⁷¹ Given the lack of time-varying global data on ethnicity, we cannot conduct this exercise for the whole globe.

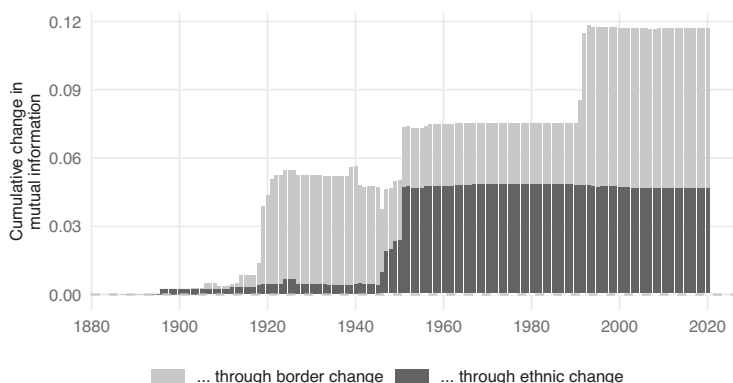


Figure 3.7 Cumulative change in state-nation congruence, Europe 1886–2020: contributions of right-sizing and right-peopling.

Data source: Based on the yearly varying HEG data.

The next step disaggregates the changes in each year into changes that resulted from border change and changes from shifts in ethnic geography, most of which were caused by violent ethnic cleansing,⁷² although we reiterate here our neglect of diversifying migration flows. Figure 3.7 displays the results. As of 2020, 44 percent of the alignment between European states and ethnic groups in our data is attributed to change in ethnic geography while the remaining 56 percent is attributed to border change.⁷³ The figure furthermore reveals strong time dependence. Although border change contributed most to the making of nation-states after World War I and the fall of the USSR, World War II killed and displaced millions among ethnic minorities thus increasing state-nation congruence through ethnic change.

This exercise in macrolevel accounting provides the first measurement of the relative importance of border change in the transformation of states into nation-states in Europe over the past two centuries. It sets the stage for our analysis of the drivers of border change in Part II, and related armed conflicts and ethnic cleansing in Part III.

⁷² See Chapter 10.

⁷³ See Chapter 5.

Part II

Nationalism and the Transformation of the State

Part II analyzes how states' borders have evolved from around 1500 through today, with a particular focus on the nationalist, post-1789 period. Chapter 4 traces the development of states in early modern Europe by revisiting Charles Tilly's bellicist theory of how war and state formation interacted to reduce the number of states in Europe through persistent warfare.¹ Focusing on state formation before the French Revolution, the chapter sets up a historical baseline that prepares the ground for our analysis of how nationalism affects state borders. Analyzing the external aspects of Tilly's theory, we reformulate it as observable propositions that are tested systematically with geocoded data on state borders and interstate wars from 1490 through 1790. Proceeding at the systemic, state, and dyadic levels, our analysis confirms that warfare played a crucial role in the territorial expansion of European states, with power differentials increasing the chance of war, which let large states grow ever larger through conquest. Small states disappeared in the process, which in turn increased the average size of states.

As shown by Figure II.1, which builds directly on Figure 2.1, this exercise provides a baseline against which we analyze how nationalism affected the shape (see Chapters 5 and 6) and conflict behavior (see Part III) of states and ethnonationalist groups. The highlighted parts of the figure are those that are analyzed in Chapter 4.

Powerful states did not grow continuously but started to shrink in the late nineteenth century and continued to do so through today, in both Europe and beyond. Chapter 5 addresses the puzzle of reversing state size, which is inconsistent with a Tillyan account of European history. We argue that border-change processes triggered by ethnic nationalism are the main drivers of this development. While unification nationalism increased states' size in the nineteenth century, its effects were dominated by secessionism, which shrinks states. Irredentism, in turn, had no

¹ Tilly 1985, 1990.

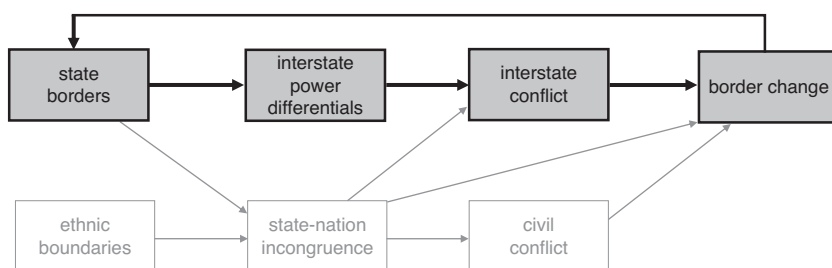


Figure II.1 The war-driven logic of state formation.

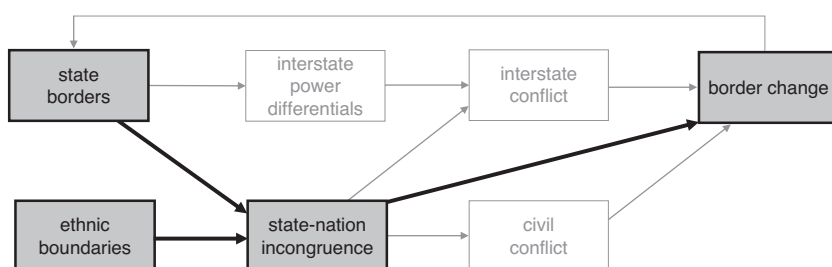


Figure II.2 How nationalism affects state size through state-nation convergence (Chapters 5 and 6).

effect on average state size. Focusing on deviations from the nation-state ideal, we postulate that internal ethnic fragmentation leads to secession and reductions in state sizes and that the cross-border presence of dominant ethnic groups makes state expansion through unification or irredentism more likely. Conducted at the systemic and state levels in Europe and globally, our analysis exploits information at the interstate dyadic level to capture these border-change processes. We find that while nationalism exerts both integrating and disintegrating effects on states' territories, it is the latter effect that has dominated since the twentieth century.

Figure II.2 situates the analysis in the overall theoretical context of our theory, again highlighting the parts that are of particular relevance. Whereas this chapter focuses on state size as the main outcome, Chapter 6 explains where state borders are drawn. But because both chapters explain variants of border change, the scheme shown in Figure II.2 also applies to Chapter 6.

Expanding our analytical scope beyond states' aggregate size, Chapter 6 offers a more general analysis of border change that fully endogenizes the shape of states since the late nineteenth century. Taking the partitioning of the European landmass into states as the main outcome, we

directly test the overarching argument that nationalism creates pressures to redraw political borders along ethnic lines, ultimately making states more congruent with ethnic groups. Based on an innovative probabilistic spatial partition model, we conceive of state territories as partitions of a planar spatial graph. Encoding data derived from historical ethnic maps on a graph as the main explanatory factor, the analysis shows that ethnic boundaries increased the conditional probability that the two locations they separate are, or will become, divided by a state border. As before, we substantiate the finding that secession is an important mechanism driving this result. Moving beyond Europe, we find similar dynamics of border change in Asia, but not in Africa or the Americas.

4 War and State Formation in Early Modern Europe*

“War made the state and the state made war” is one of the most famous claims about long-term political development in the entire social science literature.¹ Rarely have so few words captured so much history so succinctly. Yet, Tilly’s dictum remains controversial. The debate on the role of warfare in state formation continues to generate both confirmatory and critical assessments.² While several scholars have further developed the bellicist paradigm,³ others doubt the effect of warfare and put more weight on economic factors,⁴ peaceful bargaining and coalition building,⁵ religion, or dynastic politics.⁶

Given the general importance of institution building for political stability and economic development, it is not surprising that much of the recent literature investigates whether bellicist theorizing can be applied to non-European cases, such as Latin America,⁷ Africa,⁸ and Asia.⁹ When it comes to the original European context, the debate has taken place in qualitative, historical studies, although, more recently, some political economists have begun to test the paradigm more directly. This new wave of scholarship mostly limits itself to the internal properties of

* This chapter is adapted from the article “War Did Make States: Revisiting the Bellicist Paradigm in Early Modern Europe” in *International Organization*. Cederman, Galano Toro, Girardin and Schvitz 2023. We thank co-authors Paola Galano Toro and Guy Schvitz for their contributions to the article and their permission to use the material in this book.

¹ Tilly 1975, 42.

² Gunn, Grummitt and Cools 2008; Kaspersen and Strandsbjerg 2017.

³ See, e.g., Downing 1992; Ertman 1997.

⁴ North and Thomas 1973.

⁵ Spruyt 1994.

⁶ Gorski 2003; Grzymala-Busse 2019, 2023. See also Blaydes and Grzymala-Busse 2023 for a recent overview of the literature on pathways of state formation including and beyond war that puts Europe in a comparative perspective.

⁷ Centeno 2002; Thies 2005.

⁸ Herbst 2000.

⁹ Huang and Kang 2021; Hui 2005; Taylor and Botea 2008.

states, such as the link between warfare and resource extraction or public goods provision.¹⁰

Apart from some stylized facts based on the rough count of states in Tilly's original work,¹¹ we know comparatively little about the relationship between warfare and states' territorial expansion in early modern Europe. The most important recent breakthrough is Scott Abramson's award-winning, spatially explicit analysis of state formation from 1100 to 1790.¹² Provocatively, he finds little support for the bellicist theory, favoring an interpretation that centers on trade and economic conditions. While truly pioneering, his empirical evaluation focuses on states' size distributions and survival chances rather than on directly testing the link between warfare and state formation.

By articulating and testing the nexus between warfare and territorial state expansion head-on, our work finds more evidence in favor of the bellicist paradigm. While there is little support for a drastic Darwinian process exclusively driven by conquest and absorption, we find that warfare is strongly linked to the expansion of the great powers up to and beyond the French Revolution. In fact, after that historic turning point, the European system consolidated even more dramatically. Thus, to begin, we analyze the period from 1490 to 1790.

To our knowledge, ours is the first analysis that combines systematic conflict data with geocoded data on border change in early modern Europe. Based on data on conflict from Peter Brecke¹³ and on state borders from Abramson,¹⁴ our analysis covers the systemic, state, and dyadic levels. At all three levels, we find strong evidence that warfare has contributed significantly to the territorial expansion of European states since 1490. While earlier quantitative studies typically analyze systemic or state-level characteristics, we are not aware of any prior attempt to disaggregate the analysis to interstate relations.

We begin this chapter by recapitulating the bellicist argument and then reviewing theoretical and empirical responses to Tilly's original claims. Based on our reading of Tilly and other bellicist scholars, we capture the logic of the paradigm with a theoretical model that helps to spell out the main observable implications of the external dimensions of state formation at the three levels of analysis. We first turn to a system-level analysis that introduces a new measure of territorial concentration. We also consider how state size distributions have changed over time with and without legacies of persistent war. The state-level analysis traces the

¹⁰ Dincecco 2017; Gennaioli and Voth 2015.

¹¹ Tilly 1990.

¹² Abramson 2017.

¹³ Brecke 1999.

¹⁴ Abramson 2017.

trajectories of selected great powers as a way to evaluate how much of their territorial expansion was due to warfare. The next step is a systematic statistical analysis of the impact of warfare on border change and state death, followed by a dyadic analysis offering a more direct, relational test of whether warfare was associated with territorial gains and losses. As a final analytical step, we consider state formation after the French Revolution. The chapter ends with a discussion of the theoretical implications of our confirmatory findings for the rest of the book.

4.1 Tilly's Bellicist Theory of State Formation

Thanks to its parsimonious elegance and compelling logic, Tilly's theory of warfare and state formation has become the dominant account of European state formation in the early modern era and beyond. While Tilly's argument is far from the first attempt to link state formation to warfare,¹⁵ his historical erudition and eloquence secured the theory's prominence in the literature. A decade after forwarding his famous dictum,¹⁶ Tilly further elaborated his unsentimental and mostly materialist approach to state formation in an essay likening it to criminal rack-ets.¹⁷ Yet it is the classic book, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1992*, that presents the most complete and sophisticated version of his theory.¹⁸ Going beyond a narrowly coercive interpretation of state formation processes, he argues that toward the end of the second millennium, different mixes of coercion and capital converged on a relatively unified outcome, namely, the national state.¹⁹

Tilly also argues that warfare triggered internal change because it forced rulers to extract more resources from their societies, which brought about a shift from indirect to direct rule and meant that central rulers were able to bypass intermediaries, such as local elites.²⁰ In the Middle Ages, logistical constraints imposed by poor road networks forced aspiring monarchs to outsource much of their realms' defense to semiautonomous vassals in return for a right to extract resources from their subject populations. Technological and administrative progress gradually allowed states to intensify their territorial control. But despite

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hintze [1902] 1975a; Elias [1939] 1982.

¹⁶ Tilly 1975, 42.

¹⁷ Tilly 1985.

¹⁸ Tilly 1990.

¹⁹ Not to be confused with culturally cohesive nation-states, national states can be defined as "states governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures," which sets it apart from empires, city states, and other governance units, see Tilly 1990, 2.

²⁰ Tilly 1990, 103–17.

this early modern state expansion, indirect rule dominated until the French Revolution.²¹ Whether through conquest or other means of incorporation, most states did not begin to fully penetrate their societies until after the French Revolution, although the process started earlier in the more advanced states.

Tilly additionally suggests that ever more efficient and expensive warfare favored and produced external change, that is, larger and more powerful states.²² In turn, these states accumulated the resources needed to fight more wars by expanding even further and thereby eliminating smaller and less effective units. This evolutionary logic can be expected to increase the overall size of the surviving units while reducing their number as the system consolidated. Specifically, Tilly estimates the number of units in the European state system to have been 200 in 1500 – a number that had shrunk to twenty-five by 1918, following World War I.²³

4.2 Responses to Tilly's Theory in the Literature

Given its intuitive appeal both theoretically and empirically, it is not surprising that Tilly's theory remains at the center of the debate about the main drivers of state formation. Its overall compatibility with neorealist and rationalistic perspectives resonates with mainstream theorizing in the social sciences.²⁴ And in historical sociology, several bellicists have contributed to developing the paradigm.²⁵

Yet however influential it may be, the war-made-the-state thesis falls short of defining a scholarly consensus. Some scholars argue that in European history, predominantly economic factors rather than armed conflict drove development toward modern states. In this view, trade and markets gave rise to cities around which state structures eventually crystallized.²⁶ Others seek the origins of the modern state in medieval institutions, especially the Catholic Church and dynastic politics. Focusing on the former, Anna Grzymala-Busse argues that warfare sometimes disrupted rather than precipitated states' territorial expansion and was generally less central to states' developmental trajectories than Tilly assumes.²⁷

²¹ Tilly 1990, 108.

²² Tilly 1990.

²³ Tilly 1990, 45–46.

²⁴ Hobson 2000.

²⁵ Downing 1992; Ertman 1997.

²⁶ Friedman 1977; North and Thomas 1973.

²⁷ Grzymala-Busse 2019. See also Grzymala-Busse 2023.

In a critique acknowledging that the number of states declined in this period, Philip Gorski and Vivek Sharma contend that “dynastic consolidation” rather than war and conquest caused this trend.²⁸ In this interpretation, the monarchs were patriarchs rather than predators and were more interested in extending their family lineage than in expanding and demarcating their state territory, the latter being mostly a side effect of the former. Thus, at least within Latin Christendom, the main mechanism was not warfare but rather dynastic institutional developments, such as the introduction of primogeniture, that produced larger but fragmented states.

It is also possible to criticize the bellicists’ account without doubting that war contributed to state formation in important ways. In a sophisticated critique, Hendrik Spruyt argues that Tilly went too far in his Darwinian theorizing that interprets warfare as both a necessary and a sufficient condition of state formation.²⁹ According to a looser evolutionary interpretation that Spruyt finds more reasonable, states often resorted to defensive means to survive, such as alignment and bargaining, rather than internal balancing and armed struggle.

Clearly, the evolutionary logic of bellicist theorizing calls for a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of possible trajectories rather than a confirmatory, backward-looking analysis focusing on the winners of geopolitical competition.³⁰ While some of the early quantitative studies of European state formation restrict their case selection to great powers and great power wars,³¹ more recently, political economists have broadened the empirical scope.³² These studies explain complex trajectories of internal state building but say less about the external aspects of statehood, such as border change and territorial expansion.

Focusing squarely on these external aspects, Scott Abramson introduces a comprehensive geocoded dataset on governance units and their external borders from 1100 to 1790.³³ He detects a decline in the average log-transformed size of states and interprets this finding as a direct contradiction to Tilly’s original thesis. Moreover, he provides survival analysis showing that larger, rather than smaller, states tend to perish, which is a finding that also appears to challenge the bellicist interpretation. A second part of his study points to economic factors, such as soil fertility and urban growth, as primary drivers of state formation.

²⁸ Gorski and Sharma 2017.

²⁹ Spruyt 2017.

³⁰ Spruyt 2017.

³¹ Levy 1983; Rasler and Thompson 1989.

³² Besley and Persson 2009, 2011; Dincecco 2017; Gennaioli and Voth 2015.

³³ Abramson 2017.

While Abramson's path-breaking work represents the most comprehensive evaluation of the external dimension of European state formation to date, it is limited in some important respects. First, his study applies merely an indirect test of the theory in that it relies on measures of state size without linking these to conflict data. Second, his dataset starts in 1100, which appears to be too early a starting point compared to Tilly's own theory, and it stops too early. In principle, there is no reason to interrupt the time series at the French Revolution. Nevertheless, given this data limitation, we rely on 1790 as the cutoff for the main analysis given later. Furthermore, the period running up to the revolution was much less dominated by mercenary troops than Abramson suggests since by that time most great powers had professional standing armies.³⁴

To conclude, Tilly's critics question whether states grew larger in early modern Europe and, if they did, whether war rather than other factors caused this growth. Furthermore, some scholars are skeptical about applying a strict evolutionary logic to geopolitical competition. Thus, in the empirical literature, Tilly's approach to the external contours of state formation remains contested.

4.3 The Core Logic of the Bellicist Paradigm

In this section, we turn to our own attempt to evaluate the bellicist paradigm. The first step is to capture the external logic of this paradigm with a theoretical model that is displayed in Figure 4.1. Built around Tilly's link from war to state formation, the simplified scheme focuses

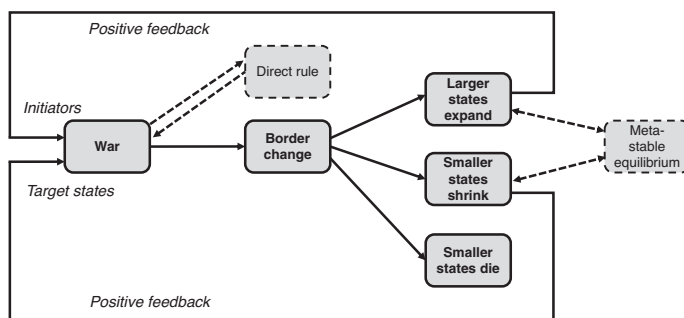


Figure 4.1 The bellicist model of war and border change.

Note: Dashed arrows mark aspects that are not explicitly tested in the empirical analysis.

³⁴ Hintze 1975b; Howard 1976.

on how warfare triggers border change, which redistributes territory in such a way that larger states gain and smaller states lose or even perish. But the reciprocal nature inherent in the second part of Tilly's dictum goes beyond this static link. What brings lasting change to the system is positive feedback that allows the big to get bigger (upper loop) and makes the small even smaller (lower loop). The upper loop sees large states grow, which in turn makes them more likely to launch another war. In contrast, shrinking states are prone to losing territory, which makes them more vulnerable to being targeted by other, more powerful states. In Tilly's own words, "The history of European state formation runs generally upward toward greater accumulation and concentration, but runs across jagged peaks and profound valleys."³⁵ Further, he argues, "states that lost wars commonly contracted, and often ceased to exist." This dynamic feedback logic is what gives the model its power to change the system in a dramatic and lasting way.³⁶

But these feedback loops do not run forever; if they did, the entire state system would end up a system-wide empire, which the European system came close to under Napoleon and Hitler and which did happen in China.³⁷ While they are not always well articulated in bellicist accounts, especially not in Darwinian simplifications of Tilly's theory, there is an implicit set of countervailing factors that dampen the expansionist loop and the state-contracting cycle.

Instead of following an ever more divergent trajectory in size and power, states in the European state system frequently reached an equilibrium due to various balance-of-power mechanisms. These are precisely the mechanisms mentioned by Hendrik Spruyt in his critique of deterministic interpretations of Tilly's theory.³⁸ In an astute statement, Kenneth Waltz classifies these as internal and external balancing.³⁹ The former pertains to states' attempts to increase their military capacity through armament, emulation, and innovation. States that were too weak to boost their capacity internally had to rely on external measures, such as defensive alliances, or seek protection through terrain features that slow down the positive feedback of conquest.⁴⁰ Thanks to balance-of-power mechanisms of this type, metastable equilibria emerged. While often quite stable for a long time, these equilibria were vulnerable

³⁵ Tilly 1990, 28.

³⁶ For more on positive feedback in Tilly's theory, see Hui 2005. See also Cederman 1997, chapter 4 and Gennaioli and Voth 2015 for explicit modeling of such processes.

³⁷ Hui 2005.

³⁸ Spruyt 2017.

³⁹ Waltz 1979.

⁴⁰ Taliaferro 2006.

to changes in weapons technology and geopolitical constellations.⁴¹ We note here that our empirical models only partially test the conditions leading to these equilibria through selected control variables (represented by the dashed arrows in the figure).

Although our empirical focus in this chapter is on the external dimension, the diagram also includes the link between warfare and internal changes (direct rule) because Tilly's theory prominently features this dynamic. According to bellicist logic, the introduction of direct rule and other measures of centralization creates another positive feedback loop driving state expansion.⁴²

What are the observable implications of this dynamic model? To start with the first part of Tilly's famous dictum, we propose:

Hypothesis H4.1a. Larger states are more likely to expand through war than smaller states.

Hypothesis H4.1b. Smaller states are more likely to shrink or perish through war than larger states.

The logic of these hypotheses hinges on whether large states tend to trigger war and smaller ones are more likely to be the target of an attack. In case of war, the distribution of territory, if any, also makes a difference. Due to their vast territories, larger states tend to have more resources to fight (and win) wars.⁴³ Hence, the theory expects larger states to make the most important territorial gains, which in turn allows these growing states to extract even more resources. In addition, persistent warfare can be expected to improve fighting skills and military logistics in the long run.

Ultimately, the evolutionary nature of the theory and the reciprocal logic of its main argument have long-term, path-dependent consequences. Whereas some states will manage to absorb enough territory to increase the territorial concentration of the system, others will fall by the wayside. This dynamic is inherent in Tilly's coercive logic: "Coercive means, like capital, can both accumulate and concentrate."⁴⁴ There are at least three partly overlapping mechanisms that contribute to the snowball effect of conquest.

First, aggressors can draw on cumulative resources gained from conquered provinces. For example, during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), Sweden engaged in such successful resource extraction from conquered territories in Germany that it hardly needed to increase

⁴¹ Gilpin 1981.

⁴² For a discussion of "self-strengthening" reforms along the internal dimension, see Hui 2005.

⁴³ For instance, population to tax and recruit and natural resources. Taliaferro 2006.

⁴⁴ Tilly 1990, 19.

taxation at home.⁴⁵ Subsequently, Prussia emulated this strategy in its own territorial expansion, which most prominently included resource-rich Silesia.⁴⁶ In contrast, peaceful gains acquired through dynastic marriages tended to be smaller and arguably less related to a strategic logic. The marriage pools available to monarchs, and thus, the territories they could gain peacefully, were limited by distance and, after the Reformation, in some cases by confession.⁴⁷ Furthermore, territories gained through peaceful treaties of union usually involved provisions of autonomy, which narrowed the resources to be gained from these provinces.⁴⁸

Second, rather than reflecting a long-term plan, military experiences during persistent warfare forced tactical innovation and organizational reforms that made the army even more fit for further expansion.⁴⁹ For example, Russia's Peter the Great's confrontations with the Swedes in the 1700s led him to westernize his army, which facilitated later conquests of Livonia and Eastern Finland.⁵⁰ Pacific expansion yielded no such direct benefits.

Third, while enlarged territory brought with it prestige in general, past military success served as a propagandistic tool that legitimized the state as a whole. Brian Downing describes this logic in the case of Prussia: "Military victory became the basic edifice of legitimacy for the state."⁵¹ The confidence gained from previous conquests also motivated further expansionist claims, as was the case in France's pretensions in the Italian Peninsula during the early sixteenth century.⁵²

This reasoning does not imply that pacific processes were unable to accelerate state expansion. A shift from fragmented and unstable polities caused by partible inheritance to one based on primogeniture created ever larger dynastic unions.⁵³ In this process of dynastic consolidation, it was the change in medieval inheritance practices rather than war-related developments that allowed European states to grow. Whether this dynamic was characterized by positive feedback is less obvious, but prestige and wealth accumulation may be plausibly postulated to have

⁴⁵ Downing 1992, 193.

⁴⁶ Downing 1992, 105. While nationalism dampened this positive feedback effect from the nineteenth century, the Nazi occupation of Europe created similar payoffs. Liberman 1996.

⁴⁷ Duchhardt 2011.

⁴⁸ Bendix 1978; Finer 1997.

⁴⁹ Tilly 1985.

⁵⁰ Palmer, Colton and Kramer 2007, 218.

⁵¹ Downing 1992, 100. For a similar argument applied to Latin American state building, see Schenoni 2021.

⁵² Ertman 1997, 94.

⁵³ Gorski and Sharma 2017.

this effect. Indeed, Gorski and Sharma report that the number of dynasties declined from twelve to five from 1300 to 1610,⁵⁴ but this reduction could have been an indirect outcome of conquest and warfare. It should also be noted that bellicist logic is compatible with threats of war rather than warfare itself.

These mechanisms also operate in the other direction. A loss of provinces, a lack of military experience, and the demoralizing effect of past defeats can be expected to accelerate a state's decline.⁵⁵ These processes prompt the following hypotheses regarding the positive feedback of war-related territorial gains or losses:

Hypothesis H4.2a. States that gained territory in previous wars are more likely to expand through war than states that gained less or nothing.

Hypothesis H4.2b. States that lost territory in previous wars are more likely to shrink or die as a result of war than states that lost less or nothing.

By implication, the bellicist paradigm expects the corresponding peaceful processes to have weaker effects on state size. It should be noted that these hypotheses compress war initiation and territorial redistribution into one step. Thus, states with a successful record of war-driven expansion will be more prone to start wars than states with a more modest record. Conversely, according to H4.2b, the vicious cycle of territorial decline implies that previous war losses will make such states likely targets of attacks. Moreover, the cumulative logic should also affect the outcome of wars, such that the most successful war-fighters will be the ones that gain the most and vice versa.

Following Tilly, this means that we need to study the European state formation process beginning in the early sixteenth century when the military revolution gained speed.⁵⁶ More specifically, Tilly points to the year 1490, which marked a new phase in the coercive expansion of European states.⁵⁷ Given the fragmentation of political authority and the absence of clear borders in medieval Europe, it becomes much more problematic to measure, let alone conceptualize, the shape or size of the system's main units the further back one goes. Indeed, the idea of well-defined territories applies only partially to the European continent, and even well into the modern age, there were many units that lacked clearly demarcated borders.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Gorski and Sharma 2017, 111.

⁵⁵ Schenoni 2021.

⁵⁶ For arguments that date state formation back to the Middle Ages, see Blaydes and Paik 2016; Grzymala-Busse 2019; Levi 1988; Strayer 1970.

⁵⁷ Tilly 1990, 45.

⁵⁸ Hall and Kratochwil 1993.

Although our empirical focus is on the period until 1790, which also marks the endpoint of Abramson's dataset, it is instructive to look beyond the French Revolution. Whereas this epochal event constituted a major upheaval in the state formation process, a complete test of the bellicist paradigm requires analysis of the period after the revolution as well. We return to this point at the end of the chapter.

While the historical nature of the bellicist paradigm precludes straightforward causal identification, our empirical strategy relies on descriptive statistics and regression modeling applied to several levels of analysis to test the link between warfare and territorial expansion. Still, the macro-historical focus of bellicist theorizing means that systemic analysis is a natural starting point, which we address in Section 4.4. After that, we disentangle the belligerent and pacific components of states' territorial gains and losses. Last, we go beyond existing work by providing a dyadic analysis of armed disputes and border change featuring all state pairs in early modern Europe.

4.4 Systemic Analysis

What are the observable implications of Tilly's theory at the systemic level? One key inference is that warfare increased the territorial concentration of the European state system.⁵⁹ Through conquest and related types of territorial expansion, some persistently belligerent states became larger, while peaceful ones remained small or were possibly absorbed by more powerful polities.

To derive a theoretically meaningful indicator of territorial concentration, we propose a measure that reflects the extent to which state borders partition the system's total territory. We define territorial concentration using a concentration index, which measures the probability that two randomly chosen locations happen to be in the same state. If Europe was dominated by a single empire, this number would be one. Conversely, if each location was governed by its own state, the system's concentration would be close to zero.⁶⁰

Figure 4.2 tells us that the territorial concentration of Europe was extremely low at the end of the Middle Ages, but then, it more than doubled from 1490 to 1790, increasing from 0.09 to 0.23, respectively. The increase was quite steep in the early sixteenth century but remained fairly steady until 1790, although there were a few short-term

⁵⁹ Because the political boundaries of "Europe" are ambiguous, we define the system in physical-geographic terms, using the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, the Carpathian mountain ridge, the Caspian Sea, and the Ural as its borders.

⁶⁰ See Chapter S4 for information about the data and the index.

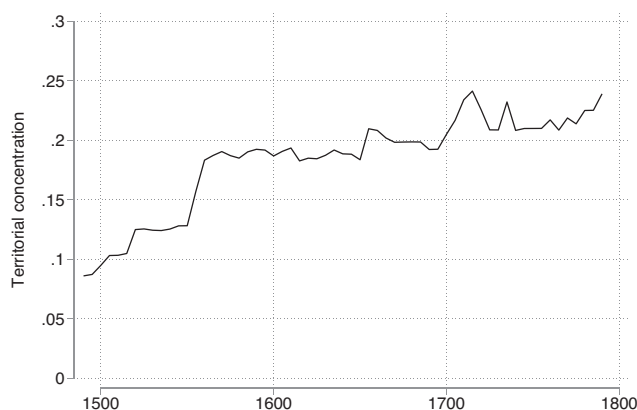


Figure 4.2 Territorial concentration in Europe, 1490–1790.

Data source: Abramson 2017.

fluctuations along the way. Moreover, as shown in Figure 4.12, territorial concentration continued to rise until the early twentieth century.

But this summary statistic offers merely circumstantial evidence since it entirely ignores warfare. To take a first step toward considering conflict behavior, we study territorial state sizes depending on whether the state in question experienced plenty of warfare. As outlined earlier, belligerent states should become larger than those with a more peaceful record. To illustrate this comparison, the ridge plot in Figure 4.3 divides the European states of 1590, 1690, and 1790 into belligerent and pacific categories (shown in red and green, respectively), depending on how much warfare they had been involved in since 1490. Specifically, belligerent states are defined as those that spent at least a quarter of the time since 1490 at war. The bellicist paradigm, the diagram shows that the warring states are much larger than the peaceful ones and that the two distributions diverge gradually. While the former category shifts toward larger sizes, especially by losing its smallest states, the latter one loses some of its largest members.⁶¹

While our systemic analysis yields some suggestive indications about the link between warfare and territorial expansion, the connections remain entirely descriptive. The main problem is that our findings derive from comparisons of highly aggregated data. To get a firmer grip on the nexus between state formation and warfare, we need to disaggregate the

⁶¹ This analysis samples on evolutionary outcomes by restricting the sample to states that survived. To address this limitation, we analyze state survival as an outcome in Section 4.5.

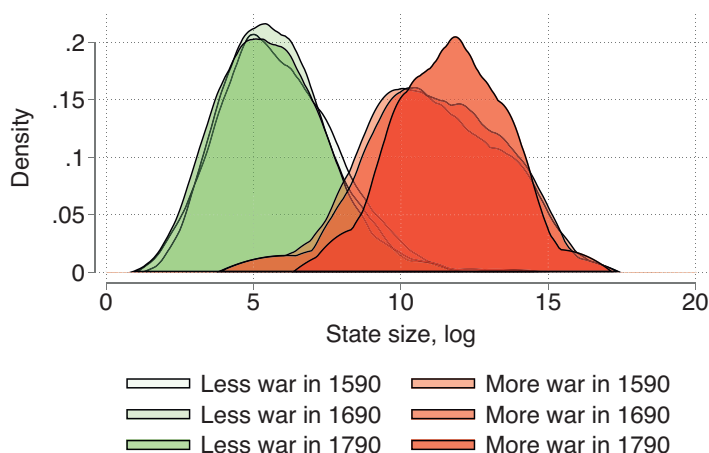


Figure 4.3 Comparing territorial size of warring and peaceful states.

Data source: Abramson 2017.

analysis. We start with the state level in Section 4.5 and move to the dyadic level in the subsequent section.

4.5 State-Level Analysis

We begin by tracing the historical trajectories of four great powers to gauge whether their territorial growth can be attributed to violent or nonviolent processes. If Tilly's theory is correct, we should be able to detect a significant contribution of armed conflict to state expansion.

We rely on extensive spatial computations to trace each state's trajectory over time, keeping track of all war-related and peaceful territorial gains beyond each state's core territory in 1490.⁶² Our approach combines data on war in pairs of states (A and B) with spatial data on territorial transfers. For each case of state A's territorial gain against state B, our procedure sorts the gains into three categories. *War-related gains* are recorded if the expansion occurred during or immediately after a war in Brecke's list that involved states A and B on opposite sides.⁶³ This relational correspondence guarantees the relatively close connection of the two categories of events. *Peaceful gains* comprise all territorial expansions by state A at the expense of state B where the two states did not participate in a conflict on opposite sides. *Terra nullius* refers to territorial expansion that concerns politically unclaimed areas.

⁶² For details, see Chapter S4.

⁶³ Brecke 1999.

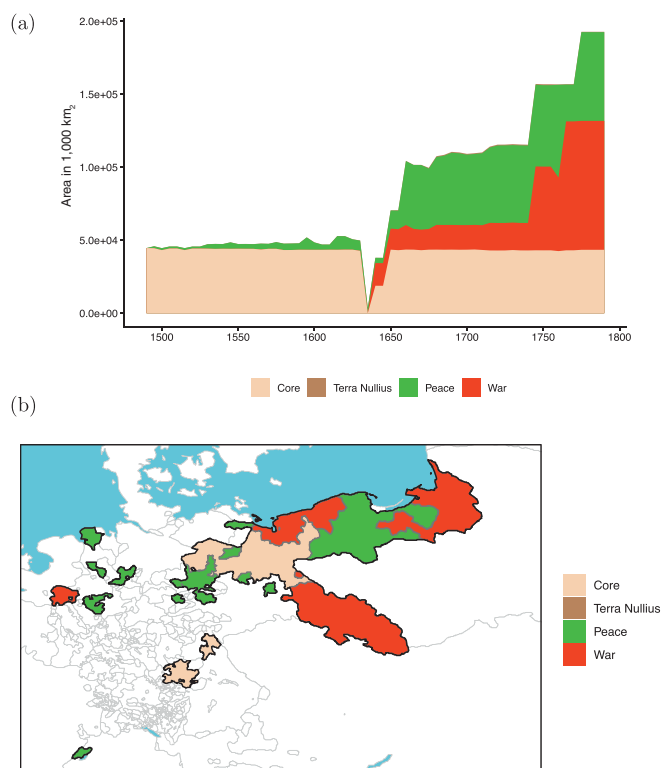


Figure 4.4 War-related and peaceful territorial growth of Prussia, 1490–1790. (a) Territorial growth of Prussia. (b) Prussia in 1790.

Data sources: Abramson 2017 and Brecke 1999.

Stacking these areas on top of each other in the (a) panels of Figures 4.4–4.7 depicts the trajectories of Prussia, France, the Habsburg Empire, and Russia. The corresponding maps display the situation in 1790, as shown in the corresponding lower panels (b). Following Tilly’s approach to state formation, the computation starts in 1490. In that year, we identify the core as the territory of the state (beige) and study territorial expansion beyond this area. Any territorial expansion beyond the core is sorted into three main categories – war, peace, and terra nullius – based on the aforementioned dyadic classification. All gains associated with violent conflict between the state in question and the losing state are added to the war gains (red). Any other expansion at the expense of other states are labeled peace gains (green). Expansion into unclaimed terrain is summed up as the terra nullius gains (brown).

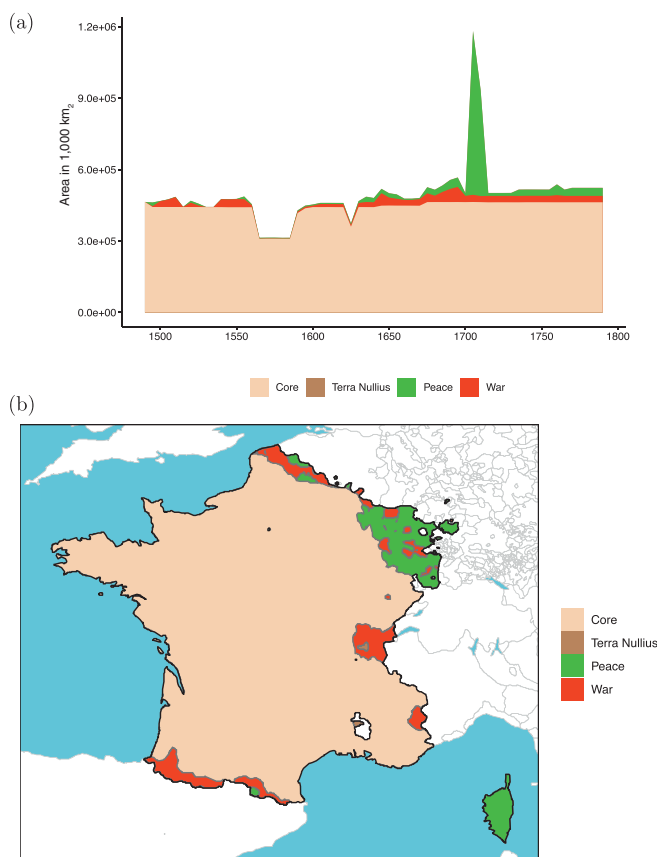


Figure 4.5 War-related and peaceful territorial growth of France, 1490–1790. (a) Territorial growth of France. (b) France in 1790.

Data sources: Abramson 2017 and Brecke 1999.

Prussia

Categorized by Tilly to have a coercion-intensive trajectory,⁶⁴ the history of Prussia serves as a clear example of a bellicist state formation process prior to the French Revolution. Panel (a) of Figure 4.4 reveals a striking growth trajectory that was primarily driven by war, as illustrated by the red area from the mid seventeenth century on. Before this process, the Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty added a few holdings to their territory

⁶⁴ Tilly 1990.

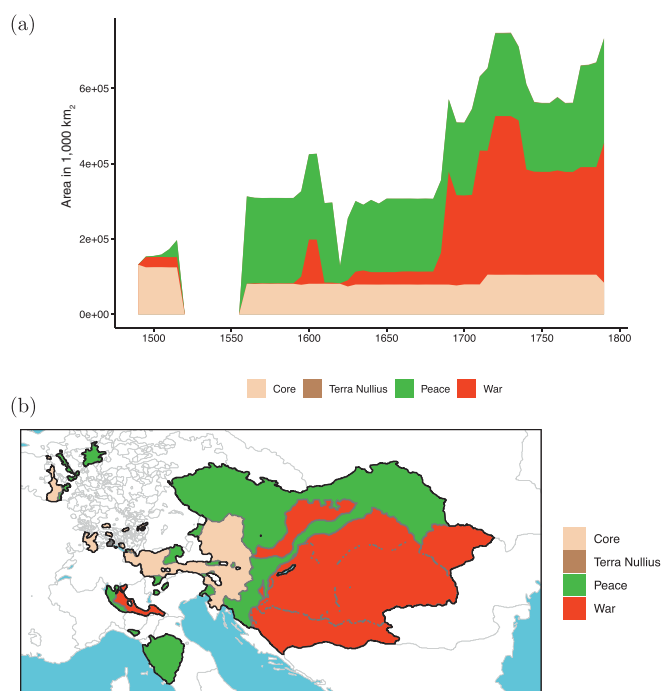


Figure 4.6 War-related and peaceful territorial growth of the Habsburg Empire, 1490–1790. (a) Territorial growth of the Habsburg Empire. (b) The Habsburg Empire in 1790.

Data sources: Abramson 2017 and Brecke 1999.

through marriage.⁶⁵ During the Swedish occupation in the Thirty Years' War, they briefly lost control over their core.

In the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, Prussia conquered parts of Pomerania as shown in panel (b) (see the red territory in the north). A decade later, conquest during the Great Northern War allowed Prussia to wrest East Prussia away from Poland (red territory in the east). Still feeling threatened on various fronts around the core and in need of resources, Frederick I and his successor Frederick the Great embarked on further expansionist campaigns.⁶⁶ To widen their resource base, the Prussian monarchs set out to conquer new territories, which aggravated existing rivalries and led to more wars and conquests.⁶⁷ This self-reinforcing process included the Silesian War with the Habsburgs,

⁶⁵ Bendix 1978, 157.

⁶⁶ Downing 1992, 92.

⁶⁷ Bendix 1978, 161; Downing 1992, 105; Ertman 1997, 256.

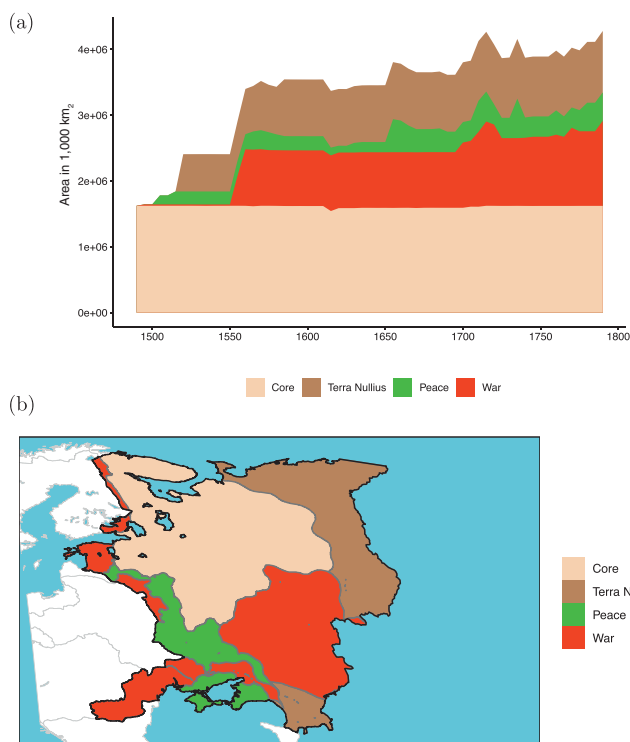


Figure 4.7 War-related and peaceful territorial growth of Russia, 1490–1790. (a) Territorial growth of Russia. (b) Russia in 1790.

Data sources: Abramson 2017 and Brecke 1999.

which allowed Prussia to gain the rich province of Silesia in the Seven Years' War (red area in the south). The latter led to a temporary occupation of Saxony and forced Prussia to expel its rivals from East Prussia and the former Julich-Cleves-Berg Province (red areas in the east and west, respectively). Overall, war transformed Prussia from a loose set of territories in 1490 to a much larger and more cohesive unit, a development that would accelerate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, culminating with the unification of Germany in 1871.

France

If Prussia represents an ideal-typical case of coercion-intensive growth, France experienced a more balanced development featuring capitalized

coercion.⁶⁸ The overall territorial growth of France was modest, especially compared to its territorial core in 1490, as shown in panel (a) of Figure 4.5. From that point until the French Revolution, France gained more new territory peacefully than it did through war.⁶⁹

In the sixteenth century, the French shifted their attention beyond the Alps, where they confronted the Spanish in the Italian Wars, and toward the Rhine, where they faced the Habsburgs. These wars led to permanent gains including the imperial territories of Metz, Verdun, and Toul. After the loss of parts of the core territory during the French wars of religion,⁷⁰ fifty years of warfare in the seventeenth century secured a series of territorial gains. France sought to conquer territories proximate to the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Rhine, and succeeded to a certain extent. The Thirty Years' War let it wrest areas close to the Pyrenees and the Rhine from Spain, while Franche-Comté and Transalpine Savoy were gained in the Franco-Savoyard War and the War of the Spanish Succession.

While France's peaceful gains are noticeable in panel (b),⁷¹ it is striking that a lot of what we know as contemporary France's shape was gained through warfare and conquest in this period. The idea of natural frontiers legitimized state expansion, as these borders were seen as important for defensive purposes. But even after having reached these frontiers, Napoleon continued to employ this discourse to justify further expansion.⁷² Thus, both before and after the French Revolution, the bellicist interpretation holds up quite well, although the French expansion was more modest than Prussia's.

The Habsburg Empire

While France made relatively moderate gains from the sixteenth century on, the Habsburg and Russian empires achieved the greatest territorial expansion prior to the French Revolution. Despite their backwardness and delay in implementing the direct rule, their outward expansion largely matches the bellicist account.

Conventional accounts of Habsburg geopolitics normally focus on the famous maxim, *Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube* (Let others

⁶⁸ Tilly 1990.

⁶⁹ However, the share of coercive expansion becomes more visible if one traces the territorial growth process from the early fifteenth century. War in the fifteenth century evicted the English from French territory and gave the French Crown control over large principalities, such as Burgundy and Brittany, see de Planhol 1994; Sahlins 1990.

⁷⁰ Ertman 1997.

⁷¹ These include Lorraine in the northeast, Corsica, which was purchased from Genoa, and a brief occupation of Spain through marriage.

⁷² de Planhol 1994; Sahlins 1990.

wage war, but thou, happy Austria, marry). According to this popular interpretation, Austrian expansion happened primarily due to strategic dynastic marriages. Of course, there is no denying that these dynamics account for much of the early growth of the empire, illustrated by the green gains during this period in panel (a) of Figure 4.6. But the figure also reveals that the pacific account obscures less peaceful aspects of Habsburg territorial expansion.⁷³

As shown by Wess Mitchell,⁷⁴ the Habsburgs developed a sophisticated military strategy that allowed them to retain and defend their core territory, which comprised the Austrian Hereditary Lands, the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, and the Kingdom of Hungary, all of which were incorporated mostly through peaceful bargaining. In contrast, profiting from the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, the Austrians made huge, war-related gains on the southeastern front that shored up their overall resources and secured sufficient geopolitical depth. Without any intermarriage with the Ottoman dynasties, a series of conquests and reconquests led to a major expansion of the empire's territory (see the red gains in panel (b), especially from the late seventeenth century). Following the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, the Habsburgs pushed the Ottomans back in a series of successful campaigns that regained all of Hungary and added new territory in Transylvania and the Balkans, including Croatia, Banat, and most of Wallachia.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the Habsburgs were able to check Russian expansion in the east while defending themselves against threats from the Prussians and the French in the west.⁷⁶ Although difficult geography and relative military inferiority forced the Austrians to adopt a mostly defensive grand strategy, they expanded opportunistically wherever resistance was weak, as in the Ottoman case and in the case of Poland's partition, which led to major gains including Little Poland and Galicia.⁷⁷

Panel (b) of Figure 4.6 shows how peaceful expansion in the north and parts of the Hungarian lands and the otherwise primarily war-driven expansion in the southeast resulted in a vast empire that included scattered holdings in today's Italy, southern Germany, and the Netherlands. Remarkably, the Habsburg Empire managed to survive the turmoil following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars for more than a century until its ultimate demise at the end of World War I.

⁷³ Rietbergen 2018, 162. The interruption in the territorial graph in the middle of the sixteenth century pertains to the dynastic union with Spain. Abramson counts both sides of the empire as parts of Castile.

⁷⁴ Mitchell 2018.

⁷⁵ Kann 1974, 70–77.

⁷⁶ Mitchell 2018.

⁷⁷ Mitchell 2018, 146–148.

The Russian Empire

In contrast to the Habsburgs, the Russian Empire has been characterized by most historians as a belligerent and expansionist state. Panel (a) of Figure 4.7 demonstrates that war accounts for most of its territorial gains after the mid sixteenth century. Significant territorial gains also resulted from Russia's conflicts in the east, involving Manchus and Chinese forces beyond the scope of the map in panel (b), and confrontations with various nomadic groups in the east and south.⁷⁸ It should be noted that our dataset's coverage of Russia is limited to its European part, so we cannot fully explain its eastward expansion.

Successive waves of conquests from the mid sixteenth century onward involved the annexation of the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates,⁷⁹ which were remnants of the Mongol Empire.⁸⁰ Determined to establish hegemony in both the west and south, the Muscovite dynasty spent several centuries in perpetual warfare.⁸¹ In the west, Russia was confronted by both Sweden and Poland–Lithuania. The Great Northern War, the Northern War, and the Russo–Swedish wars yielded major gains around the Gulf of Finland from the Swedes and the former territory of the Teutonic Order from Poland–Lithuania and further gains through the partition of Poland in 1772.⁸² In the south, the Russian tsars successfully fought the Ottoman Empire and its client state, the Crimean Khanate, for control of the Black Sea basin.⁸³ In sum, persistent warfare and conquest allowed Russia to make significant territorial gains in its northern, southern, and eastern theaters. In this sense, Russian history until 1790 and beyond fits Tilly's coercion-intensive trajectory.⁸⁴

Large-N Analysis of Gains and Losses

The four great power trajectories described earlier offer suggestive evidence that positive feedback was operating in specific cases, but they do not provide systematic support for any of our main hypotheses. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis only highlights what happened in successful polities. To counteract bias resulting from an exclusive focus on states that emerged as winners in geopolitical competition, we turn to

⁷⁸ Here shown as brown “terra nullius” areas in both panels of Figure 4.7. The latter set of conquests was motivated by the search for resources, in particular, minerals, which were lacking in the native Russian territory. LeDonne 2004.

⁷⁹ Here shown as the red areas south of the core in panel (b) of Figure 4.7.

⁸⁰ Bendix 1978.

⁸¹ LeDonne 2004.

⁸² Bendix 1978; LeDonne 2004.

⁸³ LeDonne 2004.

⁸⁴ Tilly 1990.

formal statistical testing of gains and losses at the country level. We rely on regression analysis that controls for country-specific effects to reduce the influence of geopolitical shocks. The two main dependent variables are each state's log-transformed territorial net gains and losses during each five-year period.⁸⁵

As a first tentative test of H4.1a, we analyze the effect of the territorial size of the state in peace and in war. As expected, larger states expand more than smaller states in general, but this growth becomes much steeper during wartime for moderately sized states. Panel (a) of Figure 4.8 illustrates this finding. To evaluate the dynamic version of this association,⁸⁶ we study the impact of cumulative war gains. As expected, the effect associated with war-driven growth is large and clearly separate from zero, as shown in panel (b).

Regarding territorial losses, support for the bellicist perspective is weaker at the country level (H4.1b). War-driven shrinkage of smaller states cannot be confirmed because the net effect of state size on territorial losses slopes upward, albeit less steeply than in the case of gains, as confirmed in panel (c). But note that the scope of losses also hinges on

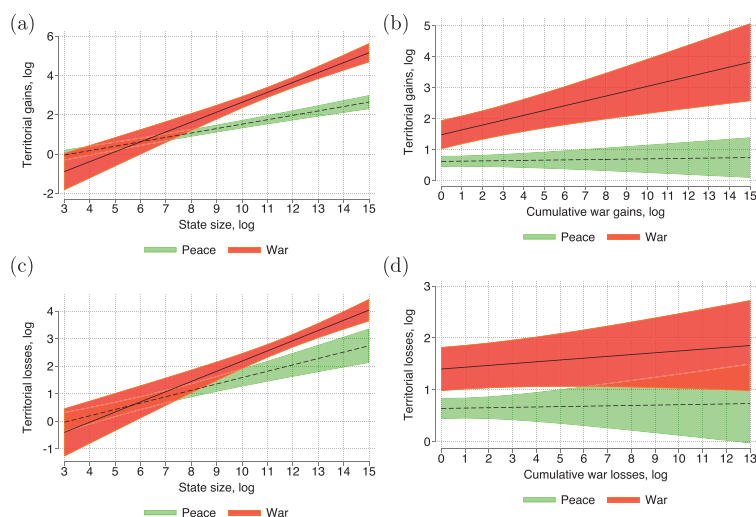


Figure 4.8 Territorial gains and losses at the country level (1490–1790). (a) Gains as a function of state size. (b) Gains as a function of cumulative war gains. (c) Losses as a function of state size. (d) Losses as a function of cumulative war losses.

⁸⁵ See Chapter S4 for full model specifications.

⁸⁶ See H4.2a.

the state's territorial size because only large states can lose a lot of territory. Still, wartime losses are generally greater than losses in peacetime, which offers some support for the theory. Turning to the cumulative measures of past losses to assess H4.2b, panel (d) reveals the expected upward slope, but it is close to zero with broad error bands.

To gain more clarity, we complement the linear models of losses with a state-level survival analysis that focuses on state death as the outcome of interest. The results from the survival analysis are shown in Figure 4.9. Again supporting the bellicist logic and, more specifically, H4.1b, these results show that state death during wartime is far more common for small states than for larger ones, while the opposite holds in times of peace.⁸⁷

To summarize, the results of the survival analyses align well with a world in which warfare is a key driver of interstate competition, state expansion, and, conversely, state death. Yet it is difficult to discern the effects relating to losses short of war at the country level. While the state-level analysis narrows the gap between conflict and territorial expansion compared to the systemic analysis, it is pitched at a relatively high level of aggregation. At the country level, the risk of ecological fallacies remains a concern, especially in the case of large countries that have many neighbors and that may be involved in several simultaneous conflicts. For these reasons, we proceed by disaggregating our evaluation of bellicist theory to the dyadic level.

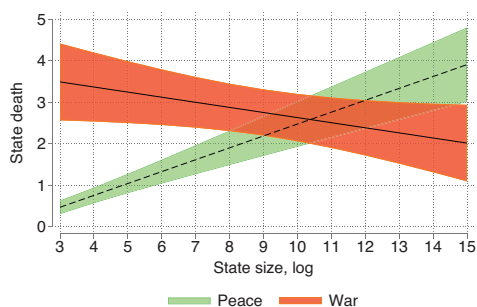


Figure 4.9 Effect of state size on state death during peace and war.

⁸⁷ Focusing on the long-term dynamics of state mortality, further analysis in Chapter S4 considers the cumulative logic used in the previous analysis. This addition is in line with an interpretation suggesting that states that experienced large territorial gains through war become “battle hardened” and are thus less likely to perish.

4.6 Dyadic Analysis

In this section, we base our investigation on pairs of states, here referred to as directed dyads, each one composed of a state A and a state B.⁸⁸ As in the previous analyses, we rely on state borders from Abramson's spatial dataset.⁸⁹ Based on five-year periods, this configuration adds up to more than three million dyad periods. It should be noted that this setup includes all dyads, even between noncontiguous states because restricting the sample to neighboring countries would lose sight of many great power interventions, for instance, by Spain on the Italian peninsula and in the Netherlands.

Our dependent variable is the territorial net gain of state A from the territory of state B, based on the same spatial computation used in the four state trajectories. Rather than merely considering absolute state size, the dyadic setup allows us to measure the relative size of state A compared to state B.

To test H4.2a and H4.2b, we introduce measures pertaining to war-related cumulative territories gained or lost. The cumulative gains indicators are the same as those used in the country-level analysis. Thus, if one of the states has accumulated large war-related gains in the past, we would expect partial or full conquest to be more likely. In the case of pacific gains, border change could also be facilitated, but the bellicist model expects the expansion to be primarily fueled by warfare.⁹⁰ As a test of H4.2b, information on holding cumulative losses is also used.

As postulated by H4.1a, the gains of state A increase with relative state size at wartime (see Figure 4.10). While larger states grow in peacetime as well, the growth rate is extremely modest compared to their wartime expansion. Conversely, if state B is smaller than state A, losses will be more likely, as anticipated by H4.1b. To illustrate the interaction, Figure 4.10 shows how state A's territorial gains, and thus state B's losses, vary with its relative size. In agreement with H4.1a and H4.1b, territorial expansion exhibits a strong degree of size dependence.

Based on our cumulative indicators of peaceful and war-related territorial gains and losses, further analysis gives us an opportunity to evaluate H4.2a and H4.2b directly. Generally, territorial changes are much more modest in peacetime. In support of H4.2a, the war-driven expansion trajectories appear to be strongly self-reinforcing. Likewise, there is a positive feedback dynamic affecting states' wartime losses after

⁸⁸ Again see Chapter S4 for the full model specification.

⁸⁹ Abramson 2017.

⁹⁰ If the areas fought over are more valuable in terms of resources, war-related gains may be more helpful to support further expansion. Furthermore, persistent war-driven expansion could also trigger a learning effect, leading to more effective war fighting.

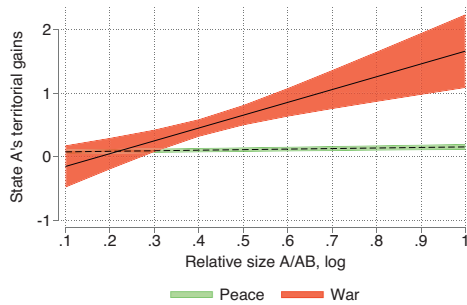


Figure 4.10 State A's dyadic gains as a function of its relative size.

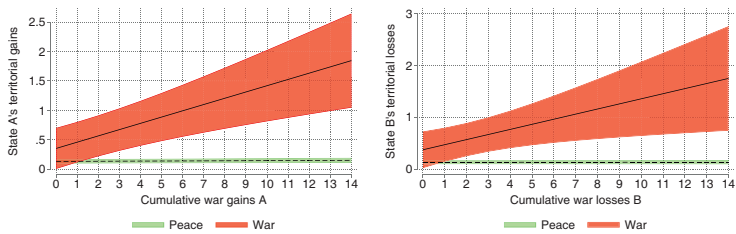


Figure 4.11 Territorial gains and losses at the dyadic level (1490–1790). (a) State A's dyadic gains as a function of cumulative gains. (b) State B's dyadic losses as a function of cumulative losses.

having experienced large cumulative war-related losses in the past, thus corroborating H4.2b.⁹¹

To facilitate the evaluation of the interaction with war, panel (a) of Figure 4.11 provides an illustration of the relationship. The effect for past peaceful gains remains much smaller, although it is clearly statistically separate from the null effect. As further evidence in favor of the overall theory, the findings confirm H4.2b – past war-related losses put downward pressure on state B's territory – and offer robust evidence in favor of the lower feedback loop in Figure 4.1. Panel (b) demonstrates this finding.⁹²

As another important step toward validating the underlying mechanisms, Chapter S4 features a supplementary analysis of the link between war and border change in the context of peace agreements.⁹³ Since most

⁹¹ This finding straightens out the question mark posed by the weak country-level findings as regards losses in the country-level analysis given earlier.

⁹² Chapter S4 offers more details on the dyadic analysis.

⁹³ See Chapter S4.

wars in early modern Europe ended with a formal peace treaty,⁹⁴ we can use this fact to close the analytical gap between war and territorial transfers. This information also helps to address potential problems of reverse causation because it highlights instances where states expanded as a result of war, rather than the other way around. This additional analysis shows that a large majority of the war-related territorial gains were codified in peace treaties, establishing a more direct link between territorial expansion and war.

4.7 Beyond the French Revolution

Although we end the analysis in 1790, the last year covered by Abramson's dataset, as noted earlier, there is in principle no reason to stop the analysis at the French Revolution since Tilly and other bellicists apply their theory beyond this historical turning point. Fortunately, the *Centennia Atlas* offers coverage until 2003.⁹⁵ Using this data source, Figure 4.12 depicts the trend toward higher territorial concentration that extends to the beginning of the twentieth century. The European state system's territorial concentration increased massively as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars and remained very high (above 0.3) throughout the nineteenth century. But after the collapse of the multiethnic empires at the end of World War I, it began to fall, stabilizing at around 0.22 in the interwar period. Although territorial concentration reached a brief, all-time high of around 0.37 during World War II, it subsequently decreased steadily, from 0.26 during the Cold War to 0.17 after the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia.⁹⁶ One would have to go all the way back to the early seventeenth and sixteenth centuries to find an equally fragmented system.

Clearly, the downward trend in territorial concentration beginning in the early twentieth century presents bellicist theorizing with a puzzle. Several possible explanations can be offered for this shift, including emerging international norms against conquest⁹⁷ and a particularly powerful trend toward self-determination after World War II.⁹⁸ Related to these explanations, ethnonationalism has had a mostly fragmenting influence on state size, leading to an overall net effect of disintegration rather than integration.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Fazal 2013.

⁹⁵ Reed 2008.

⁹⁶ In fact, Hitler's territorial gains can be seen as the last major instance of war-driven expansion in Europe.

⁹⁷ Fazal 2007; Zacher 2001.

⁹⁸ Fazal and Griffiths 2014.

⁹⁹ Hechter 2000.

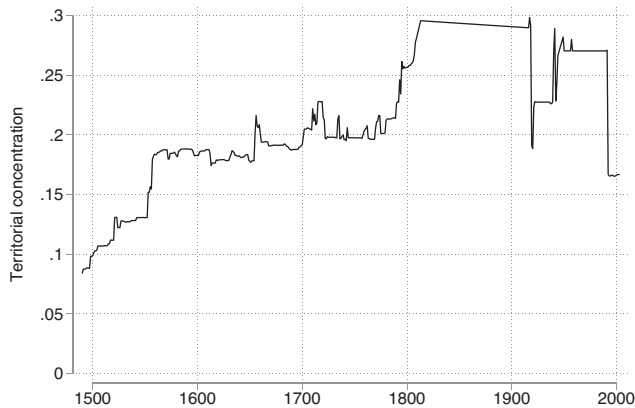


Figure 4.12 Territorial concentration, 1490–2003.

Data source: Centennia Historical Atlas.

In contrast, Tilly focuses on nationalism as a major boost for the consolidation of the system and an accelerator for the formation of “national states.”¹⁰⁰ According to Tilly and others, the shift from indirect to direct rule occurred primarily after the French Revolution. Before then, virtually all states were composites. They consisted of subsequently added territories that had a considerable amount of autonomy and there was no uniform exercise of rule across the state.¹⁰¹ As of Napoleon’s *levée en masse*, nationalism revolutionized warfare with profound implications for extraction and mobilization of resources based on the entire population.¹⁰²

Because Tilly does not fully consider the border-transforming effects of nationalism or changing international norms for that matter, this theory is only able to account for the evolution of territorial concentration until the early twentieth century. A full explanation of territorial state transformation through the early twenty-first century requires an extended, more general theory that traces the influence of international norms and nationalism’s border-transforming effect. The task of developing and testing such a theoretical framework will be addressed in Chapter 5. For now, note that until the early twentieth century, our index of territorial concentration indicates that the European state system was consolidating in agreement with bellicist expectations.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Tilly 1990, 116.

¹⁰¹ Elliott 1992.

¹⁰² Gellner 1983; Posen 1993a.

¹⁰³ A replication of the dyadic analysis using Centennia data from 1790 to 1915 shows that the link between warfare and territorial expansion remains very strong.

4.8 Conclusion

Using a stylized model capturing the external logic of the bellicist account of European state formation, this chapter offered an explicit evaluation of the paradigm. By combining data on state borders and warfare, we systematically disentangled war-related territorial gains from peaceful ones while disaggregating the analysis to dyadic relationships. Our analysis thus improves on previous tests, which have been qualitative, overly aggregated, or unable to address the nexus between war and state-making directly.

What to make of these findings? Do they vindicate Tilly's original claims about warfare and state formation in Europe? Part of the problem, it seems, is that the very meaning of state formation remains deeply ambiguous. Clearly, our evidence does not address the initial founding of the states in question or the invention of modern sovereignty as a concept. Nor does it seem reasonable to restrict territorial change to Darwinian elimination of units through conquest. Several critics rely on this strict version of bellicism to cast doubt on Tilly's theory in favor of pacific processes, including trade and coalitions, religion, or dynastic politics.¹⁰⁴ Despite contributing greatly to our understanding of state formation, these alternative accounts for the most part offer complementary, rather than competing, explanations.

Indeed, our findings confirm that war played a central role in the expansion and consolidation of European states' territories. This is not to deny that the great European dynasties also helped to shape state trajectories, but such a logic is at least partly compatible with war-driven expansion. For sure, in many cases, dynastic politics reflected the military balance as a good number of dynastic marriages were codified in peace treaties following wars.¹⁰⁵ Traditionally, dynastic entanglements put limits on territorial aggrandizement through conquest, especially through intermarriages that turned female spouses into "hostages" of foreign royal families.¹⁰⁶ Yet, a new generation of rulers started to emerge in the eighteenth century, including Charles XII of Sweden and Frederick the Great of Prussia, who put state interest before dynastic family values. This development, together with nationalism, broke the backbone of the *ancien regime*, paving the way for total warfare and ruthless war-driven expansion at the hands of Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin, as analyzed and prophetically anticipated by Carl von Clausewitz.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ See Abramson 2017; Gorski 2003 and Grzymala-Busse 2019; and Gorski and Sharma 2017, respectively.

¹⁰⁵ Duchhardt 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Abe 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Clausewitz 1984; see also Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

All in all, there is ample evidence of a war-driven expansion process, within certain bounds, in early modern Europe, thus vindicating a nuanced interpretation of Tilly's original theory. In this sense, war did make states or at least made the surviving units *larger*. The relationship between war and state expansion is explicitly endogenous, as Tilly's dictum suggests. To some extent, our cumulative gain and loss variables capture the observable implications of reciprocal causation in this positive feedback process.¹⁰⁸ Still, our statistical analyses with observational data provide solid support for the bellicist paradigm, which is further bolstered by our analyses of aggregate trends, state-level trajectories, and new data on peace agreements.

To reach this conclusion, we had to abstract away from several important aspects of competitive state formation processes. For one, we focused on violent conflict, without taking into account threats of violence, although threats are entirely in line with the war-fighting logic of bellicist theorizing. Thus, it is likely that an analytical extension that incorporates bargaining processes would further vindicate a wider interpretation of the bellicist perspective because many cases of peaceful territorial change occurred when weak states succumbed to threats issued by powerful ones. In addition, as our coverage is limited to Europe, we cannot account for the vast territorial gains the European colonial powers made overseas, although these expansions, too, are in principle compatible with the war-centric logic.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, throughout the analysis, we focused on territorial size as the prime measure of power. Tilly's theory offers a more sophisticated approach that stresses how smaller states were able to survive for long periods, thanks to access to capital.¹¹⁰ At the time of the French Revolution, direct rule had not been successfully imposed on European populations and, in several cases, never would be. A complete account of the European state formation process requires major theoretical amendments that go beyond Tilly's narrowly materialist reasoning.¹¹¹ In particular, the French Revolution and its aftermath ushered in a completely new type of political legitimacy that cannot be reduced to a mere

¹⁰⁸ However, it is difficult to see how the entire macro process could be exogenized through instrumental variables or other approaches to causal identification. Obviously, this does not preclude more limited research questions being studied with such tools. In fact, sophisticated recent studies illustrate how to leverage instrumental variables, random shocks, natural experiments, and synthetic controls. See, e.g., Abramson 2017; Schenoni 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Warfare between the British and the French over the dominance of North America in the eighteenth century absorbed considerable resources.

¹¹⁰ See also Stasavage 2011.

¹¹¹ Brubaker 2010.

amplification of state power.¹¹² Without full appreciation of the influence of nationalism, it is impossible to explain why direct rule could not be successfully implemented in the Habsburg and Russian empires, and how this failure eventually had fatal consequences for these polities.¹¹³ Future research will need to study how territorial expansion interacts with the state's internal structuring, especially with respect to resource extraction and mobilization, thus bringing together systematic research covering both dimensions.¹¹⁴

As suggested by the downward slope of territorial concentration from the early twentieth century in Figures 4.12 and I.1 in the Introduction, Tilly's theory cannot easily be extended to state formation in contemporary Europe. Nor is it advisable to extrapolate Tilly's Eurocentric theory to other parts of the world without theoretical modifications. Our model does not explicitly capture when negative feedback replaces its positive counterpart. Such an extension is needed to account for why some state systems collapsed into a single, dominant state. While the war-related positive-feedback mechanisms examined here may also apply beyond Europe in some cases, Chin-Hao Huang and David Kang show that in East Asia, emulation and learning rather than bellicist competition created the state system during the first millennium.¹¹⁵ Likewise, Mark Dincecco, James Fenske, and Massimiliano Onorato find that in Africa, warfare gave rise to "special-interest states" with high fiscal capacity and high levels of internal conflict.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in today's world, peaceful interventions by international actors rather than interstate war dominate the external dimension of state building.¹¹⁷ This situation could change of course, but Russia's struggle to make territorial gains in Ukraine following its recent invasion reminds us that international norms and nationalism make large-scale conquest very difficult.¹¹⁸ These scope conditions do not entirely rule out limited territorial gains,¹¹⁹ but today's international system clearly operates differently from that of early modern Europe. For this reason, we leap into the nationalist era. The Chapter 5 addresses how nationalism affected the size of states beginning in the early nineteenth century.

¹¹² Stuurman 1995.

¹¹³ Spruyt 2017, 95–96.

¹¹⁴ For an attempt to model both processes with an agent-based modeling, see Cederman and Girardin 2010.

¹¹⁵ Huang and Kang 2021.

¹¹⁶ Dincecco, Fenske and Onorato 2019.

¹¹⁷ Lee 2022.

¹¹⁸ Fazal 2007.

¹¹⁹ Altman 2020.

5 Nationalism and the Puzzle of Reversing State Size*

In a pioneering study, David Lake and Angela O'Mahony detect a major shift from integration to disintegration in the scale of governance around the world.¹ Having increased for centuries, the territorial size of states started to decline in the late nineteenth century, a trend that persists to the present day. In this chapter, we return to the puzzle that we posed in the introduction to this book:² Tilly's expectations point toward a steady increase in state size, so why the downward turn?

Other scholars offer several interpretations of this reversal. Enlarging the scope to include colonial holdings, Ryan Griffiths attributes a key turning point to the end of World War II when emerging norms of self-determination favored secession as opposed to conquest.³ But while the puzzle of reversing state size may no longer be as perplexing as it was to modernization theorists, Marxists, and realists, who expected a steady trajectory toward larger polities – little consensus exists on its resolution.⁴ In fact, despite border change being a fundamental transformer of main governance units over the past two centuries, a systematically tested explanation of it is missing in the literature on state size. Although a wealth of powerful analytical ideas exists at the macrolevel, scholarship has yet to articulate a specific account of the processes that drive border change and state size.

Confronting this challenge head-on by drawing on the theoretical principles introduced in Chapter 2, we argue that the puzzle's resolution requires considering the impact of nationalism, defined as a doctrine that requires state and national borders to be congruent.⁵ Integrating

* This chapter builds directly on the article "Nationalism and the Puzzle of Reversing State Size" that appeared in *World Politics*. Cederman, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2023.

¹ Lake and O'Mahony 2004.

² See Figure I.1.

³ Griffiths 2016. See also Fazal and Griffiths 2014. Griffiths' analysis is inspired by Alesina and Spolaore 2003, who argue that states' size reflects a trade-off between cultural cohesion and economies of scale.

⁴ Sharpe 1989.

⁵ Gellner 1983. See Chapter 2.

theoretical ideas from the nationalism literature that have so far been scattered in separate studies, we develop an account that links state-nation incongruence with well-defined border change processes and the effects they have on state size. Ethnic fragmentation of states often foments calls for secession that will shrink a state if successful. Territorial fragmentation of ethnic groups across state borders motivates unification that increases the winning state's size. In a combination of both incongruences, dominant groups with minority ethnic kin abroad may realize irredentist border change – a form of territorial transfer that does not affect the average size of the state.⁶ These three types of border change are consistent with the ideals that nationalists pursue in aligning state borders with ethnic geography.

Rather than measure nationalist motivations and activities directly, which, given current data limitations, goes well beyond the scope of this book, we study their structural underpinnings with new geocoded data on state borders and ethnic settlements digitized from a variety of historical maps and atlases as described in Chapter 3. We rely on this information to explain the changes in state sizes in Europe since 1816 and around the world since 1886. Our spatially explicit data allow us to analyze the observable implications of ethnic nationalism at the level of the system as a whole, the level of specific states, and the level of dyadic border-change processes. Although previous studies have examined select processes, to our knowledge, none has brought secession, unification, and irredentism together in a unified empirical framework.

Our empirical analysis indicates that following the period of state enlargement that started in early modern Europe to the unification of Germany and Italy in the mid nineteenth century, ethnic nationalism has exerted downward pressure on state size. At the global systemic level, we establish that the continuous shrinking of states corresponds to a decrease in their ethnic heterogeneity and to ethnic groups' territorial fragmentation. At the state level, we find that ethnically heterogeneous states tend to shrink and states whose main ethnic group is split by state borders are prone to grow. We disaggregate all observed border changes into ethnic and nonethnic instances of secession, unification, and territorial transfer. Our analyses show that ethnically heterogeneous states experience more ethnic secession than those that are more homogeneous, and states with a territorially fragmented main ethnic group exhibit a higher likelihood of growth through unification or irredentism. Returning to the macrolevel, we find that ethnic border change drove the early growth of European states as well as the subsequent shrinkage of

⁶ We define the dominant group as the ethnic group that has the most direct access to the state's executive power. See also Chapter 2.

states in Europe and beyond. Nonethnic border changes have had a net positive effect on average state size since the late nineteenth century.

In sum, our evidence shows that nationalism's transformation of the state has produced both integration and disintegration and that its overall effect has been dominated by the latter. Focusing on the structural drivers of changes in state size, our analysis also demonstrates that, especially in Europe, ethnic border change has played an important role in the ethnic homogenization of states. Although ethnic cleansing and assimilation have also contributed considerably to the ethnic homogeneity of states existing today, potential reverse causality induced by such ethnic change does not explain our findings.

5.1 Did a Reverse Trend in State Size Occur?

We start our investigation of the reversing trend in state size with descriptive evidence. The dotted line in Figure 5.1 reports average state size as the arithmetic mean, replicating the findings of Lake and O'Mahony.⁷ Including all sovereign states around the world while excluding their colonies, these scholars report a doubling of average state size throughout the nineteenth century, followed by a steady decline throughout the twentieth century.

Because Lake and O'Mahony's time-series data are nonspatial, we use two alternative geocoded datasets that allow for explicit spatial analysis

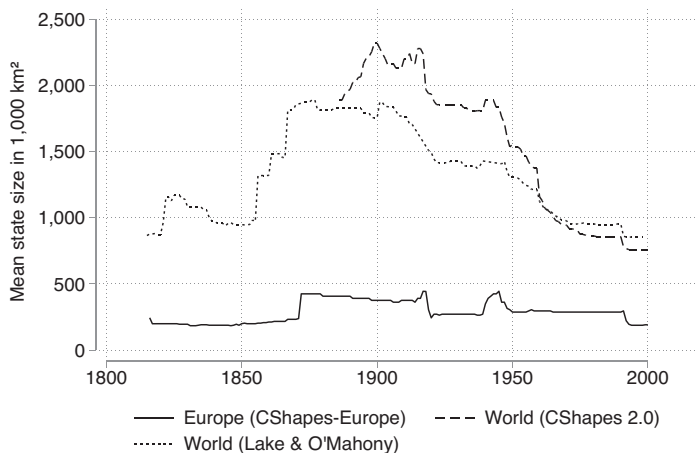


Figure 5.1 Trends in mean state size in Europe and beyond.

⁷ Lake and O'Mahony 2004.

of political and ethnic boundaries. First, to reach sufficient historical depth, we describe the development of the European state system in terms of average state size since the early nineteenth century based on the CShapes Europe dataset introduced in Chapter 3 and depicted by the curve of the solid line in Figure 5.1.⁸ Second, we widen the scope to the global state system using the CShapes 2.0 dataset to capture the full territorial size of the colonial empires, as illustrated by the dashed line in Figure 5.1. In the main analysis, we add together all territory belonging to each sovereign state, including its core area and any colonial holdings. In contrast to the narrower Lake and O'Mahony and CShapes Europe data, using our conceptualization means that the area of the United Kingdom includes the entire British Empire.

Confirming Lake and O'Mahony's puzzle of the "incredible shrinking state,"⁹ the CShapes Europe data show how European state territories increased until the late nineteenth century before starting to decline in the twentieth. These shifts in state size stem from the birth and death of states. Within the European state system, the German and Italian unification processes brought with them a precipitous decline in the number of states, mirroring the increase in average state size, followed by a steady increase in the number of European states and culminating in the creation of postcommunist states in the 1990s.

Does this puzzling trend hold at the global level? Considering the lack of data prior to the late nineteenth century, we see only a slight increasing trend in state size before the decline sets in around 1900 and lasts through the present day. This declining trajectory reflects major geopolitical upheavals, such as the collapse of the land empires at the end of World War I and, even more dramatically, the dissolution of colonial empires following World War II. The collapse of the USSR and other communist states at the end of the Cold War marks a smaller, but distinctive, movement downward in the curve. As in the European case, globally, the trend in the number of states mirrors changes in state size.

5.2 Existing Explanations of State Sizes and Their Trends

The literature on state size focuses mostly on warfare and economies of scale. We briefly review these explicit theories leaving aside the extensive literature on the underlying causes of border change. We draw on them

⁸ The coding of this new dataset involved backdating the CShapes 2.0 dataset for European cases using information from Centennia: Historical Atlas and Scott Abramson's border data. The CShapes 2.0 dataset covers all sovereign states and their dependencies around the world from 1886 through 2017. See also Chapter 3.

⁹ Lake and O'Mahony 2004.

to build our argument about how nationalism affects processes of border change.

As we saw in Chapter 4, bellicist theories of European state formation suggest that states have grown steadily through persistent warfare since the Middle Ages. As the European state system spread to the rest of the world through colonization, the effective areas controlled by centralized territorial states further increased.¹⁰ According to this geopolitical perspective, one would expect state size to continue to grow or, because warfare has become less frequent, to stabilize. Thus, the persistent decline in state size during the twentieth century challenges bellicist theorizing, which expects state size to further increase as powerful states continue to grow even more powerful.¹¹ Arguably, the main reason for this anomaly relates to the materialist orientation of Tilly and other bellicist scholars that makes it difficult to appreciate the revolutionary impact of nationalism on the size and shape of states.¹²

Stressing economic production as opposed to geopolitics, economists similarly see value in large-scale governance. This field of literature typically postulates a trade-off between economies of scale and decreasing returns to scale imposed by logistical limitations and preference heterogeneity rather than by geopolitical constraints.¹³ In a widely cited article, David Friedman suggests that territorial state size reflects an optimal allocation of net tax revenues based on land and labor.¹⁴ Building on these ideas, Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore view state size as resulting from a cost-benefit choice between economies of scale and efficiency-reducing preference heterogeneity resulting from cultural diversity.¹⁵ The influence of the latter becomes more important as trade openness and democratization reduce the value of economies of scale associated with large polities. Trade-driven globalization and democratization, then, can account for the trend toward smaller and more ethnically homogeneous states.¹⁶

Adopting an empirical approach, Lake and O'Mahony's study addresses this issue using the first systematic panel data on the territorial size of sovereign states that covers the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁷ Based on these pioneering data, they detect a clear trend toward larger states in the nineteenth century, followed by a declining

¹⁰ Roshwald 2015.

¹¹ Again, see the puzzle posed in the Introduction.

¹² Brubaker 2010; Stuurman 1995. See also Chapter 4.

¹³ Though see Bean 1973.

¹⁴ Friedman 1977.

¹⁵ Alesina and Spolaore 2003.

¹⁶ Alesina and Spolaore 2015.

¹⁷ Lake and O'Mahony 2004.

trajectory in the twentieth century. To account for this puzzling reversal, they consider several explanations, including long-term changes in economies of scale, international economic openness, preference heterogeneity, and political regime type. Finding little evidence for any of these accounts, partly because of a lack of time-varying ethnicity data, Lake and O'Mahony propose an account that contrasts the emergence of large federal democracies in the nineteenth century to that of smaller, more unified ones in the twentieth, while admitting that this conjecture amounts to little more than an "uncaused cause."¹⁸ Although this explanation is in principle compatible with our nationalist account, it replaces the old puzzle with a new one: Why did the size of democracies change in the first place? Furthermore, Lake and O'Mahony's study leaves room for further research that includes colonial dependencies, which are associated with the most momentous transformation of the scale of governance in modern history.

More recent data collection efforts cover the colonial dimension more fully. Inspired by Alesina and Spolaore's theory, Ryan Griffiths explains the decline in state size by referring to international norms and self-determination.¹⁹ Drawing on Tanisha Fazal's insight that state death has become exceedingly rare in the twentieth century,²⁰ Griffiths argues that we have now entered "the age of secession." Fazal suggests the key turning point was the major wave of secession through decolonization that followed World War II.²¹

While these accounts offer important clues about the current trend of declining state size, they say less about the processes that drive it. Alesina and Spolaore are "not interested in 'nations' as distinct from 'nation-states'"; thereby, they explicitly reject the influence of nationalism.²² But their theoretical focus on ethnic heterogeneity is well suited to a macro explanation of nationalism-driven state transformation.²³ Although open to considering nationalism as a potential explanation for the shrinking of states, Griffiths highlights normative changes after World War II, including self-determination movements and decolonization.²⁴ Importantly, his interpretation overlooks how nationalism and the idea of national self-determination had already started to transform

¹⁸ Lake and O'Mahony 2004, 700.

¹⁹ Griffiths 2016; Griffiths and Butcher 2013.

²⁰ Fazal 2007.

²¹ See also Fazal and Griffiths 2014.

²² Alesina and Spolaore 2003, 3.

²³ More recent studies of nation building by Alesina and colleagues focus on nationalism, although not in relation to state size. See Alesina and Reich 2015.

²⁴ Griffiths 2016. See also Fazal and Griffiths 2014.

European state borders in the nineteenth century and continued to do so worldwide more intensively following World War I.²⁵

In sum, Lake and O'Mahony's puzzle of the incredible shrinking state remains unsolved, especially because the effect of nationalism has yet to be adequately addressed. Much of contemporary theorizing about state size has focused on abstract explanations stressing rational choices leading to optimal outcomes rather than on considering macrohistorical trends driven by structural, evolutionary, and partly unplanned processes, such as nationalism.

5.3 Nationalism and Its Effect on State Size

Before explaining the reverse trend in state size, we consider why states expanded before the onset of nationalism. As previously mentioned, the geopolitical process that consolidated the European state system – to a large extent through warfare, as argued by the bellicist school – eliminated scores of units.²⁶ Conquest and other types of war-related territorial acquisition increased the average territorial size of states. This process entailed border adjustments that occurred largely independently of the underlying ethnic map.²⁷ For example, peace agreements redistributed territory for reasons relating to dynastic claims and balance-of-power considerations rather than the ethnic identity of affected populations.²⁸ This dynamic explains why states were growing for centuries in early modern Europe and well into the nineteenth century. Colonialism extended this long-term consolidation of the state system beyond Europe's borders, mostly through conquest.

Although the emergence of nationalism in the late eighteenth century did not immediately change the expansionist logic, it introduced the new principle of political legitimacy. Traditional territorial sovereignty was thus complemented and partly substituted by a doctrine of popular sovereignty according to which political power derives from the people rather than from the monarch.²⁹ After the French Revolution, this partial transition from territorial to popular sovereignty gradually put pressure on state borders that violated the nation-state principle that requires that state and national borders coincide.³⁰

²⁵ Manela 2007.

²⁶ While other researchers highlight alternative explanations such as economic factors, Abramson 2017, and medieval institutions, Grzymala-Busse 2019, the long-term increase in the size of European states is undisputed, see Chapter 4.

²⁷ White 2004; Hintze 1975*a*.

²⁸ Holsti 1991.

²⁹ Mayall 1990; Hinsley 1973; Yack 2001; Roshwald 2015.

³⁰ Gellner 1983.

In Western Europe, state-led nationalist assimilation of minorities to a large extent eliminated state-nation incongruence, especially where such nation building started early and benefited from an ethnic core around which a nation-state could be constructed.³¹ But even under favorable circumstances, such processes could take a long time, as shown by the case of France.³² Furthermore, in other parts of the world and at later stages of world history, assimilation was often unsuccessful. In these cases, state borders were typically adjusted to the ethnic landscape through right-sizing rather than the other way around. As borders shifted in response to geopolitical tensions, given threats of and actual resorts to violence, the process of transformation led to either the expansion or shrinking of existing states, depending on the fit between political and ethnonationalist borders.³³

The spread of nationalism through nineteenth-century Europe illustrates this process.³⁴ While state formation in Western Europe enabled mostly successful nation building around ethnic cores, farther east, little congruence between states and nations existed. In Western Europe, disjunctions included the areas that would later become unified as Germany and Italy. Both states overcame the political fragmentation of large ethnic communities that previously had been split into tiny political units loosely organized under the heading of the Holy Roman Empire. The shock of the Napoleonic Wars triggered a process of nationalist mobilization, which was initially mostly cultural but became increasingly politicized and ultimately produced border change through unification. In Eastern Europe, the situation was precisely the opposite: Huge empires were made up of many ethnic groups, some of which were in the process of emerging as ethnic nations. In this region, the diffusion and politicization of nationalist principles took longer than they had in the west, partly because of a relatively low level of literacy and the fact that most elites were inspired by German rather than French nationalist influences. Thus, far from operating like a light switch, across the continent, nationalism developed in steps through cultural awakening, politicization, and mass mobilization.³⁵

Given these historical facts, we would expect nationalist politics to first produce an expansion of state size in the European central belt of small states and principalities before producing a downward trend as the European land empires disintegrated. Because the rest of the world was

³¹ Smith 1986.

³² In his classic study of France after the French Revolution, Weber 1976 demonstrates that it took nation builders more than a century to build a unified nation-state.

³³ Miller 2007; Sharpe 1989.

³⁴ Schieder 1991; Roshwald 2015.

³⁵ Hroch 1985.

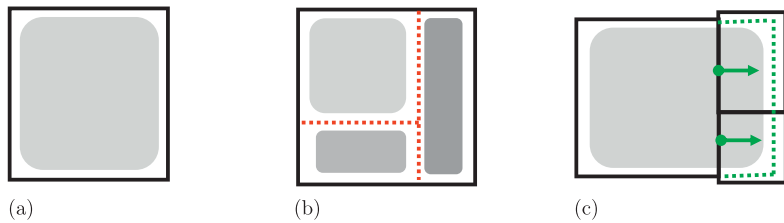


Figure 5.2 Nation-state and two types of state-nation incongruence. (a) Nation-state. (b) Ethnic fragmentation of the state. (c) Territorial fragmentation of the dominant group.

Note: States are shown as solid boxes and ethnic groups as shaded gray shapes. Dotted lines depict the new borders.

to a considerable extent becoming under the domination of European colonial empires, a powerful reduction in state size could be expected beyond Europe once the thirst for self-determination had been awakened, especially after Woodrow Wilson's promotion of this principle at the Versailles peace conference.³⁶

Having outlined how nationalism spread as a historical macro process, we shift our analytical focus to the state level. According to Gellner, nationalism requires "that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state . . . should not separate the power-holders from the rest."³⁷ To separate these two situations, we label the former case territorial fragmentation of an ethnic group and the latter ethnic fragmentation of the state.

Figure 5.2 illustrates these two deviations from the nation-state ideal. Panel (a) illustrates a perfect nation-state, shown as a box with a solid boundary that coincides with the boundary of its only ethnic group. Panel (b) depicts the ethnic fragmentation of a state, and panel (c) shows the territorial fragmentation of the state's dominant ethnic group.

Deriving the Main Hypotheses

How do the two types of nation-state discrepancy affect state borders? In ethnically fragmented states, territorial losses through secession should be more likely, as shown in panel (b). Generally, the more fragmented a state, the more reasons for territorial correction exist. In this case, the stateless and excluded groups are particularly likely to take secessionist action.³⁸ By contrast, panel (c) shows that a tendency toward territorial

³⁶ Manela 2007; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

³⁷ Gellner 1983, 1.

³⁸ Germann and Sambanis 2021.

expansion can be expected where the dominant segment's ethnic group is divided by state borders such that an important part of it extends into neighboring state territory. This integrating process usually features the unifying state as the main driving force, although it is also possible that elites representing external kin groups support unification.³⁹

In both types of discrepancies, ethnic nationalism increases pressure on borders by engendering revisionist grievances. Such claims can be advanced by stateless ethnic groups, by states themselves, or, in cases of irredentism, by both. But without resources and organization, grievances and claim-making are unlikely to produce sufficiently powerful collective action to effect border change.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, commonly felt resentment about the status quo may boost mobilization.⁴¹ In addition to grievances, common ethnic identity also tends to facilitate nationalist mobilization processes.⁴²

In sum, our reasoning uncovers a pathway from incompatibilities to border change that produces either smaller or larger states. We express these expected geopolitical effects of ethnic nationalism in two hypotheses:

Hypothesis H5.1. Ethnically fragmented states are more likely to experience secession and thus are more likely to shrink than more unified states.

Hypothesis H5.2. States whose dominant ethnic group is fragmented across state borders are more likely to attempt to incorporate their kin and thus are more likely to expand than states with more unified kin.

Both hypotheses describe straightforward changes with immediate consequences for average state size. Secession leaves the rump state diminished and the new state smaller than the initial common state. Alternatively, the incorporation of a kin-populated state clearly increases state size since the resulting unified state is by definition larger than the absorbing or absorbed states. In irredentist configurations, which feature states trying to absorb territory inhabited by ethnic kin in neighboring states, H5.1 and H5.2 are directly linked to each other.⁴³

Together, H5.1 and H5.2 show that ethnonationalist sorting processes can produce either the integration or disintegration of state territory. To address the main puzzle of state size, we need to establish

³⁹ Weiner 1971.

⁴⁰ Tilly 1978. See Section 2.3 for more on the causal pathway generating border change.

⁴¹ Petersen 2002.

⁴² Beissinger 2002.

⁴³ Chazan 1991; Saideman and Ayres 2000; Kornprobst 2008. As we will see later, however, irredentism does not change the number of states in the system and therefore does not affect the average size of states (as long as it is measured as the arithmetic mean).

when and where these developments occurred and in what proportions. Most scholars of nationalism believe that globally, too few states exist compared to the number of ethnic nations. This musical chairs-like predicament leaves many ethnic nations stateless. Gellner claims that based on back-of-the-envelope calculations of states and languages, there are many more nations than states around the world.⁴⁴ Likewise, Michael Hechter suggests that separatist and secessionist nationalism is more common across the globe than the unification variety.⁴⁵ But these conjectures do not extend easily to the European subsystem, which at the end of the Napoleonic Wars featured a large number of political units that were subsequently eliminated through unification processes during the course of the nineteenth century. Further, we examine the empirical net effect of nationalism in the European and global state systems.

Like state borders, ethnic boundaries are subject to change through voluntary or forced assimilation, as well as through ethnic cleansing and genocide.⁴⁶ But once nationalism takes root, state efforts to assimilate citizens become increasingly difficult and often spark reactive nationalism instead of successful assimilation.⁴⁷ Although we acknowledge the significance of right-peopling a state along with right-sizing to increase its ethnic homogeneity, only the latter process changes the size of states, which is our main focus in this chapter.⁴⁸

Identifying Border Change Events

In this section, instead of merely tracing ethnic and territorial fragmentation at the macrolevel, we explain how state size varies based on explicit change processes. To do so, we adopt an explicitly dyadic perspective. Because territorial change is a zero-sum game, any state pair must have a net winner (state A) and a net loser (state B). Furthermore, beyond territorial redistribution between existing states, change can be associated with state birth on the winning side and state death on the losing side. As Table 5.1 shows, this logic yields four possibilities, each linked

⁴⁴ Gellner 1983, 2. See also Van Evera 1994; White 2004.

⁴⁵ Hechter 2000.

⁴⁶ McGarry and O'Leary 1993.

⁴⁷ Hroch 1985; Hechter 2000.

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Chapter 3 and the analysis in Chapter 10. In response to potential reverse causality, we show that our results are robust to freezing ethnic geography as observed on maps from the mid nineteenth century, see Chapter S5. For sure, ethnic fragmentation per se does not prompt change in state size, but nationalist processes that may or may not occur, do. Especially since the end of World War II, power sharing has become an increasingly frequent way to manage ethnic diversity. See, e.g., McGarry and O'Leary 1993. In such cases, states respond to ethnonationalist pressures through internal political change rather than border change.

Table 5.1 *Classifying border change events in terms of state births and deaths.*

		Death of state B	
		No	Yes
Birth of state A	No	Transfer	Absorption
	Yes	Secession	Collapse/merger

to a specific category of border change depending on the birth of state A or the death of state B (or both).

We refer to *transfer* if territory shifts from state B to state A without involving any state birth or death. Should state A lose its independence in the process, for instance through conquest or purchase, *absorption* has occurred. The opposite scenario is *secession*, which gives birth to state A.⁴⁹ In case of simultaneous state birth and death, either state B experiences *collapse*, which creates a new state A (and possibly other states), or state B joins a newly formed state A (again possibly together with other states) in a process of *merger*.

The key characteristic of merger and collapse is that border change breaks the institutional continuity such that no state survives the transformation. This classification hinges critically on the ability to identify state births and deaths. This may seem like an easy task, but in practice, scholars differ in their definition of state continuation. For instance, we do not treat the ends of the Romanov Empire and the Soviet Union as state collapses in this specific sense, but rather as a series of secessions that left the respective Russian rump states alive as geopolitical entities. In the empirical analysis given later, we rely on the continuing use of state capitals to identify predecessor and successor states and in so doing differentiate secession from collapse and absorption from merger.⁵⁰ Since the empirical application of this rule leads to no observed mergers or collapses, we refer to them here purely as theoretical categories to ensure conceptual completeness.

Having introduced the main types of border change, we further differentiate between ethnic and nonethnic versions of each change. Apart from bringing together concepts that are usually discussed in isolation and less systematically, this conceptual step allows us to identify the cases

⁴⁹ In this book, we define secession widely, whether it follows from central, peripheral, or external initiative. Note that our definition includes territories leaving colonial empires. For more restrictive definitions, see Coggins 2014; Wood 1981.

⁵⁰ Capital relocations within stable state borders are not coded as the birth of a new state.

Table 5.2 *Classifying ethnic border change events in terms of state births and deaths.*

		Death of state B	
		No	Yes
Birth of state A	No	Irredentism	Unification
	Yes	Ethnic secession	Ethnic collapse/merger

of border change that follow an ethnonationalist logic and those that do not. Such an identification is crucially important to our empirical analysis. We rely on the intersection of the basic types of border change and ethnic settlement areas to derive the four types of ethnic border change displayed in Table 5.2. Each constitutes a subset of the corresponding border changes in Table 5.1.

The types of ethnic border change can be defined as follows:

- *Irredentism* is a case of territorial transfer in which state A incorporates a kin subpopulation of its dominant ethnic group by extracting territory from state B. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 is the most recent example of this category.⁵¹
- *Unification* is a case of absorption in which state A’s and B’s dominant ethnic groups are the same. Prominent historical examples are the unification of Germany and Italy in the nineteenth century.⁵²
- *Ethnic secession* is a case of secession in which state A and state B have different dominant ethnic groups. During the past two decades, this type has been by the far most common secessionist setting. Decolonization featured many examples of this type.⁵³ The decline of the large land empires, such as the Ottoman Empire, also spawned a series of ethnic secession events in the Balkans, including in Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia.⁵⁴
- *Ethnic collapse* resembles ethnic secession but proceeds without any surviving state. *Ethnic merger* is a unified state that is entirely new

⁵¹ Irredentist politics is a wider category that includes claim-making and support for kin. Brubaker 1996; Coggins 2014. Other definitions of irredentism focus only on the homeland state, see, e.g., Siroky and Hale 2017; Kornprobst 2008.

⁵² These processes also included irredentist events to the extent that some territories had to be “liberated” from neighboring states, such as France, Prussia, and Denmark in the German case and the Habsburg Empire in the Italian case. Otherwise, unification processes are usually voluntary, although its leadership can be contentious within the aggregate group. Griffiths 2010.

⁵³ Griffiths 2016.

⁵⁴ Roshwald 2001.

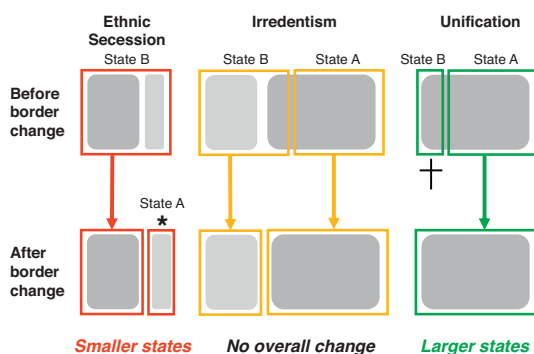


Figure 5.3 A schematic illustration of ethnic border-change processes.

rather than being formed around any previous state. The latter applies, for example, to Prussia or Piedmont.⁵⁵

Correspondingly, we can define nonethnic transfer, nonethnic absorption (e.g., conquest), nonethnic secession, and nonethnic collapse or merger as the nonethnic residuals of each of the four main categories of border change shown in Table 5.1.

Further, we focus on the three types of ethnic border change featuring state continuity – ethnic secession, irredentism, and unification – while leaving aside empirically unobserved collapse and merger. To further clarify the logic of nationalist state transformation, Figure 5.3 illustrates the three main types of ethnic border change. The upper row depicts the configurations prior to border change and the lower row shows the outcome of the respective process. Additionally, state survival is indicated by an arrow from the upper to the lower row, state birth is shown by a star, and state death is signified by a cross.

The overall effect on state size is clearly visible. While ethnic secession reduces state size, unification generates the opposite result. In between, irredentist events merely shift the border between two states but do not lead to a change in the average state size.⁵⁶

Additionally, we specify under what conditions these processes of territorial change can be expected to occur. We focus on the realized outcomes with respect to borders rather than on mere claims or violent

⁵⁵ Again, the use of the capital-based state continuity rule discounts this category empirically. We do, however, acknowledge the empirical relevance of collapse and merger depending on the definition of state survival.

⁵⁶ To depict ethnic collapse, the vertical arrow in the ethnic secession column is replaced by a second star signifying the birth of a second state. Similarly, ethnic merger can be illustrated by replacing the vertical arrow from the unification column with a second cross showing that no state survives the transition.

or peaceful attempts to effect border change.⁵⁷ Furthermore, we test arguments directly related to ethnic nationalism. In the case of ethnic secession, we focus on the extent to which minorities who are distinct from the ruling group are present.⁵⁸ Rather than trying to measure the political access of all ethnic segments in our data resources, our structural analysis uses the ethnic fragmentation of the state as a proxy for ethnic power relations.

Obviously, successful secession has many causes. In view of current data limitations and the need to focus the data collection effort on ethnicity and border change, most of the other causes are beyond the scope of this book and must be left for future research. Alternative accounts include internal drivers, such as the internal ethnic composition of the states in question and economic inequality,⁵⁹ as well as external factors relating to great power politics and norms of sovereignty.⁶⁰ Our approach assumes that ethnic geography is causally antecedent to these processes. We summarize these arguments with a formal hypothesis that relates to the notions of ethnic and territorial fragmentation introduced earlier:

Hypothesis H5.3. Ethnic secession (or ethnic state collapse) is more likely in more ethnically fragmented states than in more unified states.

Along similar lines, ethnonationalist principles yield a clear implication with respect to unification and irredentism. As Donald Horowitz argues, both processes are closely related, and in some settings, they can be seen as substitutes for each other.⁶¹ The more an overlapping ethnic group is fragmented into several polities, the more unification is likely to occur. In one of the few systematic studies of political unification, Griffiths shows that linguistic homogeneity, as opposed to security threats, is a necessary condition for such processes.⁶² Irredentism resembles unification in that border-straddling kin groups are likely to trigger state expansionist behavior. Furthermore, groups whose kin dominate neighboring states are especially likely to advance irredentist claims.⁶³ Abstracting away from explicit power relations, we thus expect the territorial fragmentation of dominant aggregate groups to foster irredentist border change. At the same time, other factors – including economic competition and political institutions⁶⁴ as well as the permissiveness of

⁵⁷ Walter 2006; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

⁵⁸ E.g., Beissinger 2002; Coggins 2011; Hale 2000.

⁵⁹ See Roeder 2007; Brancati 2006.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Coggins 2014; Horowitz 1985; Griffiths 2016.

⁶¹ Horowitz 1991. Both the German and Italian unification processes in the nineteenth century featured unification and irredentist border change.

⁶² Griffiths 2010.

⁶³ Saideman and Ayres 2000.

⁶⁴ Siroky and Hale 2017.

international norms and interests – are also known to spawn irredentist drives.⁶⁵

Based on this line of reasoning, we introduce two more hypotheses:

Hypothesis H5.4. Unification (or ethnic merger) is more likely in states whose dominant ethnic group is more rather than less fragmented across state borders.

Hypothesis H5.5. Irredentist border change is more likely in states whose dominant ethnic group is more rather than less fragmented across state borders.

5.4 Empirical Analysis

Having formulated our theoretical expectations, we begin our empirical analysis. Measuring deviations from the nation-state ideal requires data on state borders and the settlement areas of (potentially cross-border) ethnic groups. As noted earlier, we use two main geocoded data resources on state borders, the CShapes Europe data covering Europe from 1816 and the Historical Ethnic Geography (HEG) dataset, which presents historical snapshots of the settlement areas of the main ethnic groups in Europe from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century.⁶⁶

Exploring Systemic Trends in Ethnic and Territorial Fractionalization

Based on spatial information on the overlap between ethnic settlement regions and state territories, we can now define the two main operational measures of fragmentation used for a first test of H5.1 and H5.2. To operationalize a state's ethnic fragmentation, we use a standard measure of fractionalization, which indicates the probability that two randomly selected individuals in a state belong to different groups. We use a similar fractionalization index to compute the extent to which the associated aggregate group is divided by state borders. In this case, the index computes the probability that two random individuals in an aggregate group belong to different states.⁶⁷

To illustrate the extent to which states in the European and global systems deviate from the nationalist ideal, we plot the spatially weighted averages of ethnic and territorial fractionalization over time.⁶⁸ Starting

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Horowitz 1985; Saideman and Ayres 2008.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ The reader is referred to Chapter S5 for the mathematical formulae.

⁶⁸ Observations are weighted by area in order to not give too much weight to much smaller unified statelets.

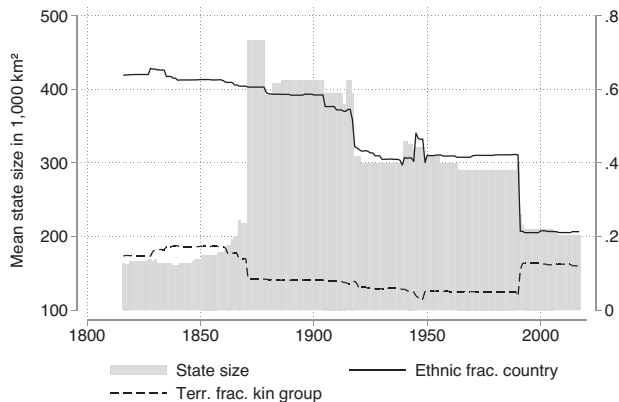


Figure 5.4 European trends in ethnic and territorial fractionalization.

Note: Area-weighted measures based on CShapes Europe and HEG data.

with the European state system, Figure 5.4 reveals that states' internal ethnic fragmentation has indeed declined dramatically since the beginning of the nineteenth century, moving from more than 0.6 down to about 0.2 at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This decline proceeded in major plunges, especially following World War I and the Cold War. The level of ethnic fractionalization correlates closely with the average state size from the late nineteenth century (see the shaded area). Territorial fragmentation also declined until after the end of the Cold War, when the breakup of the Soviet Union led to the territorial fragmentation of ethnic Russians.

Figure 5.5 shows that, at the global level, ethnic fractionalization in the nineteenth century – at about 0.6 – resembles that of the European system in the same time period. But the global decline was less pronounced than Europe's, ending at a considerably higher average of 0.34. The most notable shift toward state-level ethnic unity appears to have occurred after World War II. Because the CShapes 2.0 dataset includes colonial holdings, the effects of decolonization are clearly visible in our results. A major drop in ethnic unity also occurred following the end of the Cold War. In contrast, territorial fractionalization starts at a lower level in the global system but climbs gradually to 0.13, a level similar to the European subsample in the same time period. The upward trend throughout the twentieth century indicates that although the decolonization process reduced internal ethnic heterogeneity, it produced more cases of border-transgressing ethnic settlements – an effect that is particularly pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016.

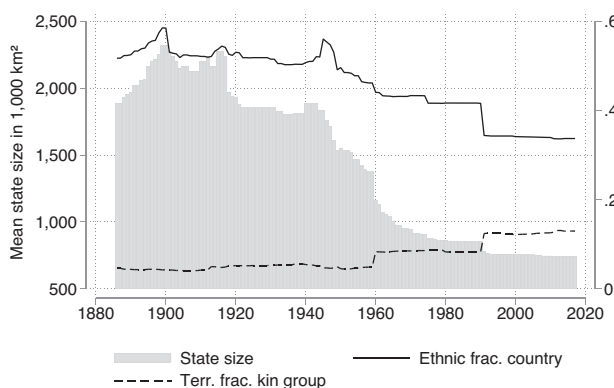


Figure 5.5 Global trends in ethnic and territorial fractionalization.

Note: Area-weighted measures based on CShapes 2.0 and back-projected ANM/GREG data.

Because state ethnic heterogeneity has decreased continuously over the past two centuries, the fragmenting effect of ethnic nationalism could plausibly be responsible for the puzzling decline in state size. But this macro correlation does not imply causation and may be far removed from capturing the underlying causal mechanism of nationalism. In the following section, we therefore turn to statistical state-level analyses.

Analyzing the Effect of Nationalist State Transformation on State Size

In this section, we analyze the direct effect of the misalignment of state and ethnic geographies on state size. We assess our theoretical arguments that ethnically heterogeneous states are prone to shrink (H5.1) or prone to grow if their dominant ethnic group is fragmented (H5.2).

For Europe since 1816, Figure 5.6 shows the likelihood that a state experienced border change. The graphs indicate the probability of territorial losses and gains (vertical axis) for any given time since the last border change (horizontal axis). As expected, panel (a) indicates that high levels of ethnic fractionalization translate into territorial losses sooner rather than later. In contrast, more homogenous states are less likely to lose territory. The corresponding results for growth shown in panel (b) reveal a similarly clear-cut dependence on territorial fractionalization, whereby fragmented ethnic groups are more likely to expand.

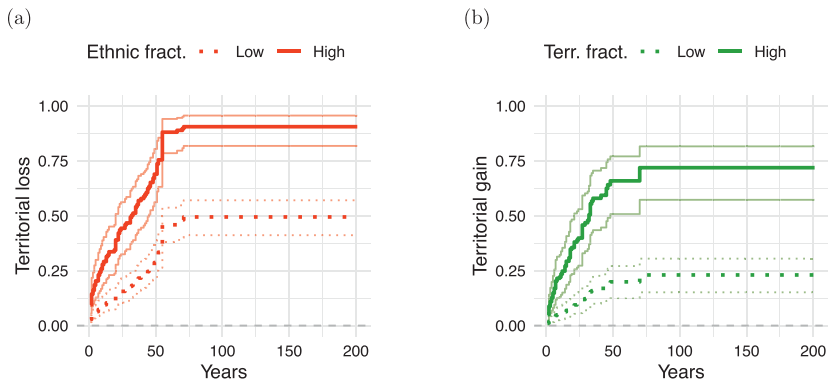


Figure 5.6 Duration until border change as a function of fractionalization in Europe. (a) Probability of territorial loss for high/low levels of ethnic fractionalization. (b) Probability of territorial gain for high/low levels of territorial fractionalization.

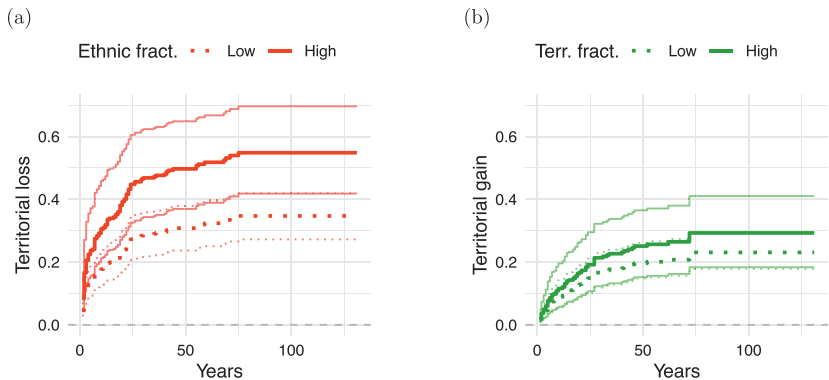


Figure 5.7 Duration until border change as a function of fractionalization in the global sample. (a) Probability of territorial loss for high/low levels of ethnic fractionalization. (b) Probability of territorial gain for high/low levels of territorial fractionalization.

As illustrated in Figure 5.7, we also find support for both hypotheses when extending the analysis to the global dataset.⁷⁰ Although a high level of ethnic fragmentation is likely to lead to a loss of territory, panel (a) indicates that more ethnically unified states are less likely to suffer this fate. For territorial gains, however, the difference is less clear, as shown

⁷⁰ See the CShapes 2.0 data and backdated ANM/GREG groups introduced in Chapter 3.

in panel (b). We will return to this issue in the event analysis given later, where the results for irredentism are less ambiguous.

These two sets of results from the European and global samples mostly support our two main hypotheses H5.1 and H5.2.⁷¹ We find that ethnic fractionalization and territorial fragmentation did not affect territorial gains and losses in European states between 1490 and 1790. This suggests that our main results are produced by post-French Revolution nationalism rather than by ahistorical attributes of ethnicity. Furthermore, our main results hold before and after World War II, even though the effect of ethnic fragmentation on territorial losses is notably stronger in the latter case. While the age of secession⁷² played an important role in the decline of state sizes after 1945, ethnic and territorial fragmentation contributed to state territorial losses and gains well before this period.

Analyzing Border-Change Processes

To test H5.3, H5.4, and H5.5, this section identifies specific processes of border change and assesses their origins in discrepancies between state borders and ethnic geography in the European and global samples. Having theoretically defined the conditions for each type of border change, we need to operationalize the continuation rule that determines cases of collapse and merger.⁷³ Our operational rule stipulates that states survive a border change event if the capital remains unchanged.⁷⁴

What does the simple state-continuation rule entail? Tables 5.3 and 5.4 offer an overview of the event counts for our two main samples. In Europe, ethnic border-change events dominate the categories of secession and absorption, whereas transfers are evenly split between ethnic and nonethnic events. The global picture since 1886 is similar, with ethnic and nonethnic transfers relatively evenly split and secession dominated by ethnic events. The main difference pertains to unification, of which only three cases occurred: Vietnam in 1975 and Germany and Yemen in 1990. According to the capital continuity rule, neither the European nor global sample had cases of collapse or merger.

Displaying data aggregated to five-year periods, Figure 5.8 combines CShapes Europe state borders with HEG ethnic boundaries. The light blue bars correspond to nonethnic border changes. This means that the

⁷¹ See Chapter S5 for complete results.

⁷² Griffiths 2016.

⁷³ Since both the CShapes Europe and CShapes 2.0 datasets provide geocoded and time-varying data on capitals, we use this information as a proxy for state leadership.

⁷⁴ Obviously, countries can move their capitals during periods of stable borders without any consequences for state continuity, as did the Federal Republic of Germany when the capital was moved from Bonn to Berlin in 1999.

Table 5.3 *Number of ethnic border change events as a share of all events in Europe, 1816–2017.*

		Death of state B	
		No	Yes
Birth of state A	No	Irredentism/transfer 52/105	Unification/absorption 50/61
	Yes	Ethnic secession/secession 34/40	Ethnic collapse & merger/all cases 0/0

Table 5.4 *Number of ethnic border change events as a share of all events worldwide, 1886–2017.*

		Death of state B	
		No	Yes
Birth of state A	No	Irredentism/transfer 45/102	Unification/absorption 3/21
	Yes	Ethnic secession/secession 133/136	Ethnic collapse & merger/all cases 0/0

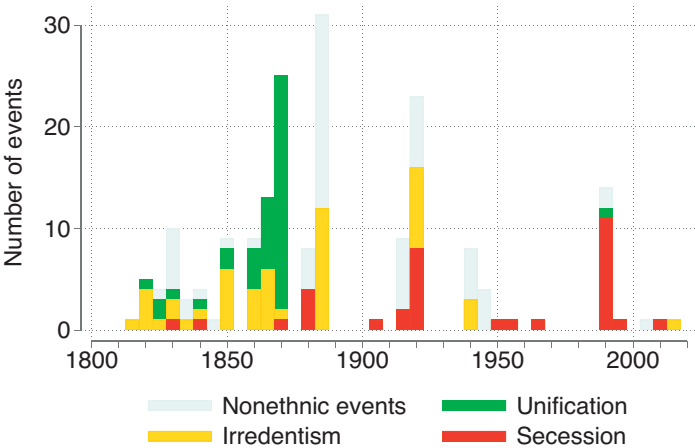


Figure 5.8 Ethnic border changes in Europe.
Data sources: CShapes Europe state borders and HEG ethnic map.

total height of the bars reflects the cumulative number of border change events per period. The other colors mark cases of ethnic unification (green), irredentism (yellow), and ethnic secession (red).

After unification in Germany and Italy during the second half of the nineteenth century, such events became a rarity in European history.⁷⁵ Instead, ethnic secession increased in importance, especially around World War I as the Habsburg and Ottoman empires disintegrated. The second wave occurred as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia collapsed. Thus, as a proportion of all border change events, ethnic border changes became increasingly significant toward the end of the twentieth century.

This picture is presented starkly in Figure 5.9, which depicts ethnic border changes in the global state system from 1886. As in the European setting, ethnic border changes around the world have eclipsed their nonethnic counterparts since World War II. Before that historical juncture, conquest often triggered nonethnic events, such as unification or irredentism. Following the end of the world wars and the Cold War, ethnic secession – which makes up almost all secession cases – dominates the historical trajectory with particularly powerful secessionist waves. Decolonization triggered this process, starting with the partition of India in 1947.⁷⁶ Unification, by contrast, is a relatively rare event in the global

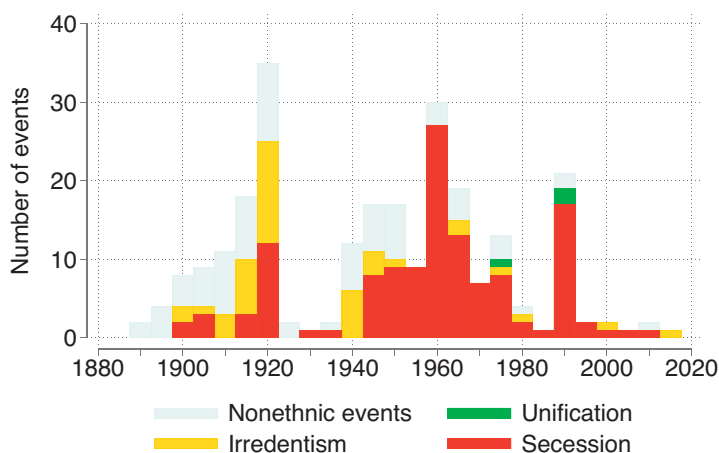


Figure 5.9 Ethnic border changes around the world.

Source: CShapes 2.0 state borders and backdated ANM/GREG data.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., the German reunification in 1989.

⁷⁶ Jana 2022.

system. In recent years, cases of irredentism have also been rare; the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 is a prominent exception that is also the most recent border change recorded in our datasets.

Nationalist State Transformation and Border Change Events

We use the information about ethnic border change events, as shown in Figure 5.10, to test whether discrepancies between ethnic and state geographies affect unification, secession, and irredentism according to our theoretical expectations. In line with H5.3, panel (a) tells us that ethnically fragmented states are more likely to experience territorial losses than those states that are more unified. Panel (b) shows that aggregate ethnic groups that are highly territorially fragmented are more inclined

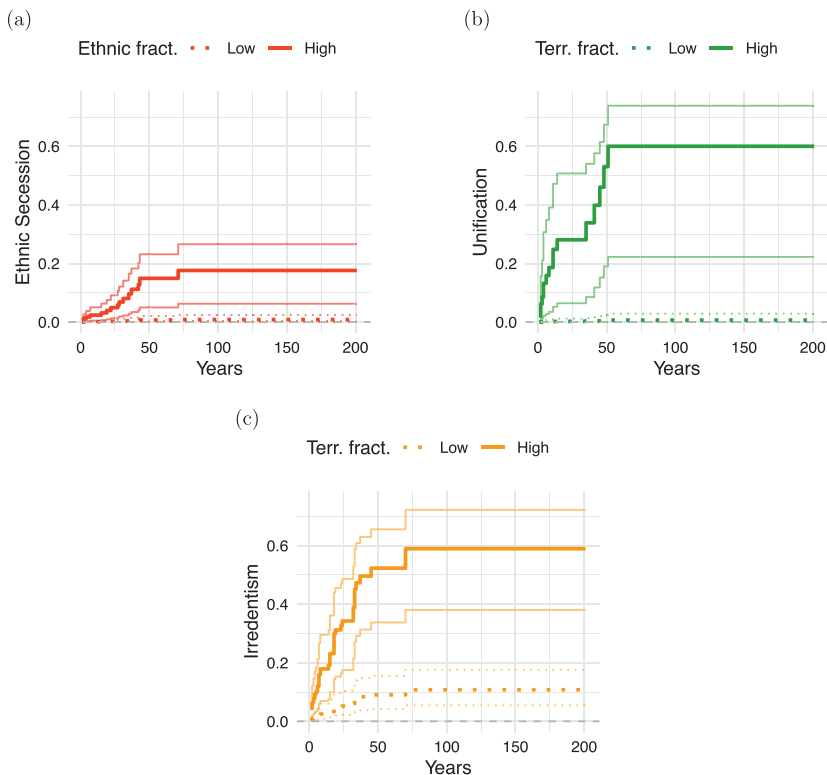


Figure 5.10 Duration until border-change events in Europe. (a) Prob. ethnic secession for high/low levels of ethnic fractionalization. (b) Prob. unification for high/low levels of territorial fractionalization. (c) Prob. irredentism for high/low levels of ethnic fractionalization.

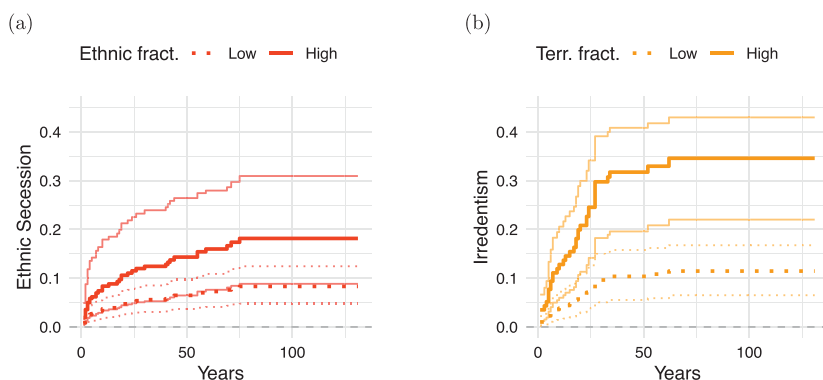


Figure 5.11 Duration until border change as a function of fractionalization in the global sample. (a) Prob. ethnic secession for high/low levels of ethnic fractionalization. (b) Prob. irredentism for high/low levels of territorial fractionalization.

to be involved in unification events, thus confirming H5.4. In addition, panel (c) shows that territorial fragmentation also makes a major difference for irredentism, as anticipated by H5.5.

Figure 5.11 reports similar results once the focus shifts to the entire world, although the differences are less stark for secession, as shown in panel (a). We do not show the graph for unification because our global post-1886 sample contains too few events to generalize, but irredentist events are clearly much more likely for high levels of irredentism as in the European case. This confirms that territorial gains at the state level are associated with higher levels of territorial fractionalization.

In sum, we conclude that ethnic secession, unification, and irredentist events appear to fit well into the macro process of nationalist state transformation that we have outlined, thus adding detailed evidence in favor of H5.3, H5.4, and H5.5. Moreover, ample additional qualitative evidence confirming these findings exists. Although the collapse of land and colonial empires in many cases was precipitated by warfare and economic factors,⁷⁷ nationalism played a decisive role in disintegration processes. For example, Hungarian and Turkish nationalism undermined the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, respectively, well before World War I by fueling a combination of secessionism and irredentism.⁷⁸ Nationalism additionally contributed to the collapse of the land empires following World War I, bringing about a flood of costly protests and rebellions. Nationalism also contributed to the collapse of

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Roshwald 2001.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Weiner 1971; Kann 1974; Roshwald 2001.

the colonial empires following World War II.⁷⁹ Mark Beissinger convincingly shows that the collapse of the Soviet Union was triggered by ethnonationalist mobilization that produced a quickly cascading series of events that unfolded against the backdrop of an overextended and inefficient system.⁸⁰

Spearheaded by Prussia and involving the annexation of various former principalities, the unification of Germany was justified with ideas of political unity and cultural nationalism, emerging in the late eighteenth century.⁸¹ Similarly, in the Italian provinces, nationalist sentiment emerged as a reaction to the Napoleonic occupation in the early nineteenth century.⁸² The Italian nationalists' taking control of Rome in 1870 ended the *Risorgimento*, the first phase of the unification process. In the following decades, Italian nationalists made irredentist claims to not-yet-integrated regions with significant Italian populations culminating with the Fascist period.⁸³

Before evaluating whether ethnic nationalism primarily produces integration or disintegration and the growth or decline of states, it is necessary to account for how dyadic change processes add up to changes in state size in the entire system. We present our findings in the next section.

Average State Size as a Function of Border Changes

Our definitions of border-change processes allow us to trace the contribution of each type of border change to the average territorial size of states. To do so, we exploit the fact that the arithmetic mean of state size is dependent only on the number of states in the system if one treats the total area of the system as a constant.⁸⁴ Thus, only secession and absorption events affect average state size. In contrast, transfers and irredentism do not influence average state size because these border changes only affect the size of specific states rather than the overall surface area of the system.

Given this understanding, we can trace the development of mean state size as a function of the specific processes of border change. Having defined ethnic secession and unification as ethnic subcategories of secession and absorption, we are also able to construct trajectories for these

⁷⁹ For an overview of the literature, see Hiers and Wimmer 2013.

⁸⁰ Beissinger 2002. See also Hale 2000.

⁸¹ Breuilly 1990.

⁸² Farmer 2007; O'Leary 2017.

⁸³ O'Leary 2017.

⁸⁴ There could still be variation due to gains from previous territories outside state control.

cases and for their nonethnic counterparts, that is, nonethnic secession and nonethnic absorption.

This approach yields three alternative histories: the actual trend in average state size, the hypothetical trajectory based solely on ethnic border changes,⁸⁵ and the curve that corresponds to strictly nonethnic border changes.⁸⁶ Whereas nonethnic change is associated with the developmental theories that we referred to at the beginning of this chapter, the ethnic trajectory captures the logic of ethnic nationalism.

What do these alternative histories look like? Figure 5.12 traces the three trajectories in the European state system. The actual trend is identical to the solid line plotted in Figure 5.1. The nonethnic trajectory remains mostly flat, as would be expected given the calming influence of great power cooperation within the Concert of Europe.⁸⁶ In contrast, the ethnic trajectory stays much closer to the actual state-size trend. In Europe then, nationalism first had an expanding and then a contracting effect on state size, reflecting that the process first affected the city-state belt before destabilizing the land empires of Eastern Europe.

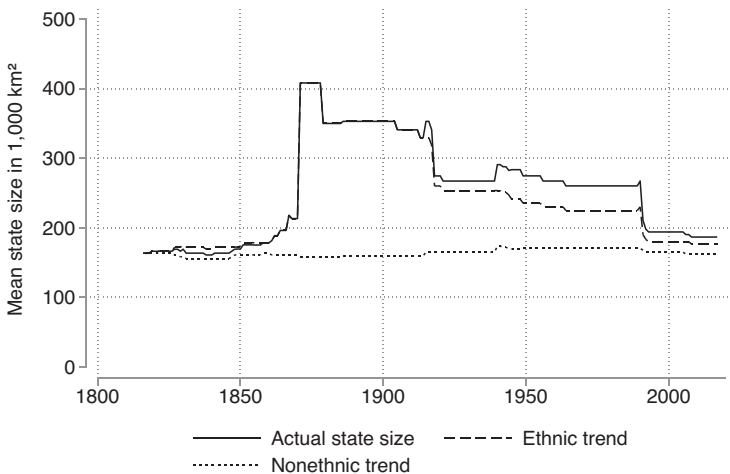


Figure 5.12 Comparing ethnic and nonethnic trends in mean state size with actual trends in Europe.

Source: CShapes Europe state borders and HEG ethnic map.

⁸⁵ These are not fully fledged counterfactual histories that “rerun history” with and without ethnic border change and may thus violate the assumption of coterminability. Tetlock and Belkin 1996; Cederman 1996.

⁸⁶ Schroeder 1986.

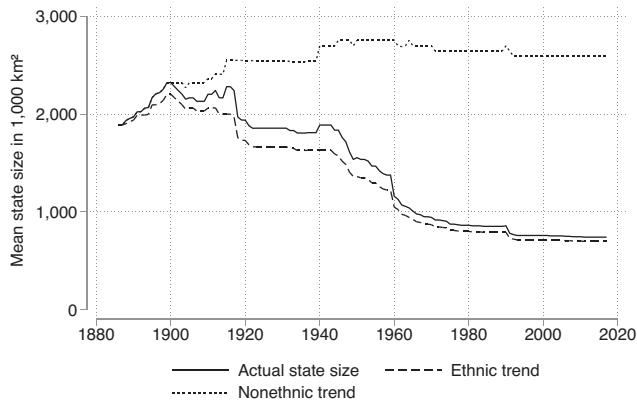


Figure 5.13 Comparing ethnic and nonethnic trends in mean state size with actual global trend.

Data sources: CShapes 2.0 state borders and backdated ANM/GREG data.

In the global comparison shown in Figure 5.13, the divergence between the two hypothetical scenarios becomes much more pronounced. As a reflection of imperial conquest disregarding ethnic borders, the nonethnic curve continues to increase until World War II, after which it starts declining gently although remaining at a high level, much as would be expected from colorblind developmental theories.⁸⁷ In contrast, the ethnic scenario closely follows the actual state-size trend, which again suggests that ethnic nationalism accounts to a large extent for changes in the scale of governance. These trends offer an intuitive solution to the puzzle of reversing state size. As expected, the initial upward trend is followed by the long-term downward trend that persisted throughout the twentieth century.

Although these findings offer solid support for our theoretical framework, we note several important caveats. Our results do not suggest that ethnic nationalism is the only process affecting state borders. Decolonization would have produced a much better ethnic fit in the absence of the *uti possidetis* norm, which prescribes that postimperial borders should follow colonial administrative borders rather than ethnic settlement patterns.⁸⁸ When the colonial empires disintegrated, ethnic cohesion increased compared to the colonial period, but most postcolonial states remained highly fragmented and ethnic groups were

⁸⁷ As argued by Fazal and Griffiths 2014, the declining trend reflects changes in the normative environment of the state system that made conquest a rare event after 1945.

⁸⁸ Griffiths 2015.

territorially divided.⁸⁹ More generally, historical border precedents continue to influence border demarcations and thus, state size.⁹⁰ Given the inertia of the territorial integrity norm,⁹¹ most nationalists have been forced to accept compromises involving autonomy and power sharing rather than border adjustments.⁹²

5.5 Conclusion

We began this chapter by returning to the puzzle of reversing state size that we started this book with, arguing that nationalism is key to understanding this transformation. Our empirical analysis focused on the implications of ethnic nationalism, connecting underlying ethnic conditions with processes of border change. As anticipated, both internal and external deviations from the nation-state ideal strongly influence state borders. In particular, ethnically fractionalized states run a much higher risk of losing territory or even of collapse than homogeneous states. Conversely, states that are led by ethnic groups with fragmented kin in neighboring states tend to expand into those areas. But since the late nineteenth century, a state-shrinking effect has dominated, which explains why the twentieth century saw a massive reduction in state size. With our spatial data on the European and global state systems, we can trace the beginning of this downward trend to the turn of the twentieth century.

By offering a systematic and precise spatiotemporal perspective, this chapter goes beyond existing macro analyses of nationalism that are either entirely qualitative or based on conventional, country-level panel data. Explicitly geocoded data enable the analysis of these processes with greater precision than has been possible with nonspatial, country-level indicators. Rather than treating the state like a black box, the spatial approach allows us to combine different levels of analysis. We have presented a series of analyses covering the system level, the state level, and the level of dyadic processes, which is then related back to the system level.

The dyadic perspective also contributes to conceptual development, especially in regard to processes of border change. Linking territorial gains and losses to state birth and death yields systematic typologies of border change processes and corresponding ethnically related subcategories, such as ethnic secession, unification, and irredentism.

⁸⁹ Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016

⁹⁰ Abramson and Carter 2016.

⁹¹ Zacher 2001.

⁹² McGarry and O'Leary 1993.

Although we have made inroads into several analytical dimensions, our work calls for further research, especially regarding the deeper causes of state formation and ethnogenesis. We have treated as exogenous that prenationalist units in the city-state belt were smaller than the emerging German and Italian ethnic nations, while the opposite applied to empires in Eastern Europe and beyond. Future analysis should attempt to endogenize the demographic processes that gave rise to the ethnic units that operated before and during the processes analyzed here.

Furthermore, given the limitations of currently available data, we must leave the systematic testing of several alternative explanations of border-change processes – including the influence of administrative units on secessionist behavior⁹³ as well as other institutional and economic variables related to irredentism – to future research.⁹⁴ Our approach is based on correlations at the systemic and state levels; we do not offer ironclad strategies of causal identification, which are better implemented in selective settings.⁹⁵

To reduce complexity, our analysis does not consider political violence, although it is well known in the literature that conflict patterns interact with increases and decreases in the scale of governance. For instance, Scott Abramson and David Carter show that territorial claims are made frequently during times of war and crisis.⁹⁶ In an era of nationalism, the bellicist expectation that interstate warfare promotes state formation has to be qualified, especially since it puts pressure on multi-ethnic states.⁹⁷ Because most governments fear territorial disintegration, successful secession often occurs through violence.⁹⁸ Future research needs to study whether a self-reinforcing dynamic exists between nationalism and warfare. Additionally, to capture changes over time, new work needs to uncover how the evolution of international norms and great power interests interacts with the ethnonationalist processes analyzed in this chapter.⁹⁹

During the past two centuries, ethnic nationalism has transformed the principle of governance in the state system, first by prompting further integration in Europe in the mid nineteenth century and then by starting to fragment existing units. Nationalism triggered several waves of

⁹³ E.g., Roeder 2007.

⁹⁴ E.g., Siroky and Hale 2017.

⁹⁵ At any rate, we have gone beyond simple correlational macro analysis by relying on control variables linked to alternative explanations, fixed-effects estimation, mutual information analysis, and several alternative datasets.

⁹⁶ Abramson and Carter 2021.

⁹⁷ Spruyt 2017.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., Walter 2006.

⁹⁹ Coggins 2011; Fazal and Griffiths 2014.

imperial disintegration, starting with the collapse of the European land empires after World War I, followed by the dismantling of the European colonial empires and the breakup of the communist states at the end of the Cold War. The current irredentist threats targeting Ukraine and Taiwan as well as ongoing centrifugal tensions within the United Kingdom, Spain, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and other multiethnic states indicate that the process of nationalist state formation is ongoing and may yet lead to further decline in state size.

6 Shaping States into Nations*

Borders are constitutive features of the modern state system that define the size and shape of states and specify the limits of state sovereignty.¹ A growing literature documents borders' attributes² and consequences,³ but their origins remain understudied with much research treating states and their borders as exogenous. Border formation has gained renewed relevance with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine; majority supported territorial revisionism in Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey;⁴ and secessionist challenges in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Catalonia. Ethnonationalist demands to redraw state borders along ethnic lines are central to all these cases.

Despite their intuitive appeal, explanations that seek border origins in ethnicity are contested and have not been systematically tested. Addressing this gap, this chapter asks whether, how, and to what extent ethnic geography has shaped Europe's partitioning into states since the nineteenth century. Using Gellner's congruence principle as a starting point,⁵ we argue that the historical rise of nationalism created a demand for nation-states. As most nations are ethnically defined, nationalism prompted popular pressures to redraw borders along ethnic lines through secession, unification, or irredentism.⁶ Of these mechanisms, secession is the most common and most systematically studied. Although the ethno-political roots of the secessionist conflict are well evidenced,⁷ some

* This chapter is an adapted version of the article "Shaping States into Nations: The Effects of Ethnic Geography on State Borders" in the *American Journal of Political Science*. Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2025. We thank co-author Guy Schvitz for his contributions to the article and permission to reuse the material for this chapter.

¹ See Sack 1986 on human territoriality more generally.

² Simmons and Kenwick 2021.

³ Abramson and Carter 2016; Carter and Goemans 2011; Simmons 2005; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016.

⁴ Fagan and Poushter 2020.

⁵ See also discussion in Section 2.2.

⁶ Weiner 1971; Hechter 2000; O'Leary 2001.

⁷ E.g., Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

studies of secession discount ethnicity and nationalism in favor of pre-existing political units and power politics.⁸ We contribute to this debate by integrating secessionist, unificationist, and irredentist border change into a common analytical framework and overcoming previous studies' problematic reliance on geographically fixed units of analysis.⁹

We thus innovate the study of border determinants, which to date also lacks a robust quantitative estimator to test theoretical arguments against potentially confounding alternative hypotheses. Realists argue that borders emerge along mountains and rivers, facilitating internal power projection and effective defense.¹⁰ From an institutionalist perspective, borders are coordination devices based on states' preferences for territory and stability¹¹ and often follow local focal lines – rivers, watersheds, or historical precedents.¹² A third perspective highlights the origins of borders in ethnic geography. For example, as noted in Chapter 5, Alesina and Spolaore theorize the trade-off between economies of scale and costs of ethnic heterogeneity in large states.¹³ We empirically test the effect of ethnic geography on state borders and provide comprehensive evidence that accounts for alternative explanations.

To do so, we overcome three challenges to assessing the determinants of borders and the spatial partitioning they produce. First, border formation is an intractable problem as an infinite number of borders can partition space into an *ex ante* unknown number of units. Second, borders entail significant and complex spatial dependencies as they form contiguous, nonoverlapping units. Third, unbiased estimation of ethnic geography's effect on borders requires consideration of confounding geographic features. We address these challenges with our new Probabilistic Spatial Partition Model (PSPM) that allows us to estimate the conditional effect of spatial features, such as ethnic settlement patterns, rivers, and mountains, on the partitioning of geographic space into nonoverlapping units, such as states. To make the division of space into states tractable, we model geographic space as a network of points on which we can encode all relevant variables. We use the PSPM to estimate the effect of ethnic geography since 1855 on state borders.¹⁴ We can thus analyze borders and border change based on preexisting ethnic settlement areas.

⁸ Roeder 2007; Griffiths 2016; Coggins 2014.

⁹ See, e.g., Griffiths 2016, chapter 2.

¹⁰ Morgenthau 1985, see also Kitamura and Lagerlöf 2020.

¹¹ Simmons 2005.

¹² Abramson and Carter 2016; Carter and Goemans 2011; Goemans 2006; Goemans, Schultz et al. 2017.

¹³ Alesina and Spolaore 1997, 2003, see also Friedman 1977; Desmet et al. 2011.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.

Focusing on the roots of border change in ethnic settlement patterns helps to address biases from omitted variables and reverse causality.

We find that an ethnic boundary between two locations increases the probability that they are or will become separated by an international border by 34 and 17 percentage points, respectively. This finding is robust to accounting for potentially endogenous changes in ethnic geography, alternative measures of ethnic differences, additional controls, and changes to the spatiotemporal data structure. Beyond Europe, we find that ethnic boundaries explain border change since the 1960s in Asia, but not elsewhere.

6.1 Ethnic Geography, Nationalism, and Border Locations

According to our theory of nationalist state transformation, the rise of nationalism created a demand for ethnically homogeneous nation-states, which caused an increasing alignment of Europe's borders with its underlying ethnic map.¹⁵ This development is part of a larger process of right-peopling and right-sizing states.¹⁶ The former has received much attention in nationalism studies evidencing the formation of nations within states through assimilationist policies and ethnic violence¹⁷ or through local dissimulation processes along state borders.¹⁸ Yet, an exclusive focus on state-led identity formation neglects parallel changes in state borders and risks underestimating the full impact of nationalism.¹⁹ We, therefore, focus on the nationalist right-sizing of states along ethnic lines and address reverse processes as an empirical challenge.²⁰

How did nationalism transform Europe's borders? Our theory of nationalist state transformation indicates that the demand for state-nation congruence puts pressure on state borders to align with the underlying ethnic landscape. In particular, three constellations violate Gellner's congruence principle, each motivating a specific type of border change.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2.

¹⁶ O'Leary 2001.

¹⁷ Weber 1976; White 2004; Bulutgil 2016; McNamee and Zhang 2019.

¹⁸ Sahlins 1989.

¹⁹ The two processes are linked as ethnic homogenization often focuses on contested territories; Bulutgil 2015, 2016; McNamee and Zhang 2019; Mylonas 2012.

²⁰ See also our discussion of methodological statism in Section 1.2.

First, and most common, are ethnic minorities in states dominated by a different group. Such alien rule deprives groups of self-determination and state services that often favor ruling groups.²¹ In response, stateless nations may try to attain statehood by secession. The breakup of empires and multiethnic states exemplifies this process.²² With many more potential ethnic nations than states,²³ secession is the most common type of border change.²⁴

Second, where an ethnic group is divided by state borders, ethnonationalist grievances, that is, nationalist calls for unification, may also emerge.²⁵ The promise of benefits from governance over a larger and ethnically homogeneous territory and population can help their cause.²⁶ Such efforts sometimes yield the merger of coethnic units, as illustrated by the unification of nineteenth-century Germany and Italy and, more recently, the reunification of Vietnam, Yemen, and postwar Germany. Concomitant to the decline of state death since 1945,²⁷ ethnic unification is exceedingly rare.²⁸

Third, a configuration in which an ethnic group dominates one state but is a minority in another can pressure the homeland government to “liberate” the group’s kin, thus resulting in irredentist nationalism.²⁹ Named after the Italian states Veneto and Trento, which remained *irridenti* (unredeemed) after the first wave of Italian unification, irredentist border change after World War II became less frequent, thanks to the strengthening of the territorial integrity norm.³⁰ Our theoretical argument here builds directly on the analysis of state size in Chapter 5, where we show how ethnic minorities strive for secessionist border change, ethnic groups divided by state borders become nationally unified, and stranded ethnic kin are at risk of being “redeemed” through irredentism. While the preceding analysis focused on the average size of states, the implication of the argument about where nationalists want to locate state borders is clear from the outset of Gellner’s congruence principle: State borders should fall along ethnic lines, no matter the type of border change that brings them about.

²¹ De Luca et al. 2018.

²² Beissinger 2002; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

²³ Particularly after the German and Italian unification processes outside our empirical scope.

²⁴ Gellner 1983; Griffiths 2016; Hechter 2000.

²⁵ Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022.

²⁶ Alesina and Spolaore 2003.

²⁷ Fazal 2004, 2007.

²⁸ See also Chapter 5.

²⁹ Weiner 1971; Siroky and Hale 2017.

³⁰ Zacher 2001.

Nationalist ideology equips revisionist activists in all three situations with powerful arguments that legitimize their claims over ostensibly indivisible territory and mobilize elites and citizens for their projects.³¹ While collective action problems and resistance by the incumbent state can inhibit actual border change,³² nationalist grievances can lower the bar for collective action by making activists less risk averse.³³ Still, revisionist nationalism is unlikely to succeed without considerable material and organizational resources.³⁴ Alternatively, geopolitical and economic crises create opportunities for change by weakening existing states, as illustrated by imperial collapse after the world wars.³⁵ In addition, nationalist successes can inspire nationalists elsewhere, further reinforcing the spatiotemporal clustering of border change. Nationalist ideas spread throughout nineteenth-century Europe and globally during the following century, thanks to the “Wilsonian moment” after World War I.³⁶

Yet, the diffusion of nationalism beyond Europe did not necessarily produce ethnonationalist congruence. The disintegration of the massively multiethnic European colonial empires led to new borders that cut through ethnic groups and created ethnically diverse independent states.³⁷ While some activists supported pan-nationalism, the prevailing elites in the Global South generally subscribed to the legal norm of *uti possidetis*. This implied that new borders would follow colonial administrative borders regardless of their ethnic fit.³⁸ Where ethnic groups were much smaller than states, as in sub-Saharan Africa, *uti possidetis* was particularly influential³⁹ – a tendency that was further reinforced by a lack of interstate competition over sparsely populated areas⁴⁰ and a strengthening of international norms.⁴¹ Yet, even under these conditions, sub-Saharan Africa was far from immune to ethnonationalist revisionism, as evidenced by Somali irredentism in the 1970s and Biafran separatism in Nigeria in the 1960s. In contrast and due to the presence of demographically dominant groups, ethnonationalism had a larger influence on border drawing in postcolonial Asia.

³¹ Hroch 1985; Murphy 2002; Goddard 2006.

³² Hardin 1995.

³³ Petersen 2002; Nugent 2020; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

³⁴ Tilly 1978.

³⁵ Abramson and Carter 2021; Skocpol 1979.

³⁶ Manela 2007.

³⁷ Englebert, Tarango and Carter 2002.

³⁸ Ratner 1996.

³⁹ Carter and Goemans 2011.

⁴⁰ Herbst 2000.

⁴¹ Zacher 2001.

Regardless of the specific historical context, groups mobilizing for border change will base their territorial claims on their (often self-serving) understanding of ethnic geography. But even where mobilization successfully achieves border change, “ethnically pure” borders tend to be elusive because of overlapping and noncontiguous ethnic settlement patterns.⁴² As a result, ethnic geography determines the approximate location of new borders. In turn, sharp focal lines, such as previous administrative borders, historical precedents, rivers, and watersheds, inform their local settlement.⁴³

Investigating the primacy of secession in a separate analysis, our main empirical focus is on the overall effect of ethnic settlement patterns on European state borders:

Hypothesis H6.1. Ethnic settlement patterns shape state territories such that ethnic boundaries and state borders become increasingly congruent.

6.2 Modeling States as Spatial Partitions

We test our claims about the effect of ethnic boundaries on state borders using time-variant data on state borders and ethnic geography in Europe since 1886 that we introduced in Chapter 3. This section explains how we go beyond other studies of border determinants by modeling the European landmass as a spatial network of points. We use the network to encode our data and estimate the PSPM.

Geographic Space as a Network of Points

We model geographic space as a network of points, a move that addresses the limitations of previous analyses of border locations. The earlier studies follow three approaches. First, Carter and Goemans show that new borders are frequently drawn along focal lines, like natural frontiers, administrative borders, or historical precedents.⁴⁴ This valuable description of border characteristics provides the groundwork for analyzing border precedents as influential causes of border stability. Yet, a focus on observed borders produces limited insights into their causes because it neglects all potential but unrealized borders. In addition, a focus on locally aligned features risks missing factors, such as ethnic

⁴² Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009.

⁴³ Goemans 2006; Carter and Goemans 2011.

⁴⁴ Goemans 2006; Carter and Goemans 2011.

geography, that only determine a border's approximate location at a higher geographic level.

Second, an approach by Shuhei Kitamura and Nils-Petter Lagerlöf uses grid cells as seemingly independent units to examine the frequency with which they have been crossed by state borders.⁴⁵ Doing so disregards nonmonotonic spatial dependencies inherent in the outcome of interest. Because borders partition space into contiguous territorial units, they interdependently emerge in grid cells. For example, a border may cross a string of neighboring grid cells. This would violate the assumption of unit independence in standard regression approaches as the outcome for any unit depends on its relation to the ensemble of neighboring cells (not) crossed by a border. Classic spatial error clustering⁴⁶ and spatiotemporal diffusion models⁴⁷ rely on an exogenously imposed spatial connectivity matrix and are thus unable to recover such endogenous spatial dependency structures.

A third approach compares observed partitionings with simulated ones. Prominent in the gerrymandering literature,⁴⁸ such comparisons are based on aggregate statistics, as in our example of the ethnic homogeneity of observed and simulated states.⁴⁹ This approach yields information on the likelihood that an observed partitioning could have originated from the simulated process. But because the observed partitioning is not modeled directly, such analyses do not produce inferences about the effects of a given spatial feature on the partitioning, particularly in the presence of confounders.

In response to these limitations, we introduce a simplified understanding of geographic space as a network of approximately 1000 points that are spread out across Europe and connected to their neighbors, as illustrated in panel (a) of Figure 6.1. This discretization of otherwise continuous geography makes tractable the problem of analyzing its partitioning into states, which otherwise has an infinite number of possible outcomes. *Ex ante*, we do not know the states, their number, names, and shapes that would emerge from the macrohistorical process we are studying. In other words, we cannot take for granted that “Germany” or “France” emerged in their current forms. Our network approach accommodates the diverse outcomes history could have produced.

Our main outcome is the map of states – the partitioning of the network in Figure 6.1 into states in a given year. We measure the partitioning into states by retrieving the state each point in the network

⁴⁵ Kitamura and Lagerlöf 2020.

⁴⁶ E.g., Conley 1999.

⁴⁷ Wucherpfennig et al. 2021.

⁴⁸ E.g., Fifield et al. 2020.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 5.

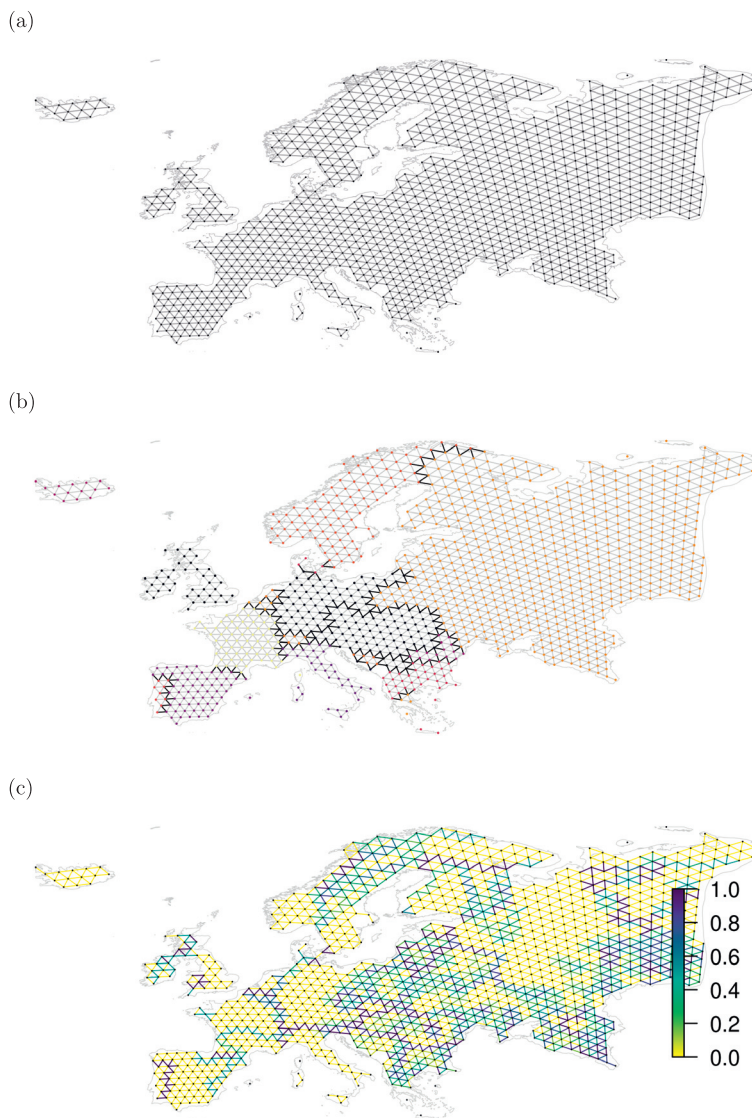


Figure 6.1 Europe as a hexagonal spatial lattice. (a) Baseline lattice. (b) Partitioning into states in 1886; border-crossing edges in black. (c) Ethnic boundaries in 1836–1885; color denotes the fraction of maps in which an edge crosses an ethnic boundary.

belonged to between 1886 and 2019 from the CShapes 2.0 dataset.⁵⁰ We analyze borders in every twenty-fifth year (i.e., in 1886, 1911, . . . , 2011). The quarter-century intervals are long enough for cumulative border change to produce meaningful variation yet short enough to capture varying patterns of border change since 1886.

Panel (b) of Figure 6.1 plots state borders in 1886. While we can distinguish “Spain” from “France,” these labels are, for our purposes, completely interchangeable. Because we do not *ex ante* know the number or names of states, we are not interested in whether some vertices became part of “France.” Instead, we study whether certain vertices together form a contiguous state – a partition. The set of all partitions defines the partitioning of Europe into states.

We measure our main independent variable, *ethnic boundaries*, by using the raw historical data on ethnic settlement patterns introduced in Chapter 3. Overlaying these data with our spatial network, we compute for any given edge in the network the fraction of maps on which that edge crosses an ethnic boundary, as shown by panel (c) of Figure 6.1. This average measure of ethnic boundaries captures discrepancies across maps. If, for example, a fluid ethnic boundary is depicted differently across maps, our ethnic boundary measure captures it as a gradient. To capture variation over time, we limit ourselves to maps produced in the 50 years prior to a given year of observation.

Probabilistic Spatial Partition Model

Our modeling approach builds on the intuition that the partitioning of space into states results from attractive and repulsive forces active between different locations. These forces correspond to factors that affect border formation, such as a river or an ethnic boundary separating two locations. If two points attract each other, they are likely part of the same state. If pushed apart by repulsive forces, they may become divided by a border. Each point is attracted to or repulsed by multiple neighboring points but can only be part of one state. Directly capturing spatial dependence by only allowing for contiguous and nonoverlapping state territories, a point’s ultimate state membership is the probabilistic result of the interplay of the attraction and repulsion exerted by and among all its neighbors.

The PSPM framework captures this logic by modeling the partitioning of the geographic network introduced earlier. The model allows us to estimate the attractive or repulsive forces resulting from multiple

⁵⁰ Schvitz et al. 2022. See also Chapter 3.

attributes of the graph's edges.⁵¹ When estimating the effect of ethnic boundaries on state borders, we can thus account for covariates that influence ethnic settlement patterns and state borders. In addition, to our ethnic boundary measure, we thus account for the length of each edge, the size of the largest river and watershed crossed by it, and its average elevation. Together, these covariates capture important geographic causes of ethnic geography and state borders.⁵²

We estimate two models. The first models the cross-sectional determinants of border locations. The second homes in on the geographical determinants of border change. To that intent, we use a lagged dependent variable (LDV) model which tests whether ethnic boundaries affect border change such that they become increasingly congruent. Doing so addresses reverse causality from state borders' effects on ethnic geography⁵³ as the main inferential threat in the cross-sectional baseline model. We thereby account for past state borders, which leaves ethnic boundaries to affect only border change. We again control for the set of geographic features, as noted earlier, and add an indicator for state borders in the deep historical past (between 1100 and 1790 CE) that may have caused ethnic boundaries and may form precedents for "new" borders.⁵⁴

6.3 Results

Overall, we find consistent support for our theoretical argument with a strong correlation of ethnic boundaries with state borders in the baseline model. Moreover, we find similarly sized effects in our LDV model. Even when accounting for current and past political borders, ethnic boundaries are strongly and positively related to the formation of new borders over the next twenty-five years.

Figure 6.2 presents the main results obtained from estimating the baseline and LDV models on the pooled data. The findings support our theoretical argument. First, the coefficient of lagged ethnic boundaries is positive, showing that nodes located in differing ethnic settlement areas repulse each other and become increasingly separated by state borders. The respective effect is only slightly larger in the baseline model than in the LDV model, which accounts for past borders and their determinants. The baseline estimates are thus not simply driven by reverse effects of state borders on ethnic geographies and omitted variables that affect

⁵¹ See Chapter S6 for details.

⁵² E.g., Kitamura and Lagerlöf 2020.

⁵³ See Chapter 10.

⁵⁴ We use Abramson's 2017 data on historical state borders. See also Abramson and Carter 2016; Simmons 2005.

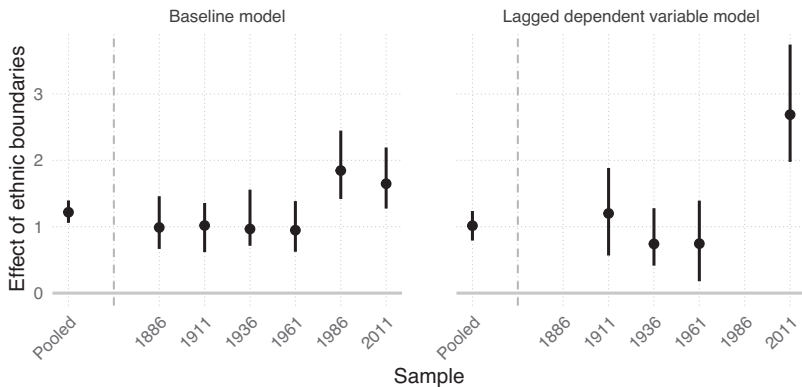


Figure 6.2 Effect of ethnic boundaries on the partitioning of Europe into states.

Note: 95% CIs from a parametric bootstrap. The lagged dependent variable model cannot be estimated for 1886 due to a lack of border change in the prior twenty-five years.

both. Importantly, the effects of ethnic boundaries are sizable. They are associated with almost two-thirds of the effect attributed to a lagged state border.⁵⁵

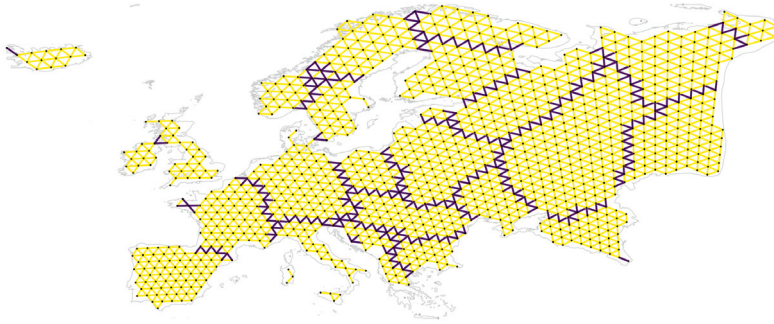
Second, consistent with the findings by Abramson and Carter, further results show that state borders between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries continue to separate nodes after 1886 conditional on ethnic geography.⁵⁶ Similarly supporting earlier arguments, we find that large watersheds and rivers, but not high altitudes, are likely to divide locations into different states.

Our results indicate that ethnic boundaries drastically increase the chance of a state border separating two points in our network. Because the chance of edges being crossed by a border is strongly interdependent on what happens in their neighborhood, we can derive interpretable results through simulations. We thus use our models to sample many European partitionings of the type plotted in panel (a) of Figure 6.3. We sample one set of partitionings that takes into account ethnic boundaries and another that does not. The difference between the two sets of predicted maps informs us about the overall effects of ethnic boundaries.

⁵⁵ In keeping with the prevalence of secessionist border change since 1886, we find that ethnic boundaries affect the emergence of new borders more than the stability of old ones.

⁵⁶ Abramson and Carter 2016, see also Chapter 8.

(a)



(b)

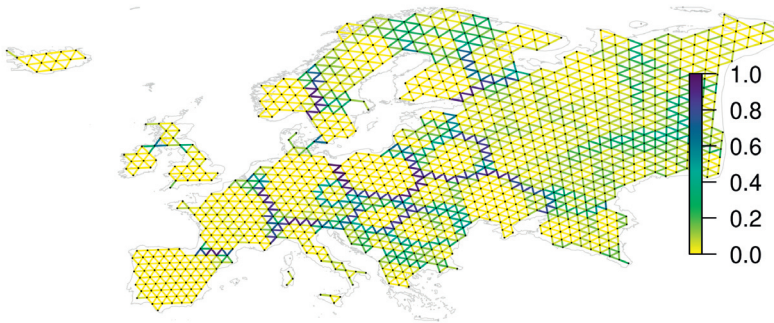
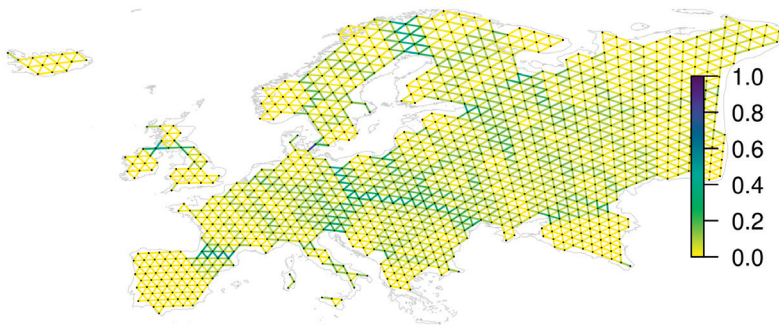


Figure 6.3 Border probabilities, part I. (a) One partitioning sampled from observed data (2011), baseline model. (b) Predicted border probabilities based on 120 partitionings sampled from observed data (2011), baseline model.

Panel (b) of Figure 6.3 shows that simulations that take ethnic boundaries into account overall closely resemble Europe's political map. There are a few anomalies; Portugal is a prominent false negative, likely due to its small size, narrowness, and the rivers and watersheds that cross it; diffuse border probabilities in the Balkans reflect overlapping ethnic settlement area; and simulated borders cross Switzerland, a state that defies ethnically aligned borders. But a comparison to panel (a) of Figure 6.4, where simulations do not account for ethnic geography, shows that incorporating ethnic boundaries greatly improves our prediction.

The difference between border probabilities in panel (b) of Figure 6.3 and panel (a) of Figure 6.4 constitutes the joint effect of all observed

(a)



(b)

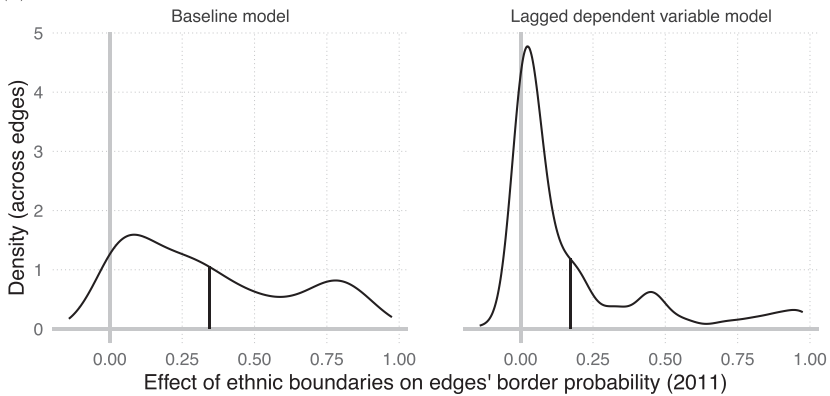


Figure 6.4 Border probabilities, part II. (a) Border probabilities predicted without ethnic boundaries, baseline model. (b) Distribution of the effect of ethnic boundaries on edge-level border probability.

ethnic boundaries, shown in panel (b) of the latter figure. Overall, ethnic boundaries increase border probabilities by 34 percentage points in the baseline model. In the LDV model, border probabilities increase by 17 percentage points over a relatively small baseline probability of border change. These results confirm a substantial effect of ethnic boundaries on the location of newly drawn state borders.

Figure 6.5 sheds light on temporal dynamics by showing separate estimates for each twenty-fifth year since 1886. In line with our argument, the baseline association between state borders and ethnic boundaries increases over time. The temporally disaggregated LDV models show that ethnic geography affected changes in state borders, particularly around the turn of the nineteenth century, World War I, and between

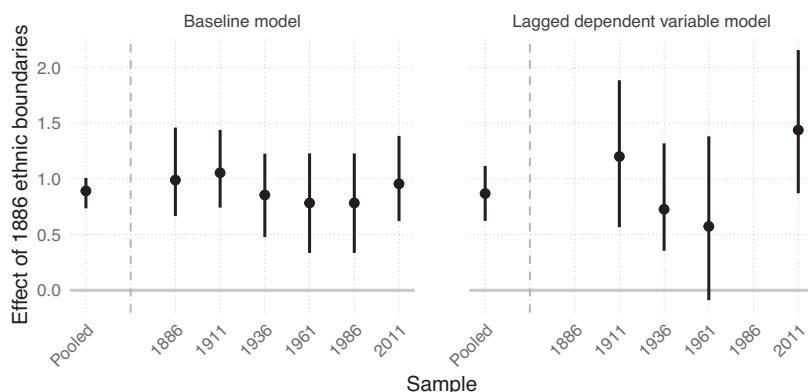


Figure 6.5 Effect of pre-1886 ethnic boundaries on the partitioning of Europe into states.

Note: 95% CIs and gray areas show the distribution of bootstrapped estimates.

1986 and 2011 when the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia collapsed.⁵⁷ World War II brought slightly lower ethnic alignment of state borders, and borders were stable from 1961 to 1986. In short, systemic instability comes with nationalist border change.⁵⁸

To summarize, a series robustness checks show that the main results are not due to either endogenous changes in ethnic boundaries over time or potentially arbitrary modeling decisions.⁵⁹ The consistency of the results with early and alternative ethnic data as well as coarse spatial networks suggests the absence of substantive bias from political manipulation of ethnic data.

6.4 Global Comparison

Our findings have so far been limited to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. In this section, we analyze their generalizability by comparing the effects of ethnic geography on recent borders and border change in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

To do so, we create spatial lattices for each continent and use our main PSPM specifications to estimate the effect of ethnic boundaries on state borders in 2017. We use the earliest global data on ethnic geography

⁵⁷ Post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav borders mostly followed administrative borders that were often drawn based on ethnic geography, see, e.g., Hirsch 2000.

⁵⁸ Cf., Skocpol 1979; Abramson and Carter 2021.

⁵⁹ See Chapter S6.

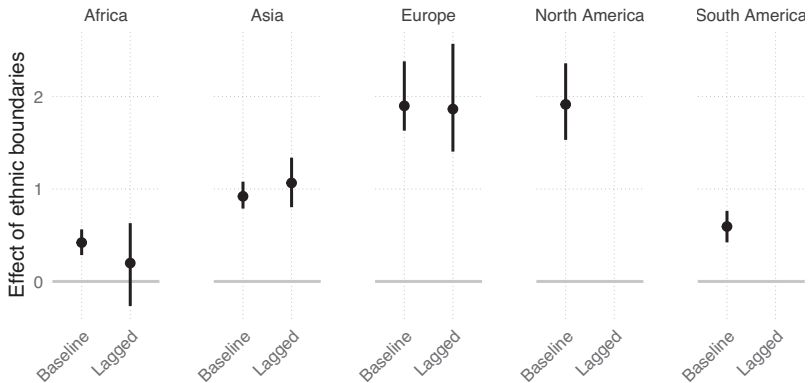


Figure 6.6 Effect of ethnic boundaries in 1964 on state borders across continents.

Note: 95% CIs and gray areas show the distribution of bootstrapped estimates.

from the 1963 Soviet *Atlas Narodov Mira*⁶⁰ and control for 1964 state borders in the LDV model.⁶¹

Starting with Africa, the results shown in Figure 6.6 support the conventional wisdom that decolonization and the *uti possidetis* norm preserved colonial borders drawn with little reference to ethnic geography.⁶² The baseline coefficient is relatively small but statistically significant,⁶³ and the LDV result shows no significant effect on border changes since 1964. Turning to Asia, the results suggest a more substantive effect of ethnic boundaries. Although their coefficient is only half the size compared to Europe, ethnic boundaries in Asia significantly correlate with borders in 2017 and with post-1964 border change. This result is mostly driven by the independence of the ethnically distinct Soviet republics. In the Americas, we observe a stronger cross-sectional correlation between ethnic and state boundaries in North versus South America. The absence of recent border change prohibits estimating LDV models.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Bruk and Apenchenko 1964; Weidmann, Rød and Cederman 2010.

⁶¹ Lacking global data, we omit the “deep lag.” This does not affect results for Europe.

⁶² Griffiths 2015; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016.

⁶³ See also Paine, Qiu and Ricart-Huguet 2025.

⁶⁴ Additional tests show that ethnic boundaries have a larger effect on border change in densely populated regions in Europe and globally, suggesting that the nationalist reshaping of states occurs mostly where territory is of high value and competed over, cf., Herbst 2000.

These results yield two insights. First, state borders are cross-sectionally aligned with ethnic boundaries on a global scale, with states in Africa showing the least alignment. Second, ethnic boundaries seem to affect border change in Asia and Europe but not elsewhere. Ongoing ethnonationalist conflicts, from secessionist Kurdistan to border disputes between India and Pakistan, suggest a continuing risk of ethnic reshaping of Asian states. In contrast, outright secessionist conflict is rare in Africa where the territorial integrity norm is generally upheld,⁶⁵ low population densities decrease territorial competition,⁶⁶ and ethnic conflict fragments some states internally.

6.5 Conclusion

Assessing nationalism's impact empirically, this chapter analyzed whether, by how much, and how the nationalist principle reshaped European states along ethnic boundaries since 1886. Bringing systematic evidence to bear, we contribute to the literature on state and border formation that has so far been relatively fragmented in regard to the ethnic origins of the partitioning of geographic space into states.

Theoretically, we have drawn on a rich yet mostly qualitative literature that highlights the impact of nationalism on international borders through secession and, less frequently, unification and irredentism. Over time, these processes gradually aligned state borders with the ethnic map. We have tested this proposition with our geocoded ethnic settlements since 1855 and our PSPM that allows us to estimate the effect of ethnic geography on the partitioning of Europe into states.

While developed for the present analytical purposes, the PSPM modeling framework can be adapted to study other partitionings, such as administrative units or electoral districts. To improve its flexibility, future development could focus on supra-edge predictors, different samplers, compositional membership outcomes, computational efficiency, and statistical properties. Additionally, innovative modelers may want to jointly assess the reciprocal relationship between state borders and ethnic geography, thus moving beyond the partial effects estimated here.

Our empirical results show that ethnic boundaries have substantively affected borders and border change in Europe since 1886. We estimate that an ethnic boundary between two locations increases the likelihood of an interstate border between them by 34 percentage points. Conditional on past state borders, ethnic boundaries increase border probabilities by 17 percentage points. Our results also suggest that the

⁶⁵ Englebert and Hummel 2005; Zacher 2001.

⁶⁶ Herbst 2000.

ethnic alignment of state borders is an ongoing macrohistorical process. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and secessionist demands across the continent underscore the continuing centrality of nationalist revisionism in European politics. Looking beyond Europe, we have found similar dynamics of ethnonationalist border change in Asia, but less so elsewhere.

Our findings suggest that ethnic geography has an important and continuing effect on the shape of European states. Of consequence, the common treatment of states (and other political units) as fixed and exogenous entities comes at the risk of selection and reverse-causality biases. Selection bias may, for example, deflate estimated effects of ethnonopolitical exclusion on conflict⁶⁷ if previous secessions caused lower levels of ethnic exclusion and conflict. Reverse causality may inflate estimated effects of ethnic diversity on economic performance⁶⁸ if economic development sparked centripetal *and* centrifugal nationalism,⁶⁹ secession, and, thus, lower ethnic diversity. Knowing about units' origins is thus an important prerequisite for inferring the consequences of at least some of their attributes.

⁶⁷ Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

⁶⁸ Alesina and Ferrara 2005.

⁶⁹ Gellner 1983, chapter 7.

Part III

Nationalist State Transformation and War

Part III shifts the attention to patterns of armed conflict. Chapter 7 links specific violations of Gellner's congruence principle to ethnonationalist conflict within and between states. While it is generally accepted that violations of state-nation congruence can cause conflict, less is known about which configurations increase the risk of either civil or interstate conflict and how these conflict types interact. Inspired by Myron Weiner's classic model of the Macedonian syndrome, this chapter proposes an integrated theoretical framework that links specific nationality questions to both conflict types.¹ Using our spatial data on state borders and ethnic settlements in Europe since 1816, we show that excluded and divided groups are more likely to rebel and, where they govern on only one side of the border, to initiate territorial claims and militarized disputes. Compounding the risk of conflict, rebellion and interstate conflict reinforce each other where ethnic division coincides with partial home rule. We obtain similar, but weaker, findings for civil wars and territorial claims in a post-1945 global sample. After World War II, governments have typically shied away from engaging in interstate disputes to address nationality questions and instead support ethnic rebels abroad.

The logic is displayed in Figure III.1, which highlights the relevant parts of the main theoretical scheme that we introduced in Figure 2.1. Figure III.1 also helps position Chapters 8 and 9 within the book, although the latter only focuses on civil rather than interstate conflict.

Adding temporal depth, Chapter 8 evaluates the influence of past golden ages on nationalist claims and conflict. It extends Chapter 7's analysis of the nexus between nationalism and conflict by adding temporal depth and assessing whether restorative nationalism increases the risk of conflict. Taking nationalist narratives seriously, we study how the wish to restore past golden ages² can be used to legitimize territorial claims and mobilize resources for action, as it did for the Polish nationalists who

¹ Weiner 1971.

² See, e.g., Smith 1986.

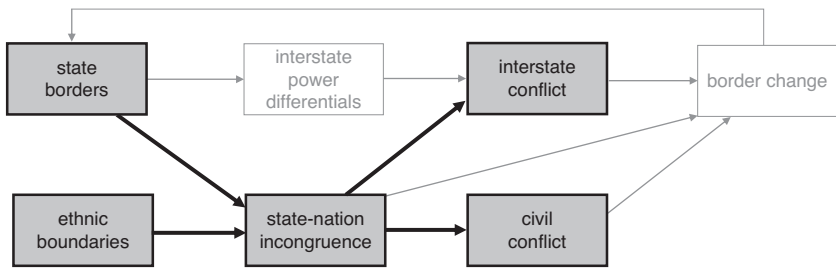


Figure III.1 How state-nation incongruence drives ethnonationalist conflict (Chapters 8–10).

repeatedly rebelled against Russian occupation throughout the nineteenth century. The goal is to reconstruct plausible golden ages by combining ethnic settlement data with information on European state borders going back to 1100 CE. The analysis shows that the availability of a plausible golden age during which a group enjoyed political independence increases the risk of both domestic and interstate conflicts. These findings suggest that specific historical legacies make some modern nationalisms more consequential than others, an interpretation that challenges radically modernist takes on nationalist mobilization.

Chapter 9 uses the gradual expansion of the European railway network 1816–1945 to investigate how this key technological driver of modernization affected ethnic separatism. Combining new historical data on ethnic settlement areas, conflict, and railway construction, we test how railroads affected separatist conflict and successful secession as well as independence claims among peripheral ethnic groups. Difference-in-differences, event study, and instrumental variable models show that, on average, railway-based modernization increased separatist mobilization and secession. These effects concentrate in countries with small groups in power, weak state capacity, and low levels of economic development, as well as in large ethnic minority regions. Exploring causal mechanisms, we show how railway networks can facilitate mobilization by increasing the internal connectivity of ethnic regions or hamper it by boosting state reach. Overall, our findings call for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of European modernization on nation building.

Finally, Chapter 10 reverses the causal priority between nations and states by analyzing how governments employ ethnic cleansing to reduce the risk of nationalist conflict. In this chapter, we shift the attention toward the right-peopling of states within their existing borders. We test conventional constructivist expectations by flipping the causal pathway back to ethnic settlements via ethnic cleansing. This is a crucial

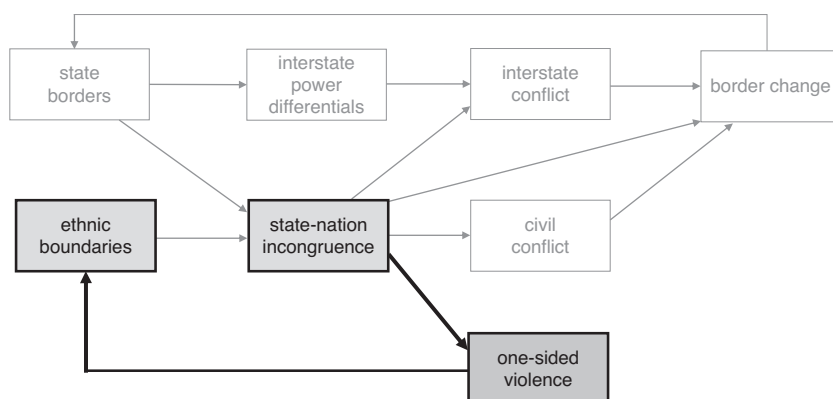


Figure III.2 How state-nation incongruence drives ethnic cleansing (Chapter 10).

complement to our focus on border change since even a casual reading of European states' violent history and our analyses suggest that much of their current ethnic homogeneity resulted from ethnic cleansing. We directly link ethnic cleansing to states' fear of being right-sized. As rising nationalism in the nineteenth century threatened multiethnic states with the secessionism and irredentism examined in the preceding chapters, some states turned to ethnic cleansing to prevent territorial losses. To test this argument, we analyze our spatial data on changes in ethnic settlement areas from 1886 to the present, which we link to episodes of ethnic cleansing. Building on Chapters 7 and 8, we find that border-crossing groups and those with a history of lost home rule were most at risk of ethnic cleansing, especially in times of interstate war. The analysis closes the circuit and shows how right-peopling and right-sizing are part of the same macrohistorical process of nationalist state transformation.

Putting this chapter into perspective, Figure III.2 shows how political violence produced by state-nation disjunctions feeds back to affect ethnic boundaries.

It is generally accepted that state-nation incongruence generates nationalist frustrations, as prominently argued by Gellner,¹ but less is known about how such violations of the nationality principle cause armed conflict. While existing conflict research helps to explain how nationalism increases the mobilizational potential of states within fixed borders² and how specific types of state-nation incongruence can trigger either internal³ or external conflict,⁴ it remains theoretically scattered and focuses on either civil or interstate conflict in addition to lacking historical depth. Our analysis in this chapter paints a more comprehensive theoretical and empirical picture of the link between nationalism and conflict, and our findings on pre-1945 Europe may offer some lessons about what could be in store if Putin gets away with his land grab in Ukraine.

One has to go back half a century to Myron Weiner's seminal article, "The Macedonian Syndrome," to find a comprehensive theoretical statement covering the full complexity of irredentist configurations and their impact on internal and external conflict, and how these categories of political violence interact.⁵ Weiner's historical model outlines an integrated process that features an irredentist state, an anti-irredentist neighboring state, and an ethnic group residing in both states. Aiming to better understand geopolitical instability and conflict in developing countries, he turned to the turbulent history of the Balkans before and after World War I as a historical reference point. Like a medical doctor diagnosing a patient, his article presents a descriptive model. In it,

* This chapter builds on a paper with the title "Nationality Questions and War: How Ethnic Configurations Affect Conflict within and between States" that is forthcoming in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Cederman, Pengl, Atzenhofer and Girardin 2024. We thank Dennis Atzenhofer for his contributions to this paper.

¹ Gellner 1983.

² Clausewitz 1984; Posen 1993a; Tilly 1994; Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

³ Gurr 1993; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

⁴ Saideman and Ayres 2008; Siroky and Hale 2017.

⁵ Weiner 1971.

he identifies the main mechanisms driving armed conflict within and between multiethnic states whose borders dissect ethnic settlements.

Despite its analytical clarity and obvious foresight, especially with respect to the momentous events that shook the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Weiner's linkage between irredentist configurations and civil and interstate war has so far attracted little systematic empirical attention. Following the first series of wars in the former Yugoslavia, Rogers Brubaker proposed a similar triadic actor constellation but did not link it explicitly to specific conflict patterns.⁶ Others have studied how irredentism generates either civil or international conflict but rarely both. In a pioneering contribution, Kristian Gleditsch and his colleagues offer a systematic evaluation of how civil conflict increases the risk of interstate disputes.⁷ Yet while adopting a broader explorative perspective that includes irredentism along with other mechanisms, their study does not consider the interaction from the other direction.

Thus, it is still unclear to what extent Weiner's classic depiction of irredentist conflict can be generalized beyond late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Balkan geopolitics. Using Weiner's model as an analytical starting point, this chapter addresses all three challenges. First, to overcome theoretical fragmentation, we draw on our theory of nationalist state transformation to build a comprehensive conceptual framework capturing foreign rule and ethnic division as well as all possible combinations of these deviations from the nation-state ideal, with Weiner's model appearing as a special case. Second, we link these configurations to both civil and interstate conflict and interactions between these conflict types. The analysis shows that Weiner's irredentist constellation featuring groups that are divided by state borders and enjoy only partial home rule is particularly prone to experiencing an interaction between internal and external conflict. In this classic irredentist setting, nationalist principles and mobilization provide a plausible mechanism showing how domestic and international conflict may reinforce each other. Third, to test our theoretical expectations, we align our data on state borders and ethnic settlement areas with information about civil wars, territorial claims, and militarized interstate disputes in post-Napoleonic Europe.

Our findings show that ethnic segments under foreign rule by an ethnically distinct host government are particularly likely to rebel. Division of excluded groups by state borders increases civil-war risk further, regardless of whether the kin group across the border holds power. For groups that enjoy home rule, division does not significantly increase the risk of intra-ethnic conflict. The combination of ethnic division with home

⁶ Brubaker 1996.

⁷ Gleditsch, Salehyan and Schultz 2008.

rule on one side of the border and foreign rule on the other is associated with interstate disputes. In this irredentist constellation, past ethnic rebellion makes the conflict between the host and irredentist kin states more likely. By the same token, there is relatively weak evidence that a history of conflict between kin and host state increases the risk of ethnic rebellion in the latter. Home rule for both parts of an ethnic group divided by state borders, if anything, reduces the probability of interstate trouble, suggesting that national unification wars between coethnic state governments are the exception rather than the rule. All our findings are driven by the pre-1945 period and get weaker or disappear in postwar Europe.

Additionally, we broaden the scope to the entire world after World War II. Based on existing datasets, this empirical extension reveals that nationality problems spur ethnic rebellion within states and territorial claims between them but are no longer systematically associated with interstate violence. We also find that the reinforcing dynamics between domestic and international conflict found in pre-1945 Europe no longer hold. Consistent with international norms and institutions that have made territorial conquest and interstate warfare increasingly risky and unacceptable, potential irredentist states instead support ethnic rebels fighting the host governments of their powerless kin abroad. Ethnic civil war thus appears as a driver and consequence of irredentist interstate conflict in pre-1945 Europe but seems to have turned into its feasible substitute under the global postwar order.

We begin by providing an overview of how the literature has approached the link between nationalism and conflict onset. We then derive operational hypotheses and introduce our main datasets. This description is followed by empirical analyses focusing on internal and external conflict in post-Napoleonic Europe and on the post-World War II period globally. The last section summarizes the main findings.

7.1 Literature

Following Clausewitz's classic insights,⁸ scholarship has shown how nationalism helps the modern state mobilize resources for interstate warfare⁹ and also how warfare promotes nation building.¹⁰ Other, more recent studies explore how different types of nationalism, especially ethnic, internally inclusive but externally exclusive types, increase the risk

⁸ Clausewitz 1984.

⁹ Posen 1993a; Tilly 1994; Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

¹⁰ Sambanis, Skaperdas and Wohlforth 2015.

of war.¹¹ But the influence of nationalism goes beyond the internal dynamics within given state borders. As argued in Chapter 2, much of nationalism's destabilizing effect derives from violations of its very core principle, namely, the congruence of the state and the typically ethnically defined nation.

An important, but relatively limited empirical literature studies how specific nationalist actor constellations cause interstate disputes and wars. David Carment and Patrick James show how irredentist configurations make international crises more severe, violent, and difficult to manage.¹² In a significant study, Benjamin Miller offers an explicit analysis of how specific deviations from "state-to-nation balance" trigger characteristic patterns of interstate conflict, including irredentist war by revisionist states with stranded ethnic kin abroad.¹³ Using detailed case studies from Eastern Europe, Stephen Saideman and William Ayres explore the conditions under which latent irredentist constellations lead to mobilization and violence.¹⁴ Focusing on Africa, Henk Goemans and Kenneth Schultz find that transborder ethnic links increase the risk of territorial claims, but only if the partitioned groups are in power on one side of the border and marginalized on the other.¹⁵ Analyzing domestic conditions that make irredentist conflict more likely, David Siroky and Christopher Hale show that economic status inconsistency and majoritarian systems increase the risk of violent interstate disputes.¹⁶ But these studies say little about internal conflict and how it may trigger or result from interstate trouble.

Other studies analyze how foreign rule and cross-border ethnic ties make domestic rebellion more likely. Early quantitative research on minorities at risk shows that different types of marginalization, including political exclusion, are conducive to civil conflict.¹⁷ The civil war literature explores how internal conflict in one country may spread across state borders, especially in the presence of border-straddling ethnicity,¹⁸ and how transborder ethnic links may facilitate rebellion.¹⁹ Related research finds that the risk of civil conflict depends on power relations

¹¹ Snyder 2000; Schrock-Jacobson 2012; Powers 2022.

¹² Carment and James 1995. The dyadic analyses by Moore and Davis 1997 and Woodwell 2004 produce similar findings, suggesting that border-transgressing ethnicity is associated with aggressive foreign policy as well as interstate crises and conflicts.

¹³ Miller 2007.

¹⁴ Saideman and Ayres 2008.

¹⁵ Goemans, Schultz et al. 2017.

¹⁶ Siroky and Hale 2017.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Gurr 1993. These insights were further developed and explicitly linked to nationalism by Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Gleditsch 2007; Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Checkel 2013.

¹⁹ Denny and Walter 2014.

between ethnic minorities and host governments as well as between host and kin states.²⁰ Focusing on external intervention in civil wars rather than their onset, other contributions show how governing ethnic groups may support coethnic rebels abroad.²¹

Despite their focus on ethnic links and irredentism, neither of these clusters of research systematically scrutinizes how internal and external conflict patterns reinforce each other. There is a deep-seated division between research on civil war and studies of interstate conflict.²² But the solution is not to treat internal and external conflict as if they were caused by the same correlates.²³ Some studies blur the two conflict types, especially under the heading of ethnic conflict. In a conceptual piece, Stephen Van Evera proposes a series of “hypotheses on nationalism and war,” but his study does not make explicit whether “war” stands for confrontations between governments or between governments and nonstate actors, nor does it try to test hypotheses.²⁴

In one of the few studies that analyze the interaction between internal and external conflict, Kristian Gleditsch, Idean Salehyan, and Kenneth Schultz demonstrate that states that experience civil war are more likely to get involved in militarized disputes.²⁵ They attribute this link to mechanisms that are endogenous to the issues that caused civil war in the first place. Such mechanisms include externalization, spillovers, and interventions, some of which relate directly to irredentist configurations and the desire to protect ethnic transborder kin. But their study does not assess whether irredentist ethnic links make the escalation from civil to interstate conflict more likely.

Similarly adopting a two-level logic, Jessica Edry, Jesse Johnson, and Ashley Leeds analyze how alliance patterns respond not only to external threats but also to internal ones.²⁶ While considering the risk of both civil and interstate conflict in the same framework, they analyze preventive alliances rather than conflict itself. Focusing on strategies of nation building, Harris Mylonas studies how governments may choose to exclude minorities supported by enemy states rather than pursuing accommodation or assimilation.²⁷

In sum, current conflict research addresses the link between nationalism and conflict, but, with respect to actor constellations and conflict

²⁰ Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

²¹ Saideman 1997, 2001, 2002; San-Akca 2016.

²² Cederman and Vogt 2017.

²³ Cf., Cunningham and Lemke 2013.

²⁴ Van Evera 1994.

²⁵ Gleditsch, Salehyan and Schultz 2008.

²⁶ Edry, Johnson and Leeds 2021.

²⁷ Mylonas 2012.

types, the analytical focus tends to be relatively narrow. Furthermore, data limitations, especially the lack of reliable data on ethnic groups before 1945, still obstruct attempts to assess whether Weiner's Macedonian syndrome can be generalized to other parts of Europe, let alone the rest of the world.

7.2 Theoretical Argument

As an analytical starting point, we build on Weiner's informal model of the Macedonian syndrome.²⁸ Although mostly descriptive and covering a particular part of the world, Weiner's seminal study offers the necessary complexity to understand the full scope of nationality problems and their link to conflict patterns. Seeking to generate lessons for multiethnic postcolonial states, he outlines a dynamic conflict process that centers on an ethnic group straddling the border between two states, at least one of which is dissatisfied with the geopolitical status quo. Together these three actors constitute a triad that extends conventional dyadic conceptions of conflict processes. This revisionist scenario centers on a situation in which the group is powerless in at least one of the states. Where its members are in power in the revisionist state, there are likely to be strong incentives to incorporate or support the powerless kin. Irredentist politics thus increases the likelihood of both rebellion and interstate disputes involving the two states.²⁹

Weiner's two-level process includes several stages of mounting tensions and mutual suspicion that ultimately trigger violent conflict. The status quo-oriented host state fears that a minority desires to be liberated by the revisionist state. In such a climate of fear and suspicion, miscalculation and emotional overreactions foster excessive risk-taking and militarization that increase the chance of violent conflict both inside the host state and between the two states. As the conflict progresses, bitterness and hatred prevail, thus drastically decreasing the chances of finding a compromise to end the ethnonationalist conflict.

The Macedonian syndrome serves as an excellent first step for conceptualizing the link between nationalist configurations and conflict, but it is only a starting point. Indeed, Weiner's descriptive model needs to be embedded into the general theoretical framework that we use to derive testable hypotheses with applicability well beyond the Balkans. In this section, we construct such a contextual account of the link between nationality problems and conflict patterns.

²⁸ Weiner 1971.

²⁹ Brubaker 1996 introduces a similar three-actor configuration, but unlike Weiner, he refrains from deriving specific conflict-inducing mechanisms, see also Mylonas 2012.

In the era of nationalism following the French Revolution, political legitimacy shifted from dynastic ruler to “the people,” typically defined as “the nation.”³⁰ This transition from territorial to popular sovereignty paved the way for ethnonationalist politics. In theory, there are many possible definitions of “the people” that can serve as the basis of popular sovereignty. But from the French Revolution onward, “the nation” as a politicized ethnic community emerged as the prevailing answer to this critical question.³¹

Once “the people” had been identified with “the nation,” the normative implications were clear. Any deviation from the nationality principle can be expected to generate grievances, which may in turn facilitate collective mobilization and trigger violent conflict. As argued in Chapters 2 and 5, state-to-nation congruence can be violated in two main ways: either there is a deficit of states, which means that some nations are exposed to alien rule, or there is a surplus, which implies that ethnic nations suffer from ethnic division. In irredentist situations, which occur if at least part of a border-transgressing nationalist community is dominated by another ethnonationalist group in addition to being politically fragmented by state borders, alien rule and division coincide, as in the case of the Macedonian syndrome.

To further clarify, we introduce our main configurations in Figure 7.1. Rather than treating ethnic nations as groups nested inside states, we conceptualize them as potential border-transgressing communities. We use the term segment to refer to each subpopulation of a transnational group.

By covering all possible combinations, the figure allows us to contextualize the Macedonian syndrome as one of five ethnonationalist configurations. The rows indicate whether the nation in question enjoys home rule, alien rule, or partial home rule. The latter applies in case some segments of the nation are in power whereas others are exposed to alien rule. The columns denote whether the nation is unified or divided. Based on this classification, we arrive at five possibilities rather than six since partial home rule presupposes that the ethnic nation is split.

- *United home rule:* Under the label united home rule, the nationality principle is fully satisfied, and we expect no nationalist conflict due to nationality problems. If one disregards its overseas colonies, the

³⁰ Mann 2005; Roshwald 2015.

³¹ Yack 2001.

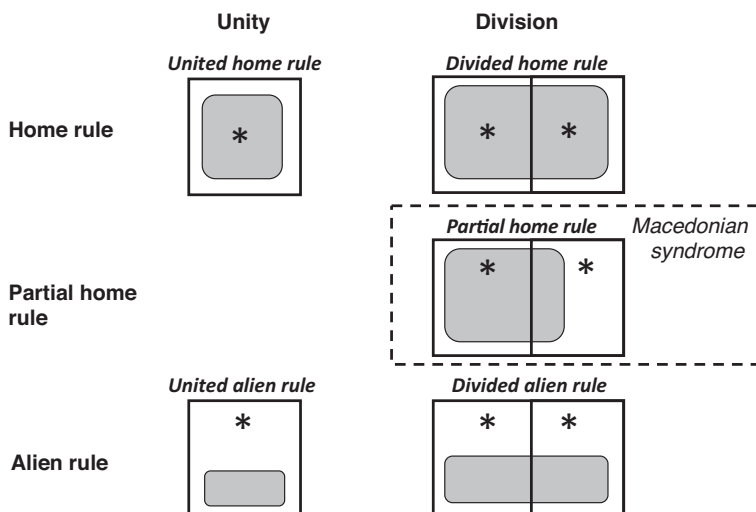


Figure 7.1 Five configurations with or without alien rule and division.

Note: States are shown as black boxes with stars denoting their capitals and ethnic nations depicted as shaded shapes. Ethnic nations containing the capital hold political power in the respective state.

past couple of centuries of Portuguese history capture the ideal of a nation-state.³²

- *United alien rule:* In configurations of united alien rule, the segment is powerless and may rebel against the host government with the aim of ousting the incumbent group or seceding from the state. Typical cases include secessionist action against imperial centers, such as the Hungarian uprising against Austrian domination in 1848 and the Baltic peoples' rebellions against the Soviet occupiers in 1946.
- *Divided home rule:* Configurations of divided home rule capture classic unification nationalism. Unification typically proceeds peacefully, thanks to nationalist affinities, as illustrated by the German reunification that began in 1989, but interstate conflict due to competition over who would take the lead cannot be excluded. The Austro-Prussian War of 1866 is a prominent example of a violent national unification process.

³² Nationalism can also cause intensified competition between states even between ideal typical nation states because nationalism facilitates mobilization within given state borders, see Clausewitz 1984; Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

- *Partial home rule*: Partial home rule represents the irredentist configuration we refer to as the Macedonian syndrome.³³ Irredentism can produce both civil conflict and interstate disputes. Whether the dominated segment strives to secede from its host state or unify with its homeland state, nationality problems increase the risk of political violence.³⁴ The Russian-sponsored rebellion in Ukraine since 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fall into this category.³⁵ Other cases include the Bulgarians rebelling in Serbia in 1885 and the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire rebelling after the creation of the Greek state in 1821. Beyond Eastern Europe, the Troubles in Northern Ireland until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 illustrate another instance of rebellion in an irredentist setting.
- *Divided alien rule*: Divided alien rule describes a situation in which all segments of the ethnonationalist group experience alien rule. This configuration is likely to produce rebellion, as the nationalists are fighting alien rule imposed by their respective governments. The ultimate goal of this rebellion is typically unification in an independent state. Much of Kurdish modern history falls into this category, as do the Serbian challenges to Austrian and Ottoman rule and the Polish struggle against foreign domination by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in the nineteenth century.

Based on this reasoning, we derive theoretical expectations for civil wars (Hypothesis H7.1) and interstate wars (Hypothesis H7.2) using united home rule as the baseline. The first set of hypotheses focuses on the outbreak of civil conflict:

Hypothesis H7.1a. Under united alien rule, the onset of civil conflict is more likely.

Hypothesis H7.1b. Under partial home rule, the onset of civil conflict is more likely.

Hypothesis H7.1c. Under divided alien rule, the onset of civil conflict is more likely.

In all three configurations, the lack of home rule constitutes the main motivation driving conflict. H7.1b and H7.1c allow us to test whether

³³ Weiner also includes a situation in which both group segments are minorities, thus approximating divided alien rule, but most aspects of the stepwise logic of his descriptive model fit this configuration rather than divided alien rule, see Weiner 1971, 668.

³⁴ Horowitz 1991.

³⁵ We classify Russian speakers as ethnic Russians inside Ukraine. This is obviously only a crude approximation because many Russian speakers identify with Ukraine, especially following Russian human rights abuses in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion.

division amplifies conflict risk above and beyond the effect of alien rule. We do not expect effects for ethnic division on its own because groups that enjoy home rule seem unlikely to fight their conational governing elites in the name of unification.

Rather than triggering conflict automatically, these hypotheses are probabilistic because several conditions need to be met for the structural configurations to translate into mass-held grievances and mobilization for violent conflict.³⁶ The step from state-nation mismatch to grievances requires that the nondominant group members frame alien rule or division as unjust while targeting the dominant group.³⁷ Furthermore, mass grievances are unlikely to materialize without a recognition of injustice, which in most cases emanates from normative frameworks, such as nationalism or self-determination.³⁸ Grievance formation also hinges on nationalist activists' framing of alien rule or division as being caused by incumbent power wielders, typically representatives of the dominant group.³⁹

Once mass-held grievances materialize, the potential for collective action increases, but it is still far from guaranteed. At this point, a successful challenge to incumbent power calls for considerable resources and organization.⁴⁰ Such efforts can profit from preexisting social networks⁴¹ and identity categories,⁴² the latter allowing mobilization to exceed the constraints of direct interpersonal relations in "imagined communities."⁴³ Importantly, instead of constituting a rival explanation, the emotional power of grievances helps nonstate challengers overcome the collective-action dilemma imposed by incumbent state power.⁴⁴

Under Hypothesis 7.2, we turn to the probability of interstate conflict:

Hypothesis H7.2a. Under divided home rule, the onset of interstate conflict is more likely.

Hypothesis H7.2b. Under partial home rule, the onset of interstate conflict is more likely.

The mechanisms responsible for interstate conflict differ somewhat from those that produce rebellion. In the former cases, it is typically

³⁶ See Chapter 2 and Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013, chapter 3.

³⁷ Tajfel and Turner 1979; Horowitz 1985.

³⁸ Brass 1991; Williams 2003.

³⁹ Gamson 1992; Benford and Snow 2000.

⁴⁰ Tilly 1978.

⁴¹ Tarrow 1994.

⁴² Goldstone 2001.

⁴³ Anderson [1983] 1991.

⁴⁴ Petersen 2002.

governments and their ethnonational constituencies rather than non-state movements that mobilize to fight. In the case of H7.2a, frustrations with division motivate the proponents of unification to take the lead. Since this process involves conational states, we expect them to consider violence only as a last resort, which should translate to a lower risk of interstate conflict than in the irredentist setup of the Macedonian syndrome.

In the case of partial home rule, the coethnics governing the homeland state view division as scandalous, but grievances relating to alien rule are also at play. In this scenario, the unhappiness concerns not only that a governing segment's kin is cut off from the homeland state but also more or less substantiated worries about the ethnically foreign government's treatment of its kin inside the other state.⁴⁵ Grievances may be genuinely felt by a considerable share of the population, or they may be stoked up and instrumentalized by nondominant elites to launch an attack against the host government, allegedly mistreating their kin across the border. In a classic example, Hitler fabricated claims that the Polish government was mistreating ethnic Germans to justify the invasion of Poland in 1939, which in turn triggered World War II.⁴⁶ Whether motivated by invented or actual mistreatment of minorities, state leaders need to foster grievances and support to prepare their country for mass mobilization and military action.

Our final analytical step captures the interaction between civil and interstate conflict. These hypotheses apply only to partial home rule, which features both conflict types:

Hypothesis H7.3a. Under partial home rule, past interstate conflict makes the onset of civil conflict more likely.

Hypothesis H7.3b. Under partial home rule, past civil conflict makes the onset of interstate conflict more likely.

H7.3a assumes that host and homeland states have a history of interstate disputes. According to this outside-in logic, hostility spilling over from the rivalry between the two states' may end up poisoning the domestic politics of the host state. For example, the irredentist setting with a disputed interstate border made the conflict in Northern Ireland more intractable. A similarly enduring dynamic characterizes repeated Greek rebellions against the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century that were fueled by warfare between the newly independent Greek state and the Ottoman Porte. In the eyes of the host government, the

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022.

⁴⁶ Bergen 2008.

homeland state's conationalists appear as a potentially threatening fifth column that deserves to be selected out for particularly harsh treatment, thus increasing the risk of violent rebellion.⁴⁷ In the opposite direction, H7.3b seeks the roots of interstate conflict in the domestic conditions of the host state. If the conationalists are already fighting against their government, their homeland kin may be tempted to intervene in the civil conflict on their side. But such interventions are far from automatic because action against a neighboring state is inherently risky⁴⁸ and may involve considerable normative costs at the international level, as has been the case especially in the post-1945 period.⁴⁹ Therefore, full-fledged armed intervention in such conflict interactions has increasingly been substituted by covert support for domestic armed actors in the host state.⁵⁰ Balkan history provides several examples of this pattern. The repeated interstate disputes between Greece and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey originated in the Greek uprising against the Ottomans in 1821, especially since newly independent Greece still excluded many Greek settlements that remained unredeemed.

Together, H7.3a and H7.3b could set off an entire series of exchanges where repeated conflict at the intra- and interstate levels creates a positive feedback effect. Students of interstate warfare analyze this phenomenon as enduring rivalries, especially in regard to repeated outbreaks of conflict between the same two states.⁵¹ Recently, some researchers have extended the concept to civil conflict.⁵² Taking it a step further, the triadic nexus of the Macedonian syndrome helps us to conceptualize persistent and recurrent ethnopolitical conflict patterns that unfold both between and within states. Prominent examples of this extended notion of enduring rivalries include persistent conflicts pitting India against Pakistan over Kashmir,⁵³ as well as Greek and Turkish competition over various territories, including the region of Thrace and several Aegean islands.⁵⁴

We summarize these hypotheses in Figure 7.2.

⁴⁷ Weiner 1971, 678.

⁴⁸ Horowitz 1985, chapter 6; Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009.

⁴⁹ Zacher 2001; Fazal 2007.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Saideman 2002.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Diehl and Goertz 2000.

⁵² DeRouen and Bercovitch 2008.

⁵³ Saideman 2006.

⁵⁴ Heraclides 2011.

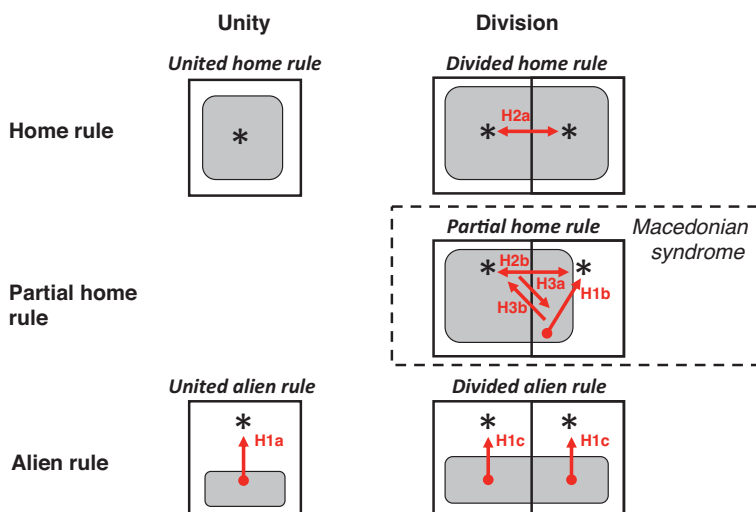


Figure 7.2 Expected conflict patterns in the five configurations.

Note: States are shown as black boxes with stars denoting their capitals and ethnic nations depicted as shaded shapes. Ethnic nations containing the capital hold political power in the respective state. Red one-way arrows starting with a dot indicate civil conflict, whereas bidirectional arrows refer to interstate conflict. One-way arrows without a dot correspond to reinforcing dynamics between civil and interstate conflict.

7.3 Analyzing Nationality Questions and Conflict in Europe from 1816

To identify specific nationality questions, we draw state borders from the CShapes Europe dataset and rely on the HEG data for ethnic groups in Europe.⁵⁵ All analyses of civil conflict rely on yearly observations of ethnic segments as units of analysis, defined as the spatial intersections between country borders and (potential) border-transgressing ethnic settlement areas. The civil war data are taken from our own data collection of ethnically specific internal conflict.⁵⁶ We also aggregate ethnic segment-level data to the level of country dyads. We identify the state-leading ethnic segments in each dyad year and check whether they initiate militarized interstate disputes or territorial claims against the other country in the dyad. Doing so allows us to test whether division and home rule or partial home rule make a difference by coding indicators of whether the dominant segment in the potential challenger

⁵⁵ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3 and Section S7.1.

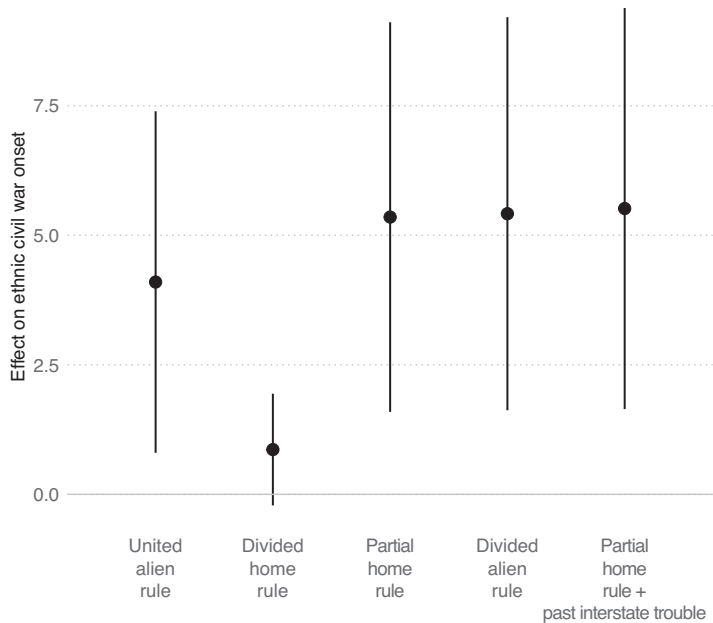


Figure 7.3 Ethnic rebellion, European sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.1. (Fifth column: TEK, 1 SD.)

state has an ethnic kin segment with home or alien rule in the respective target state.⁵⁷

The remainder of the section summarizes our main findings. We test the association between the theoretically derived nationality mismatches and territorial conflict within and across country borders in post-1816 Europe. We then extend the empirical focus to a global sample covering the post-World War II period and test whether the European findings travel to other world regions post-1945 (Figure 7.2).

We start by evaluating the link between ethnonationalist configurations and civil conflict. Capturing the conflict risk for each ethnic segment, Figure 7.3 shows the effects as dots and uncertainty as bisecting vertical lines. The solid horizontal line corresponds to no effect, which means that dots lying above it correspond to positive effects, which can

⁵⁷ See Chapter S7 in the supplementary material for technical details on variable definitions and specifications.

safely be separated from the null effect if the left side of the uncertainty line does not touch the zero line.⁵⁸

The left column indicates that for united alien rule, civil conflict is more likely than in an ideal nation-state, thus confirming H7.1a. We also include the result for divided home rule, although this does not refer to any postulated effect, and indeed, the effects are small and not separable from zero. Under partial home rule, there is a strong effect corresponding roughly to five times the average effect among all segments in our data, thus confirming H7.1b. Likewise, the next column indicates that alien rule together with division yields about the same risk of civil conflict (see H7.1c). Finally, there is some, but considerably weaker, evidence that past or present interstate disputes make internal conflict even more likely in constellations of division and partial home rule (see the rightmost column, referring to H7.3a.).

Our second set of analyses investigates how nationality mismatches relate to territorial claims between countries. We study yearly observations of country pairs covering the period between 1816 and 2001. Figure 7.4 presents the results. As expected, we find no clear sign that divided home rule would make interstate territorial claims more likely, thus casting doubt on H7.2a (see the leftmost column). But partial home rule (middle column) is associated with a clearly positive effect on interstate claim-making (H7.2b). The potential for conflict increases even further if the fought-over kin segment has been fighting its host government (H7.3b).

We next shift our attention from territorial claims to actual militarized interstate disputes. It is well known that not all territorial claims turn violent. As an alternative measure of interstate conflict at a higher level of escalation than claims, we analyze the initiation of dyadic militarized interstate disputes (see Figure 7.5). In this case, a clearly negative effect can be detected for divided groups enjoying home rule in both countries of the respective dyad (H7.2a), which underlines the conclusion drawn from the claim analysis. But we do find an effect of the irredentist constellation of partial home rule, although in this case it is somewhat less precisely estimated (H7.2a). As with territorial claims given earlier, disputes become even more likely if the relevant ethnic kin had been involved in a civil conflict with their host government (H7.3b).

In sum, our analysis establishes that Weiner's original analysis applies quite well to Europe as a whole from 1816 through the early twenty-first century, with most of the action appearing before 1945. As expected, the irredentist configuration of partial home rule generates more civil

⁵⁸ Again, see Chapter S7 for more details on the empirical analysis. The graphical results are based on model 4 in Table S7.1.

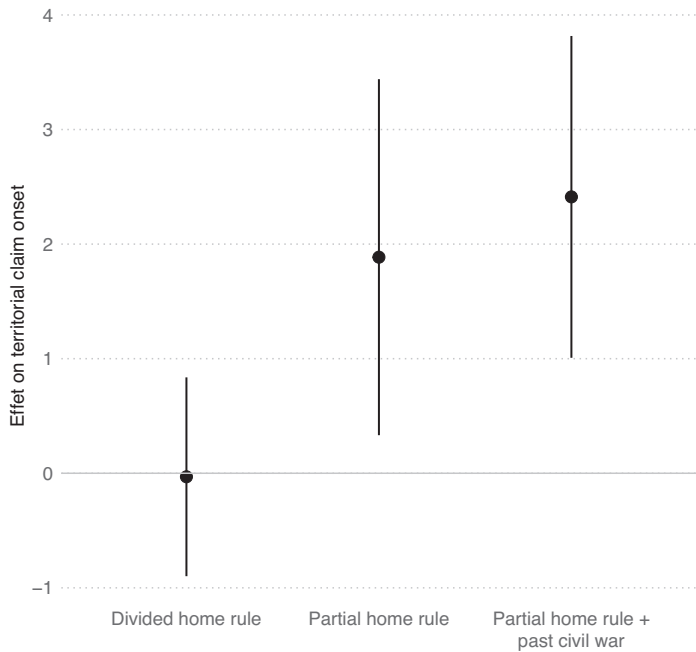


Figure 7.4 Territorial claim onset, European sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.2. (Third column: TEK, 1 SD.)

and interstate conflict than the nation-state baseline. Also in accordance with the Macedonian syndrome, the analysis reveals considerable interdependence between these two conflict types, but mostly from civil to interstate conflict rather than the reverse.

7.4 Global Analysis of Nationality Questions and Conflict from 1946

This section further investigates whether our findings for post-Napoleonic Europe apply to the rest of the world after World War II. To conduct this extended test, we construct a global dataset from 1946 until 2017.⁵⁹ The basic setup is identical to the one used in the European analysis.

Analyzing the effect on civil conflict, Figure 7.6 reveals results similar to the European case for alien rule and unity, although the increase

⁵⁹ See Chapter S7 for details.

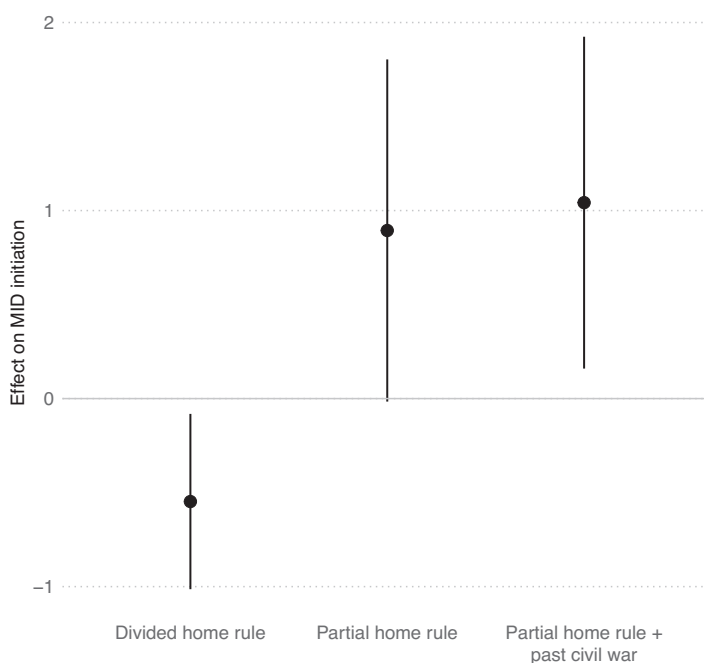


Figure 7.5 MID initiation, European sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.3. (Third column: TEK, 1 SD.)

in conflict risk relative to the sample average is lower than in the European analysis. Furthermore, as in Europe, the global effect increases for partial home rule, confirming that the Macedonian syndrome is particularly conflict-prone, as well as for divided home rule. There is no clear evidence that past interstate trouble makes a difference (see H7.3a).

Shifting to the interstate level, Figure 7.7 indicates partial home rule is indeed associated with a higher risk of irredentist territorial claims. In contrast to the European findings, the effect of past civil conflict appears to be negative rather than positive, thus contradicting H7.3b. If anything, the findings for militarized interstate disputes are even weaker, see Figure 7.8. In such a case, the irredentist configuration of partial home rule and division fails to stand out in terms of conflict risk, and the influence of previous civil conflict does not appear relevant.

As discussed in further detail in Chapter S7, these relatively weak effects could be due to changes in the international environment over time, especially the gradual consolidation of the territorial integrity norm

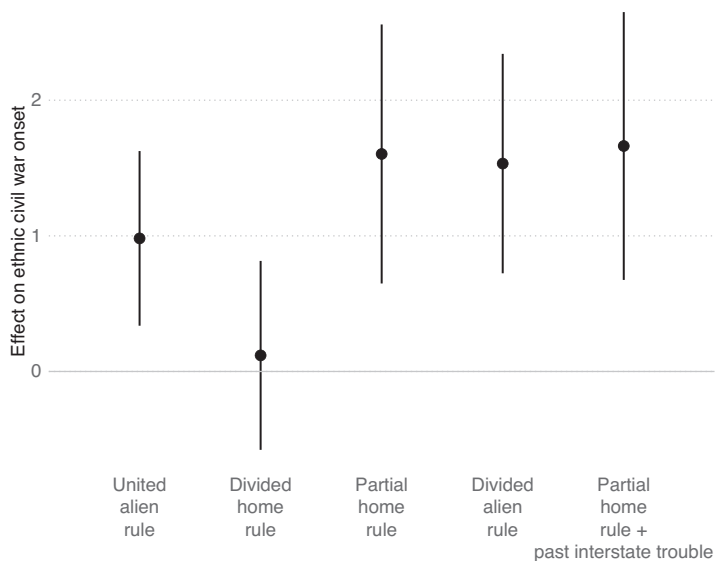


Figure 7.6 Civil conflict onset, global sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.4. (Fifth column: TEK, 1 SD.)

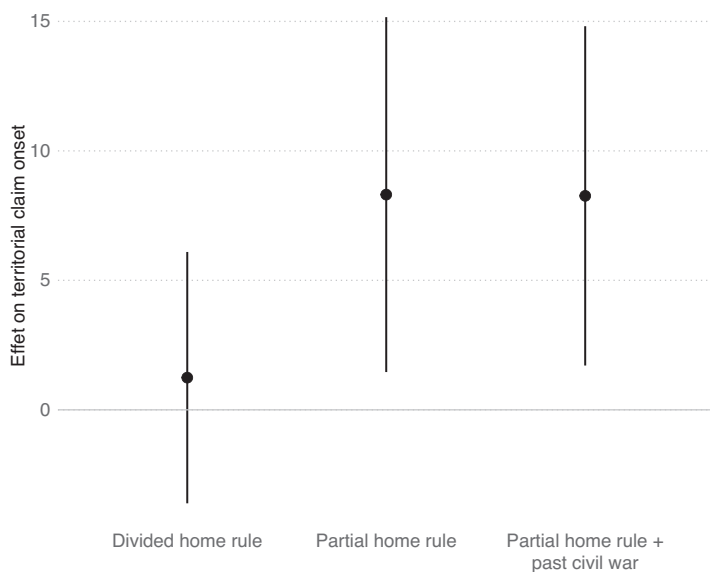


Figure 7.7 Territorial claim onset, global sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.5. (Third column: TEK, 1 SD.)

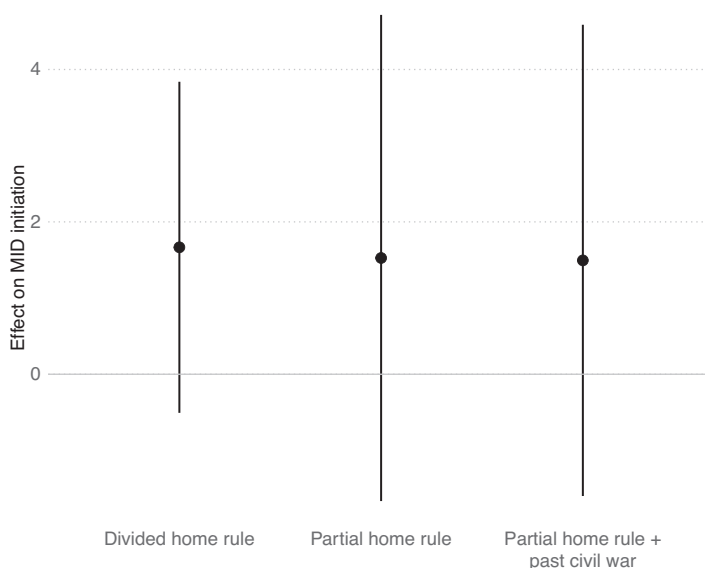


Figure 7.8 MID initiation, global sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.6. (Third column: TEK, 1 SD.)

after World War II.⁶⁰ Furthermore, during the Cold War, great power interests arguably contributed to pacification within each superpower's sphere of influence, as illustrated by Soviet suppression of conflict in the Balkans.⁶¹ That said, the global findings suggest that ethnic division combined with foreign or partial home rule continues to drive ethnic rebellion within and territorial claim-making between states. Postwar norms and institutions thus appear to have contained nationalist interstate conflict without resolving the underlying grievances and motivations.

If this interpretation is correct and the postwar international order merely raises the normative and material costs of land grabs and violent interstate action, we would expect states with irredentist inclinations to search for less risky alternatives. Existing literature on external intervention in civil wars has highlighted one such alternative: providing support to rebel groups fighting in the name of marginalized coethnics abroad.⁶²

⁶⁰ Zacher 2001; Fazal 2007.

⁶¹ Weiner 1971, 682.

⁶² Saideman 2001; San-Akca 2016.

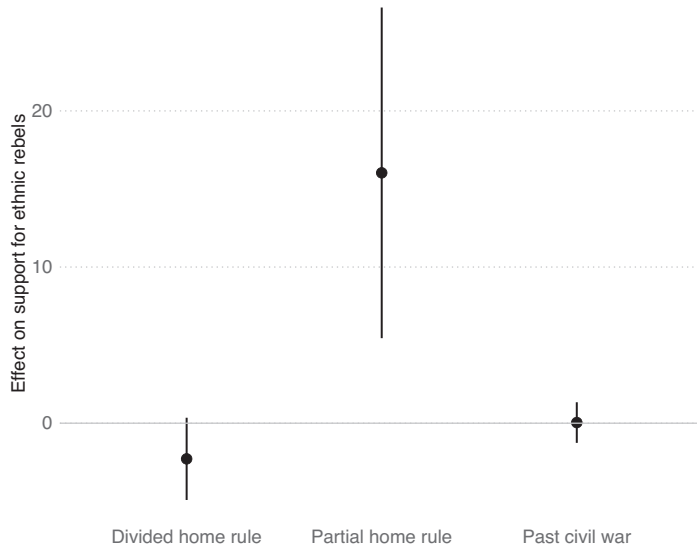


Figure 7.9 External support for rebels, global sample.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 in Table S7.7. (TEK, 1 SD.)

Additional empirical analysis confirms our interpretation that rebel support often functions as a substitute for interstate conflict.⁶³ Figure 7.9 reveals that governments are particularly likely to support rebels under partial home rule. Combined with the null findings for MID initiation, this suggests that irredentist interventions are by no means a thing of the past but continue in another, plausibly less costly form.

And so, extending Weiner's descriptive model far beyond its original spatiotemporal reference frame yields mixed empirical support. The global analysis of civil conflict suggests that nationality questions are an important driver, particularly for ethnic groups that are both divided and powerless. Focusing on territorial claims, there is support for H7.2b, which corresponds to the irredentist setting of partial home rule that is at the heart of Weiner's model. Yet this finding does not translate into militarized action, arguably because international norms have inhibited most open interstate conflict since World War II. Interestingly and consistent with this view, the irredentist constellation strongly predicts external support for ethnic rebels, a plausibly more feasible strategy to further ethnonationalist goals abroad. But the global analysis offers no

⁶³ Here, we use data provided by San-Akca 2016. See also Chapter S7.

evidence of a reinforcing effect between intrastate and interstate conflict via transborder ethnic links.

7.5 Conclusion

We have used Weiner's classic model as an analytical starting point for a more general explanation of why specific nationalist configurations are more conflict prone than others.⁶⁴ Our main findings confirm the original intuition of Weiner's conjectures. On their own, both alien rule and division are associated with a higher likelihood of conflict outbreaks in Europe. What is unique about the Macedonian syndrome is that these two violations of the nationality principle coincide. Furthermore, it is the only configuration in which both internal and external conflict are likely to break out due to state-nation incongruence. It is precisely this irredentist logic that fuels such explosive dynamics, as illustrated by the combined civil and interstate conflict affecting Ukraine since 2014.

Extending the focus from the Balkans to the whole of Europe, we find strong evidence that rebellions involving ethnonationalist groups challenging their host states increase the probability that the homeland state may get involved in disputes with the host state. There is also some, although considerably weaker, support for the reverse effect (going from interstate conflict to internal strife), which may reflect host governments' fears and claims about ethnic fifth columns within their own borders.

Focusing on the post-1945 period beyond Europe, our analysis underlines the conflict potential of specific ethnonationalist constellations. Division and alien rule significantly increase the risk of civil conflict, as illustrated by the Kurds' persistent struggle. We find somewhat weaker effects of division and partial home rule on intrastate conflict. Furthermore, this irredentist constellation also appears to generate interstate trouble only in terms of territorial claims and external support for ethnic rebels and not as militarized disputes. Yet beyond the historical European cases, there is little evidence of spillover from one level to the other. International norm shifts against violent border change could account for these differences. In this sense, global post-1945 conflict patterns between states are less extreme than could be expected based on Weiner's decades-old model. But unfortunately, Russia's military interventions in Ukraine since 2014 suggest that the very norms that had previously tamed nationalist interstate conflict may now be weakening.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Weiner 1971.

⁶⁵ Simmons and Goemans 2021.

More generally, this chapter contributes to a recent effort in conflict research to analyze interactions between different types of political violence.⁶⁶ While our analysis has focused merely on civil and interstate conflict, Weiner's process also includes one-sided violence perpetrated by vulnerable host governments that fear subversion orchestrated by revisionist neighbors.⁶⁷ We have not attempted to empirically capture such phenomena, but future research would profit from adding ethnic cleansing and other types of victimization to the repertoire of political violence to be analyzed.⁶⁸ There is also room for further exploration of how historical legacies affect the risk of conflict within and between states. Indeed, within irredentist triads, there is typically "a great concern, almost an obsession, with the past, as each actor seeks to define or justify its identity."⁶⁹ We have refrained from considering the retrospective aspect of nationalist conflict in an effort to limit the complexity of our configurational analysis. We turn to this phenomenon under the heading of restorative nationalism in Chapter 8.

⁶⁶ Cederman and Vogt 2017; Kalyvas 2019.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Mylonas 2012.

⁶⁸ Chapter 10 analyzes ethnic cleansing but does not link it explicitly to civil or interstate conflict.

⁶⁹ Weiner 1971, 680.

8 Restorative Nationalism and War*

While Chapter 7 draws a link between specific ethnonationalist configurations and conflict within and between states, this chapter extends the focus to restorative nationalism that hinges on historical comparison. Such retrospective narratives have to be taken seriously due to their geopolitical consequences even though they typically offer a distorted view of a nation's history.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a prominent example of restorative nationalism. Leading up to the assault, Putin justified it in a series of explicit statements, including an almost hour-long speech three days before the invasion. Aggrieved by the lost unity of the Russian people after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the president presented a reading of history according to which Ukraine rightly belongs to Russia.¹

Why was Putin's revisionist narrative not taken more seriously? Rational-choice scholars are prone to dismiss nationalist claim-making as instrumentalist cheap talk,² while realists typically write it off as irrational hypernationalism.³ And as our critique of ahistorical modernism shows, mainstream approaches to nationalism analyze nationalist narratives,⁴ but this school's main focus on criticizing these narratives has left the consequences understudied.⁵

While acknowledging that nations are indeed both modern and socially constructed communities that emerged after the French Revolution, we argue that some historical legacies are more consequential for modern nationalist identities and claim-making than assumed by conventional modernist scholarship. According to our constrained constructivist perspective, nationalists typically legitimize their claims by

* This chapter builds directly on the article "The Future Is History: Restorative Nationalism and Conflict in Post-Napoleonic Europe" that is forthcoming in *International Organization*. Cederman, Pengl, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2024.

¹ Putin 2022.

² Zellman 2020.

³ Mearsheimer 1990. See also Chapter 1.

⁴ See Section 1.3.

⁵ Levinger and Lytle 2001.

mixing historical facts and fiction, sometimes dating back hundreds, or even thousands, of years. In addition to Russian revisionism,⁶ contemporary examples include the conflicting territorial claims of Israelis and Palestinians,⁷ China's wish to reunify Taiwan,⁸ and Turkey's Ottoman nostalgia.⁹ Such narratives are examples of restorative nationalism because they make the case for restoring a past, idealized golden age.¹⁰

Rather than merely debunking nationalist narratives as myths and fabrications, we need to take them seriously. If millions of people share those views, aggressive nationalist projects cannot be written off as irrelevant, even if they are divorced from historical facts or common norms. As illustrated by Russia's recent invasion, the nationalist worldview has caused massive violence and is likely to continue to do so in the future.

Capturing the ethnonationalist mindset with historical data on ethnic groups and state borders, this chapter addresses whether the availability of plausible historical golden ages has made a real difference for conflict processes in post-Napoleonic Europe. By so doing, we explain how two centuries of domestic and interstate conflict in Europe are systematically linked to nearly a millennium of political history.

Our geocoded and disaggregated data help us trace how historical border change from 1100 CE on affected conflict patterns in Europe over the past two centuries.¹¹ Information on historical state borders allows us to identify past polities that could have been plausible bases for modern territorial claims that ultimately led to armed conflict, within and between states. Such retrospective projections hinge on more or less imagined links between modern ethnic groupings and their distant ancestors "owning" these polities.

Following up on Chapter 7's analysis of incongruence and conflict, our objective is to test whether nationalists' perceived loss of political power or national unity compared to some putative golden age correlates with an increase in the risk of conflict. To do so, we identify all past polities from 1816 through 2017 that spatially overlap with a settlement segment of an existing or aspiring ethnic nation within a contemporary state. We then assess whether any of these historical states contained significantly larger shares of the ethnic group's total contemporary settlement area than the present-day state (to capture cases of lost unity) and whether the historical polity was ruled by plausible ethnic ancestors (to code

⁶ Plokhy 2017.

⁷ Silberman 2013.

⁸ Roy 2019.

⁹ Yavuz 2020.

¹⁰ Coakley 2004; Ding and Hlavac 2017; Ding, Slater and Zengin 2021.

¹¹ See Chapter 3. For state borders dating back to the Middle Ages, we again rely on Abramson's 2017 data as we did in Chapter 4.

lost independence). The main assumption is that the geographic overlap between what are perceived as modern ethnic homelands and historical states makes sweeping claims about ethnic descent and historical ownership more credible.

With this empirical setup, we study the structural preconditions of nationalist claim-making rather than the ideological narratives themselves. Furthermore, our macrohistorical approach forces us to rely on observational data and correlational analysis rather than on stronger inferential methods. We deal with risks of omitted-variable bias by using fixed-effects estimation and evaluate plausible alternative explanations.

All in all, we find robust evidence that national groups with plausible claims to historically lost home rule or unity are more likely to attempt to rectify the situation through rebellion. Likewise, militarized interstate disputes and territorial claims become more likely in irredentist constellations where the leading nationality in one state has conationals abroad who have been cut off from a more unified and independent historical polity and are now ruled by an ethnically distinct host government. The effect of lost golden ages only holds for governments that explicitly promote nationalist views and is not driven by alternative mechanisms unrelated to nationalist ideology. We find that modern nationalism has more violent consequences where it is entirely fabricated but relies on selected historical facts that are reframed to serve contemporary political goals.

The chapter proceeds as follows. After a survey of the relevant literature, we introduce our theoretical framework. Next, we present two case illustrations that prepare the ground for the empirical analysis. After the analysis, we close with a section on the theoretical and practical significance of our findings.

8.1 Literature

Focusing on the scholarship analyzing the link between nationalism and conflict, we expand the critique of ahistorical modernism presented in Chapter 1. Pioneering contributions to the dominant modernist school primarily center on debunking cases of historical fabrication.¹² By stressing the constructed and historically contingent nature of modern nations, most of the recent studies of violent nationalist conflict follow the example of these seminal contributions.¹³ Rather than seeking the origins of such conflict in historical legacies, this literature focuses on how modern states shape national identities through nation-building

¹² Anderson [1983] 1991; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

¹³ For a review, see Mylonas and Tudor 2021.

policies, thus conceptualizing not only nationalism but also nationalist conflict, as fundamentally modern phenomena.¹⁴

In an influential book, Michael Mann explains ethnic massacres as the consequence of organic state ideologies in the modern era.¹⁵ Adopting a structural perspective, Benjamin Miller explains how interstate conflict results from the incongruence between states and nations.¹⁶ Directly inspired by Gellner's modernism, Siniša Malešević accounts for warfare in the Balkans as a response to the late modernization of the region's underdeveloped states.¹⁷ And along similar lines, Andreas Wimmer and Brian Min analyze internal and external warfare as a consequence of an irreversible shift from premodern empires to nation-states.¹⁸

As we saw in Section 1.3, there is a dissenting minority of scholars who question the modernist consensus. The most prominent theoretical opposition comes from the ethnosymbolist school, which, unlike primordialism, accepts the modernity of nations but insists that national identities derive from premodern ethnic cores.¹⁹ This perspective doubts that the French Revolution constituted a historical *tabula rasa*. Rather than dismissing ethnonationalist narratives, these scholars consider them to be truly consequential in today's world. But despite their suggestive anti-modernist criticism, ethnosymbolists have weakened their own case by insisting that ethnic cores are almost always crucial for the emergence of modern nations.²⁰

In contrast, quantitative studies of nationalism tend to follow strictly modernist principles in portraying nationalism as the product of nation-states while also using backward-projected contemporary units of analysis that cause hindsight bias.²¹ Statistical investigations of how long-term historical legacies influence modern conflict patterns do exist, but this literature says more about the long-term persistence of violence and state structures than about the link between nationalism and political violence. For instance, Abramson and Carter show that territorial claims in interstate disputes in Europe after the French Revolution tended to follow prerevolutionary precedents based on historical state borders.²² Yet their study covers only interstate claims, views appeals to ethnicity in mainly instrumentalist terms, and does not identify specific subsets of

¹⁴ See, e.g., Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Brubaker 1996.

¹⁵ Mann 2005.

¹⁶ Miller 2007.

¹⁷ Malešević 2012.

¹⁸ Wimmer and Min 2006.

¹⁹ Smith 1986; Hutchinson 2018.

²⁰ Smith 1986.

²¹ See, e.g., Wimmer and Min 2006; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010.

²² Abramson and Carter 2016.

precedents that are particularly well suited for nationalist claim-making. Recent studies covering sub-Saharan Africa highlight the impact of pre-colonial ethnicity and statehood on contemporary civil conflict, although mostly without reference to nationalism.²³ Shelef addresses nationalist legacies around the world but limits his sample to the impact of homelands on interstate disputes.²⁴ Further, using experimental survey evidence from China, Fang and Li find that “historical ownership” increases support for uncompromising stances in interstate disputes,²⁵ a pattern that marks Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion as well.²⁶ Similarly, ethnic minorities in postcommunist countries with a history of prior statehood are prone to launch violent separatist campaigns.²⁷ More generally, since World War II, lost unity has made ethnic groups more likely to engage in civil conflict.²⁸

Research on ethnic groups’ short-term legacies of autonomy and statehood shows that they increase the risk of civil conflict. Following pioneering work by Ted Gurr,²⁹ recent studies find that lost autonomy makes ethnic entrepreneurs more likely to claim and fight for independence, an effect driven by grievances and opportunity-related factors.³⁰ Other studies show that ethnic groups that have been recently “downgraded” through exclusion from executive power are considerably more likely to rebel against the government.³¹

Our work draws inspiration from these recent research streams but advances beyond them in several respects. First, to do justice to nationalist narratives, we present data that go back to the Middle Ages, which by far surpasses the time horizon of earlier literature on nationalist grievances.³² Second, while most research on long-term legacies restricts itself to the persistence of conflict and state institutions, our analysis highlights how specific historical reversals are exploited by ethnonationalists. Third, we show that these grievances are not limited to power losses but extend to fragmented groups’ seeking to reclaim prior unity. Fourth, we analyze both civil and interstate conflict, in contrast to virtually all previous research, which does one or the other. Improving

²³ Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016; Paine 2019; Wig 2016.

²⁴ Shelef 2020.

²⁵ Fang and Li 2019.

²⁶ Dill, Howlett and Müller-Crepon 2024.

²⁷ Smith 2013. Bakke, Rickard and O’Loughlin 2023 find that geopolitical proximity to Russia in its “near abroad” is positively related to popular buy-in of historical narratives promoted by the Kremlin.

²⁸ Cederman, Rüdiger and Schvitz 2022.

²⁹ Gurr 2000*b*.

³⁰ Germann and Sambanis 2021; Siroky and Cuffe 2015.

³¹ Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013; Petersen 2002.

³² Though see Abramson and Carter 2016.

on the prior literature in these four areas through an integrated analysis enables us to test systematically whether historical structures that could legitimize nationalist claims increase the risk of armed conflict in post-Napoleonic Europe.

8.2 Theoretical Argument

To understand how nationalism caused conflict in the past and may do so in the future, it is necessary to reconstruct nationalist reasoning. Whether they control their own state or not, leaders of ethnic nations are the main actors in our account of nationalism and conflict in post-Napoleonic Europe. Such actors reason and behave in accordance with the principle of nationalism, which prescribes congruence between the state and the nation.³³ As we argued in Section 2.2, deviations from this principle can be expected to generate grievances that, combined with resources and opportunities, increase the probability of violence.

In their attempts to address incongruence, leaders of stateless segments seek to overcome alien rule, while those who lead nations that already enjoy state power strive to reverse division by incorporating their kin through state expansion. Alien rule tends to generate grievances that increase the risk of rebellion against the government, typically through secessionist violence.³⁴ Divided ethnic groups can trigger interstate conflict if there is competition over which state will lead the unification process. The combination of alien rule and division characterizes irredentist configurations that could involve civil or interstate conflict or both. In such cases, the actor constellation features a triadic relationship between an entrapped group segment, its host government, and revisionist kin state. The entrapped segment is exposed to alien rule by the government, which in turn may get involved in an interstate dispute with a revisionist kin state.³⁵

But revisionist claims do not merely stem from unhappiness with static configurations; they also depend on historical comparisons. Although eager to compare their status to other nationalist groups at any point in history, nationalists are particularly obsessed with the historical trajectory of their own group. Nationalist mobilization derives major inspiration from stylized, and often embellished, accounts of the nation's history.³⁶

³³ Gellner 1983, 1.

³⁴ Hechter 2000. For more details, see Chapter 7.

³⁵ Brubaker 1996; Weiner 1971. See the configuration partial home rule as introduced by Chapter 7.

³⁶ See, e.g., Coakley 2004; Geiss 2007.

Ethnic nations play a central role in such narratives. But such entities are often contested and may even be at odds with the self-perceptions of many of their presumed members. For this reason, we use the nationalists' own categories of practice as categories of analysis to capture their worldview and behavioral motivations even if they are historically inaccurate.³⁷ This analytical perspective based on participants' primordialism does not mean that we endorse nationalists' ontological perspectives or policies.³⁸ We are instead interested in the narratives' effect on conflict decisions rather than their historical veracity.³⁹

As we have seen, modernists do not deny that nationalists appeal to prior history, but they do question whether such appeals have a lasting effect:

It is, of course, true that nationalist intellectuals and politicians seize upon myths and symbols inherited from the past and weave these into arguments designed to promote national identity and justify nationalist claims. However, it is very difficult to correlate their degree of success with the "objective" importance of such myths and symbols.⁴⁰

We equate the objective importance of nationalist claims with their conflict-inducing effect. Our analysis considers both civil conflict and interstate disputes that occurred in Europe after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1816 until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Nationalist leaders select their justification from a wealth of historical material, typically mixing facts and myths. These stories often take on lives of their own and may even lead to rhetorical entrapment.⁴¹ Along with poets, philologists, and linguists, historians played a pivotal role in the crafting of these narratives as national history.⁴² The pioneers of historical research emphasized fact-based scientific methodology but left plenty of room for romanticized versions of the past. Interestingly, these scholarly activities were focused on an intense search for nations' origins in the Middle Ages.⁴³

Nationalists in established nation-states enjoy considerable advantages in their efforts to craft such narratives. They are able to draw on state institutions to create and disseminate an "official" version of the state's

³⁷ Brubaker 2004, 31–33.

³⁸ See Section 1.2.

³⁹ Still, there is a risk that analytical use of the nationalists' categories of practice will play into their hands, but this is a risk worth taking because ignoring the nationalists' own concepts makes it difficult to understand their behavior.

⁴⁰ Breuilly 1996, 151.

⁴¹ Goddard 2006.

⁴² Duara 1995, 27.

⁴³ Berger 2015, 113–123.

history written from the vantage point of its dominant ethnic group.⁴⁴ Threatened by cultural extinction, stateless and marginalized groups in Eastern Europe did not possess these advantages when nationalism emerged in the nineteenth century but made particularly impressive efforts to reconstruct their nations' origins and development, sometimes in conjunction with linguistic standardization.⁴⁵

These nationalist narratives tend to follow a restorative three-step logic:⁴⁶

- *Golden age.* The first step is to identify an idealized golden age in the nation's "glorious" past that is characterized by political and military power, unity, and freedom from foreign influence and that stands in stark contrast to the current vantage point of a shrunken, oppressed, or divided nation.⁴⁷ As mentioned earlier, European nationalists tend to search for such golden periods in the Middle Ages,⁴⁸ but some histories are much more recent, such as the USSR in the twentieth century, and some go further back, such as Italian and Greek nationalists' quest for historical greatness in classical antiquity.
- *Dark age.* The second step is to describe the current period as a dark age of oppression or fragmentation that brutally interrupted the golden age, leading to collective victimization and status loss. Typically, internal decline or foreign occupation is perceived to have arrested or reversed the nation's cultural and political development.⁴⁹ Examples include the Serbs' grievances caused by Ottoman domination following the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.
- *Restoration.* The third step features remedial action that promises to restore the nation's greatness, for instance, through national liberation or revisionist campaigns aimed at restoring unity by reincorporating lost territory inhabited by nationalist kin. Today's populist and charismatic politicians, including most prominently Putin, are particularly likely to make such promises.⁵⁰

By adopting a master narrative, historians in the nineteenth century in particular constructed national histories that defended the nation's territory or laid claim to territories that had ostensibly been lost through some "unfair" turn of history. In her study of five nineteenth-century

⁴⁴ Coakley 2004.

⁴⁵ Connelly 2020.

⁴⁶ Levinger and Lytle 2001. See also Baár 2010, 295.

⁴⁷ Coakley 2004; Smith 1986, 1997.

⁴⁸ Berger 2015, 113–23.

⁴⁹ Coakley 2004, 548.

⁵⁰ Indeed, Carter and Pop-Eleches 2024 suggest that popular grievances originating from historical territorial losses increase voters' support for populist parties.

nationalist historians in East-Central Europe, Monika Baár summarizes the explicitly spatiotemporal logic:

Due to their personal involvement in the state-building process, historians contributed to the creation of the national territory, the anticipation and validation of national borders, as well as to the justification of subsequent border changes. Representations of the Golden Age were also employed, particularly in those historiographies that sought to redress the status quo, in order to articulate the geographical dimensions of the (desired) state. Thus, the epoch in which the nation reached its territorial peak was almost invariably cast as the most triumphant period of national history.⁵¹

Nationalist leaders seek to overcome alien rule or division by mobilizing for the restoration of a putative golden age in the distant or recent past. To identify sufficiently plausible golden ages, they scan their geographic region's political history. If they find a past polity that can be portrayed as having enjoyed home rule or national unity in contrast to the current situation, they may use it as a basis for narratives of an apparent golden age.

One main assumption in this regard is that past polities that incorporated at least parts of current ethnic settlements offer more attractive historical material to nationalist entrepreneurs than distant alternatives. First, geographic overlap makes questionable claims about historical continuity and ethnic ancestry more plausible. Rulers of "local" historical states or empires are more likely to have spoken a proto-version or dialect of the language that later came to be seen as defining the cultural boundaries of the modern nation. Second, geographical overlap between past political borders and current ethnic settlements facilitates linking past configurations to a leader's present-day ethnonational goals. Achieving autonomy over or incorporating territory already inhabited by national kin populations presents as more pertinent and achievable goals than resettling allegedly lost territories further away that are currently populated by other groups. Third, we further assume that any past period, however recent or distant, short or long, will suffice as raw material for a potentially convincing narrative.⁵² Ultimately, the goal of revisionist action is to restore national dignity in the form of unity, home rule, or both.

Our main theoretical claim is that nationalist leaders who can rely on a golden-age polity are more likely to act on revisionist claims than those who are deprived of any usable history. Contrasting their group's current

⁵¹ Baár 2010, 225.

⁵² Obviously, there may be many points that satisfy the conditions of a golden age. It is reasonable to assume that those periods that lasted the longest and that mark the very zenith of the nation's power and influence will be chosen by the nationalists, but this specific choice is not essential for our analysis. Burghardt 1973.

predicament with a supposedly more favorable situation in the past facilitates revisionist mobilization through two main mechanisms. First, such comparisons make current deviations from national congruence appear unnatural and unjust, which fosters grievances and makes nationalist leaders' claims resonate with broader audiences. Second, historical reference points provide a clear path to restorative action, help coordinate goals and expectations, and make national independence or unity appear attainable.⁵³

This temporal logic may appear straightforward, but long-term backward projection often rests on questionable historical assumptions. Besides the obvious difficulty of uncovering specific facts from the distant past, the main problem is that the *longue durée* of these accounts presupposes ethnic groups' historical continuity despite centuries of migration, intermarriage, and assimilation. Furthermore, restorative nationalists have to assume that their putative ethnic ancestors controlled the polity in question, which is especially challenging in the premodern era because it was dominated by dynastic rather than ethnonationalist politics.

According to Patrick Geary, this backward projection amounts to dangerous "pseudo history" that views the European peoples as "distinct, stable, and objectively identifiable social and cultural units." Far from being inconsequential, he argues, "this pseudoscience has destroyed Europe twice and may do so yet again."⁵⁴ Our analysis in no way tries to evaluate the historical validity of this sweeping retrospective projection of ethnicity. Instead, our primary task is to study whether specific historical narratives are as dangerous as Geary suggests.

The three-step logic carries particularly acute conflict potential in cases where more than one national group claims the same territory, as illustrated by Israeli and Palestinian nationalism⁵⁵ and overlapping claims to Macedonia by Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks.⁵⁶ But the mere existence of a golden-age narrative does not automatically lead to conflict.

Beyond historical grievances, several factors, including resources, organization, and opportunities, determine whether nationalist leaders will end up triggering conflict.⁵⁷ But the content of the narrative also matters. To be truly effective, a narrative needs to resonate with a wide audience, which is unlikely if it is entirely invented.⁵⁸ Political activists

⁵³ Levinger and Lytle 2001. For a more general argument about nationalist grievances as resentments, see Greenfeld 1992.

⁵⁴ Geary 2002, 11, 13.

⁵⁵ Silberman 2013.

⁵⁶ Connelly 2020.

⁵⁷ Tilly 1978. See Section 2.3.

⁵⁸ Smith 1986.

rely on “injustice frames”⁵⁹ to construct grievances about “robbery” perpetrated by specific outgroups. Such an attribution of blame invests mobilizational efforts with considerable emotional energy.⁶⁰ Nationalist elites regularly employ restorative reasoning as a particularly effective mobilization strategy providing both “diagnosis” and “prognosis” for urgent action.⁶¹ Whether the leaders in question truly believe this ideology or only use it instrumentally matters less for conflict outcomes. Assuming the latter, recent research shows how states advance territorial claims invoking historical precedents that serve as focal points coordinating and facilitating collective action.⁶² Yet this perspective portrays decision-makers as relatively unconstrained in their fabrication of links to ethnonationalist precedents.⁶³ In contrast, we use spatiotemporal backward projection of modern ethnic settlements to identify a more constrained set of historical polities that satisfy the criteria of restorative nationalism.

Our first task is to derive the main types of historical transitions that can give rise to restorative nationalism. Using the classification of static nationality problems from Chapter 7 as a basis, Figure 8.1 depicts the theoretical possibilities. Transition 1 captures situations of lost home rule.⁶⁴ Focusing on horizontal shifts in the diagram, transition 2 is here divided into two possibilities. In transition 2a, the group suffers from alien rule but is downgraded to divided alien rule. In contrast, as shown by transition 2b, the group could enjoy home rule from the beginning but ends up in divided home rule. Finally, in case the group loses both home rule and unity, there is a diagonal move from united home rule down to either divided home in transition 3a, or to partial home rule in transition 3b.

The next task is to derive the link from historical transitions to civil conflict. Focusing on excluded segments that rebel against their host states, we depict the three types of shifts in Figure 8.2, with each row containing two temporal phases corresponding to status in a past golden age followed by the current dark age. The three transition types correspond to lost home rule, lost unity, and both.

⁵⁹ Benford and Snow 2000.

⁶⁰ Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001.

⁶¹ Levinger and Lytle 2001.

⁶² Abramson and Carter 2016; Goemans 2006. Prospect theory may also help explain why restorative narratives are particularly consequential since they aim to restore losses rather than realizing new gains, Kahneman and Tversky 1979.

⁶³ Far from assuming entirely unconstrained decision-makers, the previous literature on the legacy of borders treats these as important institutional constraints, see Abramson and Carter 2016.

⁶⁴ We show this transition starting with unified home rule resulting in united alien rule, but, in principle, this shift can occur through any move from the upper row downward, from divided home rule to divided or partial home rule.

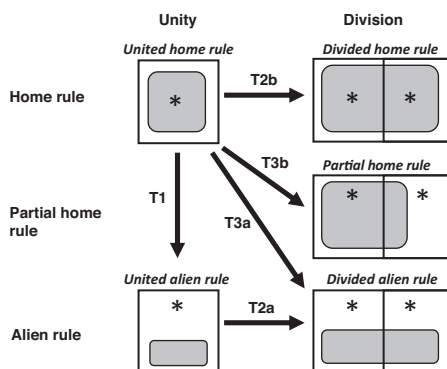


Figure 8.1 Transition types T1–T3 derived from the configurations in Figure 7.1.

Note: States are shown as rectangular boxes with stars marking capitals and shaded areas symbolizing ethnic groups.

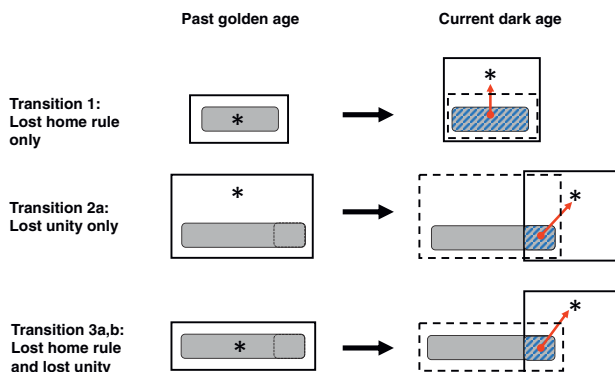


Figure 8.2 Linking three historical transitions to civil conflict.

Note: States are shown as rectangular boxes with stars marking capitals, shaded areas symbolizing ethnic groups, striped areas representing the highlighted segment, and red arrows depicting conflict.

Each of the two main types of restorative nationalist grievances, lost home rule and lost unity, is associated with a violation of state-nation congruence relative to an allegedly more favorable past. If an ethnic population segment is exposed to alien rule in its host state, the probability of conflict should be higher if the segment experienced home rule in the past.⁶⁵ The same logic applies to division. If the group belonged to the

⁶⁵ For a related argument applied to autonomy, see Hechter 2000; Siroky and Cuffe 2015.

leading segment within its aggregate group but was subsequently cut off from the majority of its kin, that would also constitute a conflict-inducing grievance.⁶⁶ Additionally, both conditions could apply simultaneously.

Cases that involve lost home rule (transition 1) typically emerge as a consequence of conquest or less violent types of amalgamation. The Croats fighting to leave the former Yugoslavia in 1991 fall into this category. Their leader, Franjo Tudjman, was a historian and retired general who articulated a restorative claim to independence with references to medieval statehood. Although some historians dispute whether there was a distinctive Croatian identity among South Slavs in the Middle Ages, Tudjman proclaimed that the “centuries-old dream of the Croatian people” had been fulfilled through independence.⁶⁷ Other historical cases include groups that rebelled to regain independence after geopolitical reversals, including Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians in the nineteenth century who identified various premodern political entities before the Ottoman occupation as their respective golden ages.⁶⁸

Lost unity may occur without any loss of home rule if the group in question did not enjoy access to power in the first place (transition 2a). This scenario includes some cases following imperial retraction, for instance, the Ossetians becoming divided as a consequence of the collapse of the USSR. As stated by Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud,

The South Ossetians want to heal the partition and reunite the two halves of their nation. Independent statehood is seen as merely a means to this end, and will gladly be given up the moment it has been achieved. In symbolic nation building this is illustrated by the fact that the flag and coat of arms of South Ossetia are identical to those of North Ossetia.⁶⁹

This transition type does not occur very frequently, and on its own, lost unity can be expected to generate less conflict than settings in which restoration invokes a politically independent golden age.

In the third main type of transition, group segments fight the government because they are doubly aggrieved, having suffered the loss of both home rule and unity. As shown in Figure 8.1, there are two main sub-cases depending on whether the ethnic group loses power in all segments (transition 3a) or merely in some (transition 3b). Polish nationalism following the partition of Poland in 1795 captures subcase 3a very well. Desiring to regain unity and independence, the Poles staged a series of rebellions against foreign rule by the Russians and the Habsburgs in the nineteenth century. Relatively recent memories of established statehood

⁶⁶ Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022.

⁶⁷ Bellamy 2003.

⁶⁸ Connelly 2020.

⁶⁹ Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, 503.

reinforced the nationalists' determination to regain sovereignty despite the high cost of doing so imposed by the occupying powers.⁷⁰

In subcase 3b, a segment loses home rule while its kin, with which it was formerly united in an independent state, retains power, creating a potentially irredentist situation. Anti-unionist nationalists in Northern Ireland harking back to Celtic times held compound grievances of this type. Leading up to World War I, nationalist mobilization radicalized against British direct rule with reference to a golden age of medieval statehood.⁷¹ After the partition of Ireland, the Irish Republic emerged, while Northern Ireland remained under British rule. In its armed rebellion against the British state and its unionist settlers, the Irish Republican Army fought for Irish home rule and unification of the entire Irish island.⁷²

Having analyzed all relevant transitions generating civil conflict, we summarize our theoretical expectations in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis H8.1. Lost home rule or lost unity increases the probability of civil conflict.

That is, there will be an effect on conflict if at least one of the two types of historical losses applies.

We next turn to interstate relations. The relevant units in this case are states rather than segments, although state action concerns a specific coethnic group segment abroad. Capturing a situation of lost unity only, transition 2b in Figure 8.2 is similar to transition 2 described in Figure 8.3, but in it, the group segment enjoys sovereignty in both the golden age and the current period. German reunification in 1990 fits this situation, and like most cases involving the merger of conationals, it did not produce conflict. We expect restorative nationalist mobilization to be much more effective when targeted against ethnic others rather than against perceived members of the same nation. Although competition between the merging units can involve violence between coethnic state governments,⁷³ we refrain from formulating an explicit hypothesis capturing this rare case.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Connelly 2020, 141.

⁷¹ MacNeill 1920.

⁷² O'Leary 2007.

⁷³ See the dashed arrow in Figure 8.3.

⁷⁴ Although only partially captured by our dataset, the German and Italian unification processes in the nineteenth century could be viewed as instances of reunification (for instance, by referring to the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Empire, respectively). In the German case, two of the three unification wars involved irredentist configurations pitting Prussia against non-coethnic states hosting German-speaking minorities. See also Configuration 3b in the next paragraph. Only the Austro-Prussian War conformed to transition 2b, with coethnic state governments fighting each other over national unification.

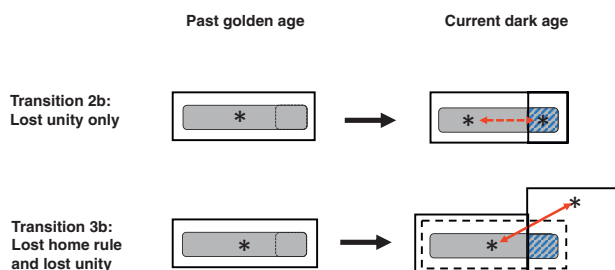


Figure 8.3 Linking two transition types to interstate conflict.

Note: States are shown as rectangular boxes with stars marking capitals, shaded areas symbolizing ethnic groups, striped areas representing the highlighted segment, and red arrows depicting conflict.

In transition 3b of Figure 8.3, the combination of partly lost home rule and lost unity can also generate interstate conflict.⁷⁵ In this setting, the kin state of the absorbed segment advances claims in support of the segment's autonomy, independence, or outright reincorporation into its own territory. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine are recent examples. Bemoaning the loss of empire and the ensuing disunity of ethnic Russians, Putin justified the incorporation of Crimea and support for the rebels in Donbas by appealing to restorative nationalism:

I heard residents of the Crimea say that back in 1991 they were handed over like a sack of potatoes. . . . But the people could not reconcile themselves to this outrageous historical injustice. All these years, citizens and many public figures came back to this issue, saying that Crimea is historically Russian land and Sevastopol a Russian city.⁷⁶

We summarize our reasoning in a second hypothesis corresponding to each conflict type:

Hypothesis H8.2. Lost home rule and lost unity increase the probability of interstate conflict.

8.3 Empirical Approach

This section details how we operationalize lost home rule and lost unity in line with the theoretical logic explained earlier. We convey the basic intuition with reference to the histories of Poland and Romania.

⁷⁵ See the bidirectional arrow in Figure 8.3.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Plokhy 2017, 339.

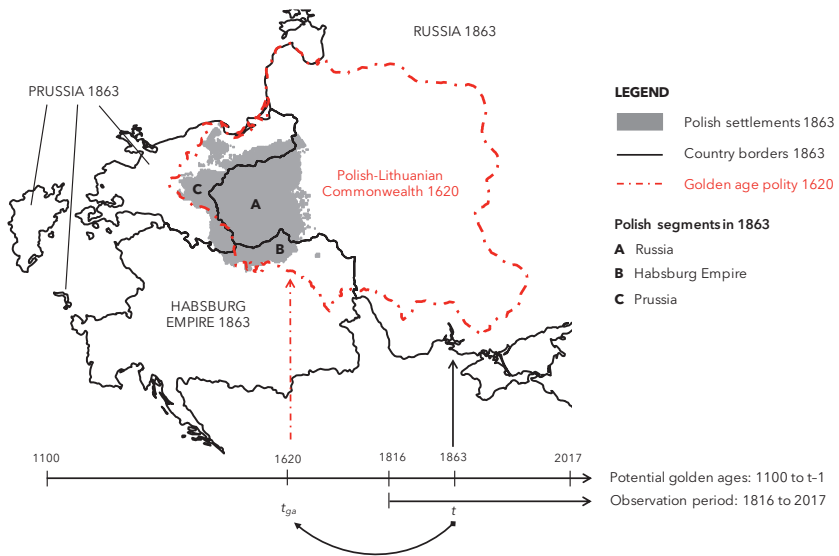


Figure 8.4 Lost home rule and lost unity: Polish example.

Note: Black borders indicate Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian country borders in 1863. The gray area depicts the Polish ethnic settlements in 1863. A, B, and C refer to the respective segments within the three polities. The red, dashed borders delineate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at its territorial apex in 1620.

Intuition and Examples

As we have argued, ethnonationalist conflict within and across country borders comes in two distinct forms, civil and interstate. Intrastate nationalist conflicts are fought by politically powerless groups against an ethnically distinct ruling elite. As illustrated by segments A, B, and C in Figure 8.4, this case is captured by the Polish populations under Russian, Habsburg, and Prussian rule in 1863, the year of Poland's January Uprising in Russia.

Interstate nationalist conflicts involve a state-leading group fighting for coethnic territory under foreign rule in another state. An example is the Romanians in independent Romania in 1916, here shown as population A in Figure 8.5. When the country entered World War I on the side of the Triple Entente in order to gain Romanian-populated territories in Transylvania rather than joining the fight alongside its long-standing allies Austria-Hungary and Germany.

As such, rebellions involve groups without home rule that may or may not be united in one country, while interstate nationalist conflict requires division between at least two states and a combination of home rule

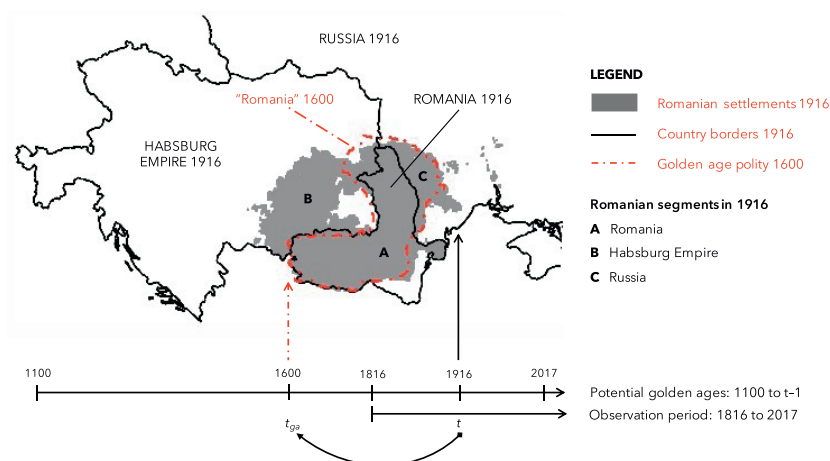


Figure 8.5 Lost home rule, lost unity, and interstate relations: Romanian example.

Note: Black borders indicate Romanian, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian country borders in 1916. The shaded area marks the Romanian settlements in 1916. Areas A, B, and C correspond to the respective Romanian ethnic segments within the three states. The red, dashed borders delineate the short-lived union of Wallachia, Moldavia, and parts of Transylvania under Michael the Brave in 1600.

and foreign rule across country borders. Foreign rule or division may in some cases be sufficient to motivate ethnic rebellions against the host government or irredentist campaigns against neighboring states.⁷⁷ But mobilization seems particularly likely where leaders can stir up more intense grievances by contrasting the already unsatisfactory status quo with a supposedly greater past.

Nationalist leaders, writers, and historians engage in historical fishing expeditions to identify national golden ages.⁷⁸ They search the political history of their geographic region for actual past polities that can be portrayed as having achieved ethnic home rule, national unity, or both. Past home rule requires that the ruling elites of the historical state are viewed as plausible ethnic ancestors of the contemporary nation. Claims about past unity gain credence where the past polity contained very large shares of the contemporary ethnic nation's main settlement areas.

⁷⁷ In a pioneering study based on nonspatial data, Huth 1996 confirms this irredentist logic with respect to territorial disputes.

⁷⁸ See the arrows pointing back from t to t_{ga} in Figures 8.4 and 8.5.

In the Polish example, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth at its territorial apex around 1620 clearly satisfies both conditions.⁷⁹ The historical capital was Krakow, and Polish kings and noblemen held political power. At the same time, the historical border of the commonwealth contained the vast majority of all Polish settlement areas existing in 1863. The commonwealth thus provides historical raw material for it to be portrayed as a national golden age, which is exactly what nineteenth-century Polish nationalists did.⁸⁰

As for Romania, the short union of 1599–1600 extended beyond 1916 Romania and comprised parts of the Romanian-speaking territories under Habsburg and Russian rule.⁸¹ As this polity was ruled by Wallachian Prince Mihai Viteazul, twentieth-century nationalists referred to the “Romanian” polity of 1600 as an independent and united golden age and claimed the prince, known as Michael the Brave, as their national hero.⁸²

Combining facts, half-truths, and fiction, nationalists project their contemporary conceptions and political goals onto the selected historical polity. Doing so often involves greatly exaggerated claims about past rulers’ proto-nationalist motivations and the historical populations’ group consciousness and continuous lineage to the present ethnic nation. The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was far from a modern nation-state *avant la lettre*. Likewise, most Transylvanian peasants were arguably indifferent as to whether they were ruled by a Wallachian prince, the Habsburgs, or some Ottoman proxy. The main factual ingredient in these narratives of a national golden age is a historical polity with roughly the same geographical extent as the contemporary one.

By contrasting the current predicament with such idealized golden ages, nationalists can call for restorative action. Intrastate rebellion against ethnically distinct alien rule becomes more likely where these historical comparisons reveal lost home rule, lost unity, or both. As interstate nationalist conflict requires political control over at least one independent state, restorative nationalism can lead to international disputes where a contemporary nation rules a state but has a kin segment under foreign rule abroad that has lost both home rule and unity when compared to the historical golden age.⁸³ Thus, irredentist interstate conflict tends to be fought in the name of nations that claim lost unity and partially lost home rule, as in the Romanian example.

⁷⁹ See the dashed border in Figure 8.4.

⁸⁰ Connelly 2020.

⁸¹ See the dashed border in Figure 8.5 and segments B and C.

⁸² Boia 2001.

⁸³ Examples of this include Transylvanian and Moldavian Romanian speakers under Austro-Hungarian and Russian rule.

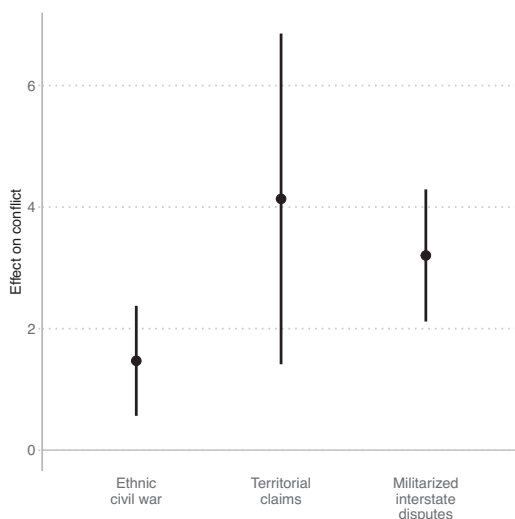


Figure 8.6 Overview of main effect of a golden age (lost home rule or unity) on civil war, territorial claims, and fatal militarized interstate disputes.

Note: All coefficients divided by the sample mean of the respective dependent variable. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 3 in Tables S8.1–S8.3.

8.4 Analyses and Results

This section presents our main results. The analysis proceeds with ethnic segments serving as the main units of analysis.⁸⁴ Figure 8.6 presents a summary of the findings. The leftmost column measures how much more inclined toward rebellion group segments were in the presence of a golden-age polity than in its absence. The positive effect for groups' lost home rule or unity is clearly separable from zero, thus confirming H8.1.⁸⁵

Turning to interstate conflict, the remaining two columns test H8.2. Again, the effects are sizable and significant. The middle column reports a substantive lost-golden-age effect that amounts to a fourfold increase in the probability of identity-related territorial claims as compared to the

⁸⁴ Chapter S8 in the supplementary material provides further details on data and model specifications.

⁸⁵ In substantive terms, the coefficient implies that lost home rule or lost unity is associated with a 146 percent increase from the sample mean of 0.23 ethnic civil war onsets per 100 segment years.

statistical baseline. The rightmost estimate tells us that segments that have a golden-age polity experience a 320 percent increase in the risk of fatal militarized interstate disputes.

Together, these results provide strong support for H8.1 and H8.2 and show that historical reference points that can be portrayed as golden ages in urgent need of restoration make a clear difference for violent nationalist mobilization in both intrastate and interstate conflict.

Although we establish strong links between structural historical shifts and conflict risk since 1816, our analyses so far provide little insight into the timing of nationalist claim-making and mobilization. For this reason, Chapter S8 investigates whether the golden-age effect is stronger during geopolitically unstable periods and whether it pertains to countries experiencing nationalist mobilization. The findings confirm both scope conditions.

Furthermore, it could be that the apparent effect of lost home rule and lost unity is spurious. Thus, Chapter S8 also considers three main alternative explanations – structural legacies, persistent instability, and territorial revisionism. Our main results hold after the introduction of these accounts.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have taken ethnic nationalists at their word, not because we share their views or believe that their claims always correspond to the truth, but because their words have momentous consequences. These consequences include both internal and external conflict in Europe since the early nineteenth century. In fact, a good case can be made that the nationalist narratives analyzed here contributed importantly to both world wars by destabilizing European state borders, especially those of Germany.⁸⁶

What do our findings imply theoretically? First and foremost, the results show how specific uses of history increase the risk of violence. Because mainstream constructivist research focuses on highlighting historical contingencies and inaccuracies, it has less to say about the factual component of nationalist claims. While confirming that nations are modern and constructed, the results cast doubt on accounts that dismiss premodern history as irrelevant. Clearly, far from everything is made up in the nationalists' backward-projected narratives, which are often

⁸⁶ Cattaruzza and Langewiesche 2013.

much less innocent than Gellner's metaphorical nations-as-navels observation.⁸⁷ Indeed, our analysis shows that the structural availability of a golden age in a nation's past is statistically associated with a greater risk of conflict in post-Napoleonic Europe. Although myth busting undoubtedly serves important historiographic and normative functions, scholarship on nationalism needs to pay more attention to the actual impact of nationalist narratives and how nationalists made, and are still making, selective – but not random – use of history.

Furthermore, dismissing nationalist narratives as mostly fictitious and irrelevant exaggerates the extent to which the modern world constitutes an abrupt break with the past. This tendency is also present in developmental theories that relegate empires to the dustbin of history once they have been irreversibly superseded by modern nation-states.⁸⁸ This perspective is blind to the impact of imperial legacies on the argumentation of contemporary nationalists.⁸⁹ Indeed, modern multiethnic states may not differ sufficiently from empires to write off imperial rule as an anachronism, at least to the extent that these states try to enforce central dominance in their relations with the periphery. Indeed, neo-imperialism is particularly visible in Moscow's current war of aggression in Ukraine.

Nationalist mobilization is a fundamentally modern phenomenon that emerged in the nineteenth century. But rather than being entirely invented or imagined, many national identities derive at least partly from deep historical legacies. It does not follow that premodern ethnic communities produced modern nations in a deterministic one-to-one relationship. Some ethnosymbolist critiques of mainstream approaches to nationalism overemphasize the continuity of premodern ethnic cores by insisting that they underpin virtually all modern nations.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, while there have been examples of actual long-term ethnic persistence in specific cases,⁹¹ our analysis does not hinge on such a correspondence. As we have argued, the impact of nationalism does not require historically verified continuity from the early stages of history to today's world. All that is needed is that the claims of prior statehood and unity are associated with a modicum of plausibility in the eyes of key political actors.

By taking nationalists' historical claims seriously, our research also shifts the attention from what they say and think to the consequences

⁸⁷ Referring to Gellner's famous metaphor, Bayly 2004, 219 argues that "this does not mean that 'navels' were unimportant where they did exist. . . . Navels have unintended, unexpected, and sometimes deep consequences," see also Roshwald 2015, 328.

⁸⁸ E.g., Wimmer and Min 2006; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010.

⁸⁹ Beissinger 1998; Motyl 1999.

⁹⁰ Smith 1996.

⁹¹ Weyland 2021.

of their words. In this sense, we follow Beissinger, who stresses the need to consider nationalisms that bite and not only those that bark.⁹² Indeed, there are few consequences that are more biting than warfare, although populist nationalism also poses a major threat to democracy and the rule of law.⁹³

In closing, we reiterate that dissecting the impact of nationalist narratives does not mean endorsing nationalist worldviews or policies. As we will argue in Chapter 11, our research does not imply that nationality questions can, or should be, solved through the territorial unification of divided nations or the partition of multiethnic states.

⁹² Beissinger 1998.

⁹³ Ding and Hlavac 2017.

9 Railroads, Separatist Mobilization, and Conflict*

While the previous chapters have shown how deviations from Gellner's congruence principle may spur border change and different forms of conflict, they offer only limited guidance on the timing of nationalist upheavals. This chapter reduces this gap by analyzing how one specific vector of European modernization – railroad construction – triggered reactive nationalism in the form of separatist mobilization, conflict, and, ultimately, border change in ethnic segments under alien rule.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe saw unprecedented economic, political, and cultural change. Industrializing economies, expanding markets, centralizing states, and nationalist ideologies fundamentally transformed both private and public life.¹ These modernization forces were driven by new transport technologies, especially railways.² Railroads connected previously isolated subnational regions, fostered industrialization, and boosted the state's ability to reach and govern peripheral populations. According to influential modernization theorists, they helped to create the communicative, economic, and political conditions that promoted national integration and identity formation.³ Simultaneously, however, other scholars argue that expanding transportation networks contributed to the separatist mobilization of culturally distinct peripheral groups.⁴

We test these arguments by combining newly collected geospatial data on the expanding European railway network (1834–1922) with measures of independence claims, secessionist civil wars, and successful secession (1816–1945). We link these data to yearly observations of ethnolinguistic group segments derived by intersecting historical maps of

* This chapter is an adapted version of the article with the title “The Train Wrecks of Modernization: Railway Construction and Nationalist Mobilization in Europe” that is forthcoming in the *American Political Science Review*. Pengl, Müller-Crepon, Valli, Cederman and Girardin 2025. We thank Roberto Valli for his contributions to the article and his permission to use the material.

¹ Osterhammel 2014; Buzan and Lawson 2017; Ansell and Lindvall 2021.

² Maier 2016.

³ Deutsch 1953; Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991.

⁴ Hechter 2000; Breuilly 1982; Huntington 1968.

ethnic settlements with time-varying country borders covering the period 1816–1945.⁵

We find that, on average, railway access is associated with about a twofold increase in the probability of separatist mobilization. This effect materializes immediately and dissipates over time without turning negative.⁶ Our analysis of heterogeneous effects shows that separatist responses to railway access complicate top-down nation building in states with low levels of economic development and state capacity while providing motivation and opportunities for national independence campaigns, particularly among large minorities. A disaggregated analysis of the mechanisms underlying the effect of railway access suggests that improvements in state reach reduce separatism risk and improvements in internal connectivity increase it, with market access exerting little effect.

This work contributes to the literatures on modernization, nationalism, separatism, and the political consequences of transport and communication technologies. Analyzing railroad construction and other dimensions of modernization, historians have provided convincing qualitative evidence on national integration in France⁷ and on disintegration and separatist nationalism in Eastern Europe.⁸ In the disciplines of economic history and geography, there is a rich literature on the impact of railway construction on economic development, urbanization, and industrialization,⁹ but less is known about how it influences political outcomes like nation building. In a study of nineteenth-century Sweden, Alexandra Cermeño, Kerstin Enflo, and Johannes Lindvall show how railways empowered public school inspections, leading to higher enrollment rates and more nationalist curricula in connected locations.¹⁰ Recent empirical contributions link railroads to the diffusion of opposition movements¹¹ and resistance to the state.¹²

⁵ See Chapter 3.

⁶ In addition to observing parallel pretreatment trends, an instrumental variable approach based on simulated railroad networks bolsters the robustness and causal interpretation of our findings.

⁷ Weber 1976.

⁸ Breuilly 1982; Connelly 2020.

⁹ See, e.g., Fishlow 1965; Hornung 2015; Berger 2019; Alvarez-Palau, Díez-Minguela and Martí-Henneberg 2021; Donaldson and Hornbeck 2016; Donaldson 2018.

¹⁰ Cermeño, Enflo and Lindvall 2022.

¹¹ Brooke and Ketchley 2018; García-Jimeno, Iglesias and Yildirim 2022; Melander 2021.

¹² See, e.g., Pruett 2023. For studies on more recent communication technologies and their impacts on national identification, political mobilization, and conflict, see, e.g., Choi, Laughlin and Schultz 2021; Pierskalla and Hollenbach 2013; Shapiro and Weidmann 2015; Christensen and Garfias 2018; Enikolopov, Makarin and Petrova 2020; Gohdes 2020; Manacorda and Tesei 2020.

What is missing are studies that analyze both integrative and disintegrative dynamics of national identification systematically and more broadly. Our arguments and findings provide a comprehensive assessment of how a crucial technological driver of modernization relates to separatist mobilization across Europe.

9.1 Literature

The introduction of steam-powered railroads is often described as “the defining innovation of the First Industrial Revolution”¹³ and is inextricably linked with the various modernization processes that spread across Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A large and classic literature links the rise of nationalism to these processes.¹⁴ The relevant arguments fall into two main camps depending on whether they stress national integration or separatism.

The former school expects cultural homogenization and increasing identification with the state-leading nation to drive nationalism.¹⁵ Political accounts highlight the modern state as the key agent of change.¹⁶ In this view, states devise and implement nation-building programs to respond to international and domestic threats.¹⁷ A complementary perspective views the development of industrial economies as the main integrating force. In Ernest Gellner’s seminal account, the transition from agrarian to industrial modes of production requires standardized languages.¹⁸ In a pioneering book, Karl Deutsch highlights expanding communication networks resulting from technological innovation, labor migration, and market exchange as industrial drivers of nationalism.¹⁹

Despite an integrationist thrust, modernist accounts also shed light on national disintegration. Adopting a political perspective, John Breuilly and Michael Hechter expect the shift from indirect to direct rule to trigger reactive mobilization, especially where peripheral elites enjoyed autonomy prior to state centralization.²⁰ Similarly, Deutsch notes that wherever social mobilization outpaces assimilation, nationalist conflict becomes more likely.²¹ Gellner expects the combination of preexisting cultural differences and uneven development to trigger separatism.²²

¹³ Cermeño, Enflo and Lindvall 2022, 715.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Deutsch 1953; Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Robinson 2014; Eifert, Miguel and Posner 2010.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm 1990.

¹⁷ Hintze 1975*b*; Tilly 1994; Posen 1993*a*.

¹⁸ Gellner 1983. See also Gellner 1964; Green 2022.

¹⁹ Deutsch 1953.

²⁰ Breuilly 1982; Hechter 2000.

²¹ Deutsch 1953.

²² Gellner 1983, 1964.

Complementing the theoretical classics, several empirical studies analyze, albeit selectively, the link between modernization and nationalist mobilization. Perhaps most famously, Eugen Weber traces French national identity formation in the nineteenth century, highlighting industrialization, expanding transportation and communication networks, and state policies as integrating forces.²³ Nevertheless, despite his brilliance, Weber remains a scholar of France, a country that enjoyed particularly successful nation building compared to most other European countries.

More recently, cross-country studies show that state-led nation-building efforts, in particular, education reform, become more likely when rulers face international²⁴ or domestic threats.²⁵ While these studies explain the strategic timing of nation-building policies, the mere adoption of such efforts does not guarantee their success.

Microlevel quantitative work within single countries illustrates how specific educational, linguistic, and religious nation-building efforts succeeded or backfired in nineteenth-century and contemporary France,²⁶ Prussia,²⁷ colonial Mexico,²⁸ early twentieth-century United States,²⁹ and Atatürk's Turkey.³⁰ These contributions provide important evidence on how specific state policies cause national integration or disintegration, but say less about cross-country variation.

In one of a very few comparative studies, Andreas Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein focus on nation-state creation in a global sample of 145 territories corresponding to independent states in 2001 back-projected through 1816.³¹ Using railway density as a modernization proxy, they find no effect on the transition to nation-states in pre-national or newly independent states. Despite this pioneering effort, their over-aggregated research design suffers from hindsight bias due to backward-projected sampling based on contemporary state units that were shaped along ethnic lines as a result of nationalist border change.³²

In sum, the link between modernization and national integration or disintegration remains contested. First, scholars disagree about whether modernization spurs nationalism for or against the state and what mechanisms account for the link between modernization processes and

²³ Weber 1976.

²⁴ Darden and Mylonas 2016; Aghion et al. 2019.

²⁵ Paglayan 2022, 2024; Alesina, Giuliano and Reich 2021.

²⁶ Balcells 2013; Abdelgadir and Fouka 2020.

²⁷ Cinnirella and Schueler 2018.

²⁸ Garfias and Sellars 2021.

²⁹ Fouka 2020.

³⁰ Assouad 2020.

³¹ Wimmer and Feinstein 2010.

³² See Chapters 5 and 6.

nationalist mobilization. Second, existing literature provides little theoretical or empirical guidance regarding the contextual factors that produce state-building or counter-state nationalism in specific cases. Third, while the classic contributions offer little systematic evidence for their claims, more recent microlevel studies convincingly validate parts of those classic theories in selected countries but offer no comparative outlook.

9.2 Theoretical Argument

Extrapolating from the earlier discussion on existing research, railway expansion and the associated modernization processes likely affected European nationalism through multiple mechanisms and had varied ambiguous implications for national cohesion and political stability within given state borders. The integrative potential of an expanding state presence and the exchange of goods, people, and ideas over large distances point to successful nation building. At the same time, local connectivity and modernization may facilitate oppositional mobilization and spur separatist responses to national integration.

Our theoretical framework draws on this literature to explain how and under what conditions railroad construction united or divided Europe's multiethnic states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We introduce mechanisms through which railways affected the motivations and opportunities for separatist mobilization among nondominant population groups. These groups are culturally distinct from their host state's governing elites; typically, they are demographically smaller and more peripherally located than their state-leading counterparts.³³ Practically all states in Europe contained such minority segments. Before industrialization, central governments typically ruled nondominant groups indirectly by outsourcing important governing tasks to local intermediaries.³⁴ Cultural differences and mediated forms of projecting power suggest that most European states still operated more like empires.³⁵

The situation changed when industrialization, direct forms of rule, and nationalist ideologies swept across Europe in the nineteenth century. Separatist mobilization occurred wherever elites of nondominant groups managed to rally their followers against the state. Benefiting from agrarian economies and indirect rule, some of these leaders belonged to the

³³ Mylonas 2012.

³⁴ Hechter 2000.

³⁵ Motyl 1997; Burbank and Cooper 2010. Historians refer to these units as "composite monarchies," see Elliott 1992. Even metropolitan France, arguably the most centralized and cohesive state in the early nineteenth century, had imperialist traits. Weber 1976.

old-guard elite, whose status was threatened by local industrialization or state centralization.³⁶ Other leaders, ranging from bourgeois liberals and democratic reformers to ethnonationalists, became the “new elite.”³⁷

For new and old elites, separatism had several advantages over alternative forms of mobilization. First, national independence would assure exclusive access to the benefits of local governance that were increasingly endangered by central-state expansion.³⁸ Second, stressing cultural unity at the local or regional level helped to forge coalitions between old agrarian elites and rising middle classes whose economic interests were typically unaligned.³⁹ Third, once ideologies of national self-rule took root, bravely resisting domination by a culturally foreign elite allowed nondominant groups to mobilize local populations more effectively than alternative opposition frames based on class or party ideology.⁴⁰ Fourth, separatist mobilization raised the prospect of securing support from nationalizing Europe’s great powers, which became increasingly receptive to ideals of national self-determination.⁴¹

Taking separatism as the main outcome under investigation circumvents the challenge of defining and measuring national integration at subnational levels. National integration can be achieved through assimilation into the national dominant group, the development of an overarching identity on top of ethnic diversity, or political integration and power sharing across ethnic divides.⁴² Given these different paths to national cohesion, it seems analytically more productive to focus on whether the crucial, necessary conditions for integration are absent – in other words, to zoom in on clear failures of nation building. Wherever a culturally distinct region breaks away from a state or mobilizes the local population in an attempt to do so, nation building has evidently failed.⁴³

Among the forms that separatist mobilization can take, we consider the formation of organizations claiming autonomy or independence for an ethnic group as well as attempted or successful secession. While some separatist movements never went beyond making nationalist claims, such as the demands for autonomy by Spanish Galicians in the 1930s,⁴⁴ other movements escalated violently. In the Ottoman Empire, for instance, initial independence claims by Bulgarians and Romanians were followed

³⁶ Hechter 2000; Garfias and Sellars 2021.

³⁷ Gellner 1983; Hutchinson 2018.

³⁸ Hechter 2000.

³⁹ Breuilly 1982.

⁴⁰ Balcells, Daniels and Kuo 2023; Gellner 1983.

⁴¹ Breuilly 1982.

⁴² Wimmer 2018; Rohner and Zhuravskaya 2023.

⁴³ Yet, as argued by Connor 1972, the absence of separatism is clearly not a sufficient condition for national integration.

⁴⁴ Garcia-Alvarez 1998.

by secessionist civil war in the 1870s, and both successfully gained independence through the 1878 Treaty of Berlin.⁴⁵

Motivations Driving Railroad Construction

Before discussing the consequences of railroads in Europe, we provide a brief overview of the motivation behind their construction.⁴⁶ In Britain, commercial actors took the pioneering steps toward connecting urban centers via railroad.⁴⁷ But the British case is unrepresentative in this respect. More typically, France saw an active governmental role in railway planning, which served to promote not only economic development but also national integration and cultural penetration into the country's periphery.⁴⁸ Centralizing logic was also present in Sweden,⁴⁹ Belgium, and, with major delay, Spain.⁵⁰ In unifying Germany and Italy, railroad construction contributed to integrating previously independent entities, although with considerable lack of efficiency in the latter case.⁵¹ French planners were also motivated by geostrategic considerations, especially the need to counter Prussian/German rail-based mobilization.⁵²

Further east, the large multiethnic empires were more reluctant to engage in nation building. Their dynastic elites saw nationalism as a threat rather than an asset. Coupled with limited access to capital, this reluctance delayed the introduction of railways and their use for the purpose of nation building. Nevertheless, the military threat posed by the Western great powers increased the pressure on imperial decision-making, in both the Habsburg Empire and Tsarist Russia.⁵³ While commercial interests drove early railroad construction in Vienna, concerns about securing its borders and quick deployment of its troops motivated the empire's extension of railroad lines to the Russian border and into the Italian peninsula.⁵⁴

With even less access to private finance than Vienna, the Romanov Empire similarly used railways to reinforce its external borders but also employed them as a tool of imperial rule.⁵⁵ In 1863, the newly built

⁴⁵ Minahan 2001; Goína 2005, 137.

⁴⁶ See Suryanarayan 2024 for a general overview of the literature on endogenous state capacity.

⁴⁷ Trew 2020; Bogart 2009.

⁴⁸ Weber 1976.

⁴⁹ Cermeño, Enflo and Lindvall 2022.

⁵⁰ Alvarez-Palau, Díez-Minguella and Martí-Henneberg 2021.

⁵¹ Schram 1997.

⁵² See, e.g., Alvarez-Palau, Díez-Minguella and Martí-Henneberg 2021, 264.

⁵³ Gutkas and Bruckmüller 1989.

⁵⁴ Köster 1999; Rieber 2014.

⁵⁵ Schenk 2011.

rail connection between St. Petersburg and Warsaw allowed the Tsarist regime to send the troops that crushed the Polish revolt in the January uprising. Yet the belated Russian drive for nation building and Russification gave railroads a prominent role as cultural homogenizers. Foreshadowing Putin's more recent expression of imperialist attitude, Baron Andrey Nikolayevich Korf, predicted a harmonious path toward national integration upon visiting Ukraine after the Polish rebellion:

The way to it is through the railroad. . . . It is not only the goods that move along this road, but also books, ideas, customs, views. . . . The Great Russian and Little Russian capitals, ideas, views will mix, and these two peoples, already standing close, will first become related and then become one.⁵⁶

With this discussion in mind, we further explore empirical biases from politically motivated railroad construction in our analysis given later.

Railroads, Modernization, and Separatist Mobilization

We here turn to our main argument of how railroad construction may affect the choice of nondominant populations to support separatist movements. This choice depends on the expected costs, benefits, and chances for success of state-led nation building and national independence campaigns. Railway construction in the periphery may affect the emergence of separatist movements if it shifts the costs, benefits, and success probabilities as perceived by local populations. We describe three broad mechanisms through which access to expanding railway networks matters and from which we derive our baseline hypothesis. We then link our causal mechanisms to specific forms of more gradual railway expansion before deriving contextual factors that may tilt the balance toward integration or disintegration.

The three theoretical mechanisms through which railroads may have affected nondominant-group individuals in modernizing Europe are illustrated in Figure 9.1 and relate, respectively, to increased interactions between dominant and nondominant groups (M1), the state's ability to reach and penetrate nondominant populations (M2), and nondominant elites' and populations' capacity to mobilize against the state (M3). The following paragraphs lay out how, through these three mechanisms, growing railroad networks affect the costs, benefits, and likelihood of success of separatist mobilization.

M1: *Market Access and Social Communication.* First and foremost, railroads affect local populations through economic integration

⁵⁶ Quoted in Miller 2015, 359–360.

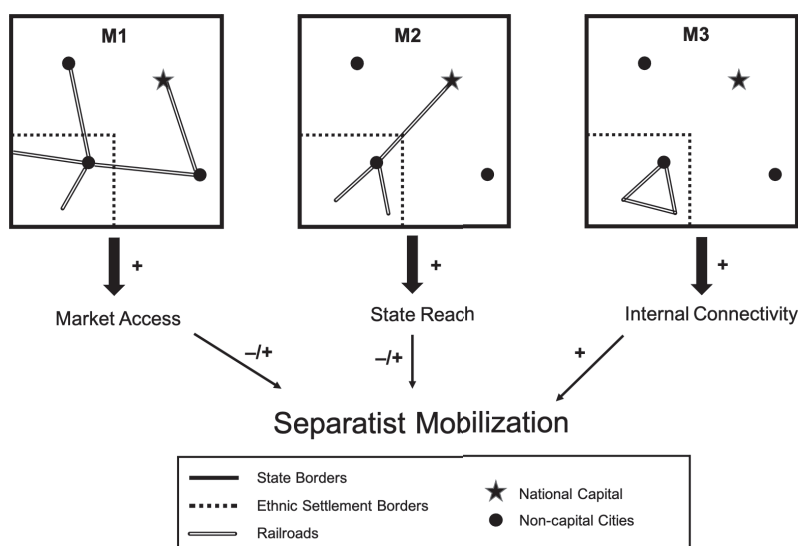


Figure 9.1 How railroad construction matters.

and social communication. Improved connectivity to the entirety of a country's territory, and especially to major cities, increases the costs of secession by making economic independence less attractive. It provides peripheral populations with material incentives to orient themselves toward an increasingly national economy and in some cases to even culturally assimilate into a supralocal national identity. Mechanism M1 in Figure 9.1 illustrates this point. Two railroad lines directly link the nondominant population segment in the bottom-left corner to the two noncapital cities.

Industrial and capitalist development is inextricably linked with railway construction. Moving goods and people across distances enabled the formation of integrated market economies and labor migration from agrarian towns to industrializing cities.⁵⁷ Recent empirical studies show how railway building contributed to city growth (increasing employment shares in the industrial sector) and more integrated markets in nineteenth-century Europe.⁵⁸ By the same token, urbanization and industrialization spurred railway construction as the earliest lines

⁵⁷ Rostow 1960; Fishlow 1965; Weber 1976.

⁵⁸ Keller and Shiue 2008; Hornung 2015; Alvarez-Palau, Díez-Minguela and Martí-Henneberg 2021; Berger and Enflo 2017; Berger 2019.

typically connected the major industrializing cities within a country.⁵⁹ Where railways brought income-earning potential and prospects for upward mobility within national markets, local residents were unlikely to support peripheral elites' attempts to break away from the state and cut themselves off from these emerging opportunities.⁶⁰

Railways accelerated the expansion of communication networks and brought previously isolated rural residents in contact with urban dwellers and with each other and can be expected to have created bottom-up incentives and pressures for cultural homogenization as described by Gellner and Deutsch.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, Weber describes road and railway networks as a technological precondition for "radical cultural change" in nationalizing France.⁶² Charles Maier even uses the term "railroad nationalism" to describe the transformative effects of the transport revolution on national integration in Europe and the United States.⁶³

Nevertheless, cultural differences may become more salient where members of distinct ethnic groups compete for inherently scarce modernization benefits.⁶⁴ Gellner explains how economic integration and information flows can make ethnically distinct peripheries acutely aware of their subordinate status and limited prospects for upward mobility, which should increase support for separatist movements.⁶⁵ Therefore, railroad expansion could also be expected to increase peripheral populations' motivation and elites' opportunities for separatist mobilization.

M2: State Reach and Direct Rule. A second and plausibly equally important mechanism links railroads to the central state's ability to reach, govern, and transform local populations in top-down fashion. Providing public goods and engaging in ambitious state- and nation-building policies would have been inconceivable without railroads.⁶⁶ Modern transportation infrastructure significantly boost what Michael Mann calls the "infrastructural power" of European states, which he defines as the "institutional capacity of a central state [...] to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions."⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Hornung 2015.

⁶⁰ Hierro and Queralt 2021.

⁶¹ Gellner 1983; Deutsch 1953.

⁶² Weber 1976, chapter 12. See also Segal 2016.

⁶³ Maier 2016.

⁶⁴ Bates 1983.

⁶⁵ Gellner 1983.

⁶⁶ Wimmer 2018.

⁶⁷ Mann 1993, 59.

Mechanism M2 in Figure 9.1 depicts this logic, illustrating a direct railroad link from the national capital to the main city in a culturally distinct ethnically nondominant region. Again, both local and nonlocal railway construction matters as each kilometer of track constructed between the capital and the nondominant segment implies reduced travel times to and from the political center.

Central states need to reach and penetrate peripheral areas to implement their preferred policies, monitor state-appointed bureaucrats, and, if necessary, repress unruly local elites and populations.⁶⁸ The prospect of state repression increases the costs of separatist mobilization and lowers the chances of separatist success. Cermeño and colleagues' analysis of nineteenth-century Sweden supports this view, showing how railways enabled public school inspectors to better reach peripheral districts, leading to higher enrollment rates and more nationalist curricula in connected locations.⁶⁹ If railway-enabled public goods provision,⁷⁰ mass education,⁷¹ and policing capabilities⁷² induce loyalty and obedience as intended, local populations should have reduced motives and opportunities to support separatism.

At the same time, increasing state penetration and top-down nation building may spur backlashes where they proceed – or are perceived – as exploitative schemes of “internal colonialism,” thus nurturing popular and elite-level support for secession and facilitating separatist mobilization.⁷³ Interestingly, the mere fact of alien rule by ethnically distinct central-state elites, regardless of specific policies, appeared increasingly scandalous in nationalizing Europe.⁷⁴ By bringing the state closer to peripheral elites and populations and thus threatening their status, power, and traditional ways of life, railroad networks can plausibly contribute to the emergence of reactive nationalism.⁷⁵ The Russian Empire's expansion of rail connections to the Polish lands facilitated separatist mobilization, including among railroad workers,⁷⁶ and the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire were met by Serb resistance in 1878 and 1910.⁷⁷

⁶⁸ Hechter 2000, 29.

⁶⁹ Cermeño, Enflo and Lindvall 2022.

⁷⁰ Wimmer 2018; Alesina and Reich 2015.

⁷¹ Paglayan 2021, 2022, 2024; Alesina, Giuliano and Reich 2021.

⁷² Mann 1993; Müller-Crepon, Hunziker and Cederman 2021.

⁷³ Hechter 1977.

⁷⁴ Hechter 2013.

⁷⁵ Hechter 2000.

⁷⁶ Schenk 2011.

⁷⁷ Hechter 2000; Malešević 2012.

M3: Internal Connectivity and Social Mobilization. Third, railroads can facilitate the coordination and collective action of peripheral opposition movements, thus lowering the costs of separatist mobilization. Mechanism M3 in Figure 9.1 shows how local rails within a culturally distinct subregion improve the internal connectedness of its residents. Rapidly spreading information and ideas as well as social ties between leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens are key ingredients to successful mobilization⁷⁸

In line with this notion, recent empirical studies illustrate how railroad connectivity contributed to the diffusion and growth of opposition movements in nineteenth-century United States,⁷⁹ pre-democratic Sweden,⁸⁰ and interwar Egypt.⁸¹ Similarly, denser peripheral road networks resulted in higher levels of organized violence against the state in Africa in the twentieth century.⁸² Specifically related to nation building, Deutsch expects ethnic conflict where social mobilization through improved communication happens prior to local assimilation into the dominant national culture.⁸³ By boosting internal connectivity, often unintentionally, railroad construction may increase the opportunities for separatist mobilization and, via internal communications and exchange, promote identification with separatist movements. Reactive mobilization occurred in groups that were traversed by the state's main railroad networks, such as the Ukrainians and Belorussians in Tsarist Russia and the Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire. Even some industrializing segments in Western Europe, such as the Catalans in Spain, benefited from increasing levels of internal connectivity and managed to resist the assimilationist and integrationist advances of the central state.

Deriving Testable Hypotheses

The three causal mechanisms outlined in Figure 9.1 generate ambiguous expectations regarding the link between railroad construction and separatism. On the one hand, railways provide the transportation and communication networks that integrationist modernization theories regard as essential for both bottom-up (M1) and top-down nation building (M2). On the other hand, both market integration (M1) and state penetration (M2) may spur local backlashes, and internal connections (M3)

⁷⁸ Granovetter 1978; Kuran 1992; Shesterinina 2016; Aidt, Leon-Ablan and Satchell 2022.

⁷⁹ García-Jimeno, Iglesias and Yildirim 2022.

⁸⁰ Melander 2021.

⁸¹ Brooke and Ketchley 2018.

⁸² Müller-Crepon, Hunziker and Cederman 2021.

⁸³ Deutsch 1953.

are likely to facilitate separatist mobilization. There are several reasons to expect railroad construction in ethnic nondominant areas to increase the risk of separatism, at least in the short term.

First, and as illustrated by the figure, newly built railways within the settlement area of a nondominant group unambiguously improve internal connectivity, but market access and state reach also depend on nonlocal railways in other parts of the country. Second, market access and state-reach mechanisms do not unequivocally point to integration and may also foster resistance and separatist mobilization. Third, the integrative and assimilationist effects of market integration, social communication, and state reach typically unfold gradually and only fully materialize in the long term. Economic change and local industrialization tend to uproot local modes of production and systems of exchange before adaptation is complete, and the benefits trickle down to broader segments of the local population. While contact and exchange through personal mobility and labor migration have the potential to foster cultural homogenization into an overarching national identity, such cultural change rarely occurs overnight.⁸⁴ Similarly, state-led nation-building policies like mass schooling and compulsory military service target younger generations, and therefore, the full effects will not be apparent until decades after they are introduced.⁸⁵ In contrast, the backlash against market integration and state building is often immediate.

Thus, we expect the first railway connections in ethnically nondominant regions to increase the risk of separatism. The effects of internal connectivity on coordination and social mobilization likely materialize more immediately than the integrative forces described earlier.⁸⁶ In addition, where local elites and populations regard incipient economic change and state penetration as threats, they have strong incentives to mobilize resistance before slow-moving assimilationist pressures undermine their local basis of support. We, therefore, state the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis H9.1. Railway construction in nondominant regions increases the likelihood of separatist mobilization, at least in the short term.

⁸⁴ Weber 1976.

⁸⁵ Blanc and Kubo 2024.

⁸⁶ Although depicting an overall slow-moving process of assimilation into French national identity, Weber 1976, 205–207, highlights the first arrival of a rail connection in a locality as a mind-opening, perhaps even a revolutionary event that abruptly pushed rural areas out of their premodern slumber. In ethnically distinct areas, this shock often provided a trigger for counter-state mobilization.

The first task of our empirical analysis is to test whether there is any systematic relationship between local railroad construction and peripheral nationalism and, if so, whether a first railway connection increases the potential for counter-state nationalism as hypothesized. To leave it at that, however, would be theoretically unsatisfying. European history provides numerous examples of both successful nation building and national disintegration. The conditions under which one or the other prevails is a puzzle as equally important as any general relationship between railroads and separatism – if not more so.

Conditional Hypotheses. Specific contextual conditions are likely to shape the opportunities and motivations for separatist mobilization. We explore six cultural, demographic, political, and economic factors that either complicate top-down nation building or favor separatist mobilization.

First, large cultural distances make it harder for the state to reach, govern, and assimilate peripheral populations.⁸⁷ Homogenizing populations that speak local dialects of the dominant language or languages that at least belong to the same linguistic family appears easier to do than bridging deeper cultural divides.

Second, where large majorities already speak some version of the state-sanctioned national language, standardization across local dialects and assimilation of culturally more distinct but small national minorities become a realistic prospect. Conversely, national integration appears to be a much more daunting task where the state-leading nation represents a relatively small share of its country's population.

Third, national independence campaigns only gain support where they can mount a credible challenge to the host state and offer the prospect of economic and military viability in case of successful secession.⁸⁸ Nondominant groups with large populations and territories can more credibly promise sufficient state and market size after independence and are, therefore, more likely to rally the required support than small national minorities.⁸⁹

Fourth, in underdeveloped countries, railway access likely brings in the central state but does not come with the economic benefits and opportunities of rapid industrialization, and therefore, peripheral populations have little incentive to become loyal to the center or to invest

⁸⁷ Alesina and Reich 2015.

⁸⁸ Siroky, Mueller and Hechter 2016.

⁸⁹ Hechter 2000, chapter 5.

in cultural assimilation. Under such conditions, claims about exploitation by the ruling elite are particularly likely to resonate with local populations.⁹⁰

Fifth, only high-capacity states can be expected to successfully implement direct rule and ambitious nation-building policies. Preexisting levels of state and, especially, fiscal capacity developed through earlier processes of political reform, technology adoption, or economic integration are thus likely to matter.⁹¹

Sixth, democratic institutions, especially liberal ones that protect all citizens – particularly minorities – against excesses of the state may make peripheral populations more likely to accept or even support direct rule by the center.

Based on these contextual arguments, we specify and test additional hypotheses regarding the link between railroads and separatism.

Hypothesis H9.2. Railway access increases the likelihood of separatist mobilization in . . .

- (a) nondominant groups that are culturally distant from the state-leading nation,
- (b) countries dominated by a relatively small national dominant group,
- (c) large nondominant groups,
- (d) relatively poor and less industrialized countries,
- (e) low-capacity states,
- (f) staunchly autocratic states.

Network Structure and Specific Causal Mechanisms. We move beyond the short-term effects of the mere presence of a railway connection to investigate how more gradual and long-term improvements in connectivity relate to the mechanisms described earlier. The main drivers in bottom-up versions of integrationist modernization theory are industrial development, urbanization, and personal mobility and exchange over large distances. This mechanism (M1) should be particularly relevant where railway construction effectively integrates peripheral regions into national markets and improves local population access to the industrializing cities of the state. Provided that they do not trigger intergroup conflict or competition, railway lines that increase a region's market access⁹² can be expected to lower local incentives for separatism and to contribute to growing affinity with the state-framed national identity, especially in the long run.

⁹⁰ Hobsbawm 1990, chapter 4.

⁹¹ Wimmer 2018.

⁹² Donaldson and Hornbeck 2016.

In a similar vein, top-down nation building through public goods provision, education, or repression requires fast and reliable transportation links between the state capital and potentially restive minority regions (M2). Separatist mobilization therefore seems less likely wherever newly constructed rails more directly connect peripheries with the administrative capital and the integrative effects of direct rule and top-down nation building prevail over local efforts to mobilize for separatism.

In addition, new transportation links can also boost internal connectivity within peripheral regions without simultaneously increasing state reach or national market access (M3). We thus test the following more long-term hypotheses linking the structure of expanding European railway networks to the likelihood of separatist mobilization.

Hypothesis H9.3. Railway-induced improvements in . . .

- (a) national market access reduce the likelihood of separatist mobilization (M1).
- (b) state reach reduce the likelihood of separatist mobilization (M2).
- (c) internal connectivity increase the likelihood of separatist mobilization (M3).

9.3 Empirical Analysis

As in previous chapters, our analysis uses yearly observations of ethnic segments, defined as the spatial intersections between country borders and ethnic settlement areas.⁹³

Data on Railroads and Separatism

We use local-level access to railway networks as a geographically and temporally disaggregated proxy for the uneven spread of modernization across Europe. To test our theoretical predictions, we combine the ethnolinguistic segment polygons introduced in Chapter 3 with newly collected geographic data on the expanding European railroad network covering the period 1816–1945. We restrict the sample to all nondominant segments since separatist mobilization only occurs in ethnic groups that can plausibly claim to suffer under alien rule. The sources and digitization process of the spatial railway data are described in greater detail in Chapter S9 of the supplementary material. Figure 9.2 plots the temporal and geographic variation in this dataset.

⁹³ See Chapter 3 for details about data on ethnic settlements and state borders.

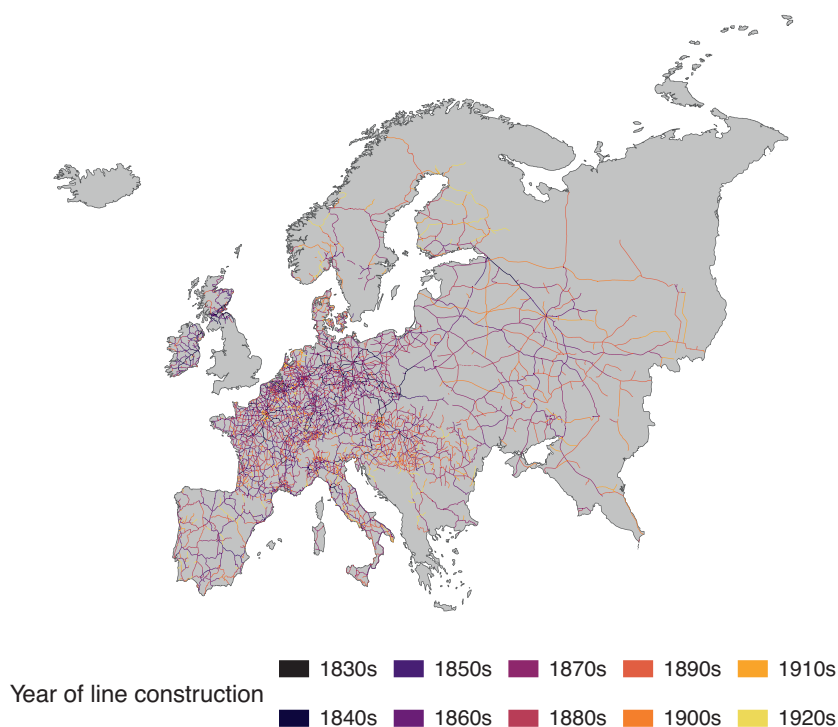


Figure 9.2 Geographic data on yearly railway construction.

The main treatment indicator in the analyses that follow is a dichotomous measure of railroad access derived from geographically intersecting the yearly ethnic segments with yearly data on the European railway network. All segments intersected by a rail line are assumed to be connected to the network. To get closer to the causal mechanisms, we use the network structure of the railway data to compute continuous proxies for state reach and connectivity to urban markets. The main outcome in this chapter is a combined indicator of separatist mobilization capturing instances of successful secession, onsets of secessionist conflict, and national independence claims.⁹⁴

Empirical Strategy and Results

We use a difference-in-differences (DiD) design to test Hypothesis 9.1. The intuition of this empirical strategy is to compare how the risk of

⁹⁴ See Chapter S9 for details.

separatism evolves after the first railway is constructed in a segment's territory relative to segments that have not yet received a railroad. The main assumption in this setup consists in the presence of parallel counterfactual trends, which means that in a hypothetical scenario of not having received a railroad, the risk of separatism in treated segments would have increased or decreased in parallel to the observed risk in untreated segments. If this assumption holds, the DiD model estimates the average causal effect of rail access on separatism among treated ethnic segments.

Presenting an event study, Figure 9.3 illustrates the estimated average treatment effect from a DiD model as well as how the risk of separatism changes after the first railroad arrives. The horizontal axis denotes the relative time to and since the first railroad construction in years, while the vertical axis shows effect sizes in percentage points. Since separatism is a rare event, we estimate event study coefficients for five-year bins before and after the arrival of the first railroad in a segment.⁹⁵

The main results show that railroads access has a comparatively large effect on separatist mobilization. In the DiD specification, we estimate that the yearly risk of mobilization increases by slightly more than 2 percentage points, which is equivalent to a 195 percent increase from the sample mean.⁹⁶ The event study in Figure 9.3 shows that the effect materializes quickly after the first railway is built in a segment and remains consistent over the following decades. In a set of additional analyses, we find this result to be robust to changing the main specification and to accounting for potentially endogenous railroad construction by isolating quasi-exogenous patterns of railroad development through simulation of “apolitical” railroad networks.⁹⁷

To test the conditional H9.2a–f, we replicate the baseline model from Table S9.1, model 1, while interacting the railway access dummy with moderating variables coded at the segment- and country-year levels. Figure 9.4 displays marginal effect plots.⁹⁸

Panel (a) tests whether the destabilizing effects of rails are stronger in ethnic segments that are culturally more distinct from the state-leading group (H9.2a). We calculate linguistic distance from the dominant group

⁹⁵ More specifically, the point estimate at –60 on the horizontal axis refers to sixty or more years before railroad construction, the one at –55 captures the fifty-fifth to fifty-ninth year before treatment onset, and so on. Similarly, the estimate at 0 includes the year the first railway is built and the four consecutive years, the one at 5 denotes the fifth to ninth posttreatment years, and so forth. The results in Figure 9.3 are based on a specification with country-year fixed effects, which ensures that only ethnic segments within the same country of a treated segment serve as control group.

⁹⁶ See model 3 in Table S9.1 in the supplementary material.

⁹⁷ See Section S9.3 in the supplementary material.

⁹⁸ The binning estimates are provided according to Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu 2019.

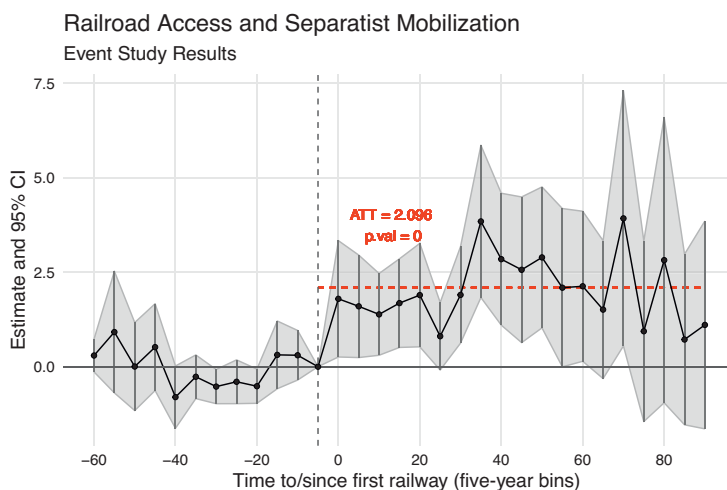


Figure 9.3 Treatment effect of the first railroad on ethnic separatism.

Note: Average treatment effect (ATT) estimate based on model 4 in Table S9.1.

by matching the ethnic categories from our maps to the Ethnologue language tree.⁹⁹ Interacting rail treatment with linguistic distance yields a positive but weakly significant coefficient (see model 1 in Table S9.2 in the supplementary material). For example, separatist conflict took place between linguistically similar groups, such as Catalans and Spanish, as well as distant ones, such as Germans and Hungarians. One interpretation of this non-result is that conditional on some cultural difference, group-level politicization and mobilization processes are more important than cultural distance.

Panel (b) interacts the rail indicator with the country-year-level population share of the state's dominant group. Consistent with H9.2b, the interaction coefficient is negative and significant, which suggests local railways are particularly likely to spur nationalist independence campaigns in countries with relatively small ruling groups. Nevertheless, the binning plot in panel (b) suggests that the significant linear interaction term is likely due to a small number of cases with particularly small dominant groups.¹⁰⁰ The binning coefficients show that there are no significantly different effects in the lowest, intermediate, and highest third of the distribution of national dominant group's population share.

⁹⁹ Lewis 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Note that our population measures underestimate the population size of Russians in the Russian Empire and Turks in the Ottoman Empire because of our geographical definition of Europe, which crops part of each group's population.

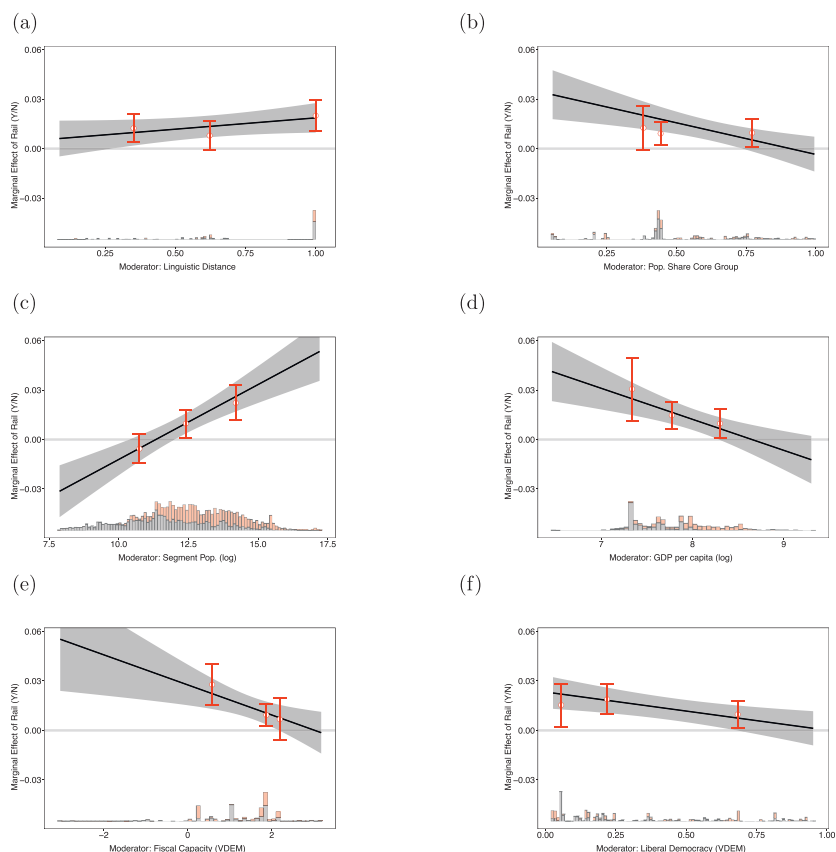


Figure 9.4 Marginal effect plot. (a) Linguistic distance. (b) Share dominant group. (c) Segment population. (d) Per capita GDP. (e) Fiscal capacity. (f) Liberal democracy.

Note: The linear interaction estimates derive from models in Table S9.2 in the supplementary material.

Panel (c) tests our argument about the nondominant groups' opportunities to engage in separatism. The results reveal that railways mainly spur separatism in demographically large ethnic segments, in line with H9.2c. Examples of large ethnic segments that mobilized are Belarusians; Poles and Ukrainians in Russia; and Czechs, Hungarians, and Italians in Austria-Hungary. In contrast, railroad access has a negative effect in very small ethnic segments in which it is likely more difficult to stage a separatist movement against the forces of state and market integration.

To test H9.2d and H9.2e, we rely on per capita GDP and fiscal capacity measures from the historical V-Dem data.¹⁰¹ The negative and significant linear interaction with per capita income in panel (d) suggests that our findings are driven by relatively poor and arguably less industrialized country years in the sample, thus confirming H9.2d. Similarly, the binning estimates for fiscal capacity in panel (e) suggest that the effect of railway access is significantly larger at typically low values of fiscal capacity than at typical medium or high values, consistent with H9.2e. The cases of separatism in less developed states with lower fiscal capacity mostly fall in the Russian and Ottoman empires and in their successor states.

Finally, the interaction term with the V-Dem liberal democracy score is negative and significant in panel (f).¹⁰² However, the binning estimates reveal that if anything, the effect is highest at low-to-intermediate values of liberal democracy, which mostly occur in the Ottoman and Russian empires during the second half of the nineteenth century. While the rail effect in the most democratic third of the distribution is significantly smaller in the middle one, it is not significantly lower than observations in the lowest democratic tertile.

In the final part of the analysis, we test H9.3 and attempt to separate the three mechanisms through which gradual expansions of the railway network may affect center–periphery bargaining and separatist mobilization as outlined in the theory. To that end, we employ the railway-based market access, state reach, and internal connectivity proxies described earlier. Figure 9.5 presents results from two-way fixed-effects models of separatism that include inverted average travel times to large cities, national capitals, and any point within nondominant ethnic segments. These models follow a similar intuition as the main DiD specifications. We compare how separatism evolves in segments that have seen increases in market access, state reach, or internal connectivity relative to control segments without corresponding changes in these railroad-related proxies.¹⁰³

The first estimate shown in the leftmost column of Figure 9.5 shows a substantively small and statistically insignificant coefficient for a 100 percent increase in national market access. Contrary to our expectation in Hypothesis H9.3a, we do not find any systematic effect of national market access on separatist mobilization. Turning to the state reach mechanism in the middle column, we find that a one standard deviation reduction in travel time from the national capital to a nondominant

¹⁰¹ Coppedge et al. 2020.

¹⁰² Coppedge et al. 2020.

¹⁰³ See Table S9.3 for the corresponding regression table.

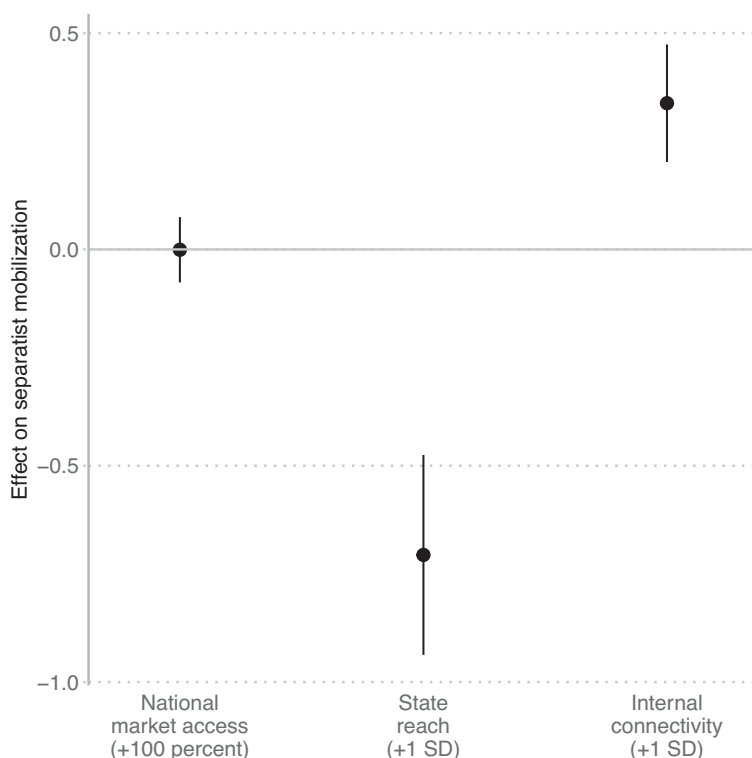


Figure 9.5 Effects for causal mechanisms: market access, state reach, and internal connectivity.

Note: Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Based on model 4 of Table S9.3.

population segment significantly reduces the risk of separatism by 0.45 percentage points, which is consistent with H9.3b (second estimate in Figure 9.5). Last but not least, as shown by the rightmost column, a one standard deviation increase in internal connectivity, which we use as a proxy for local mobilization capacity, is associated with a 0.22 percentage higher and statistically significant chance of separatism, as expected in H9.3c.

9.4 Conclusion

Modern transportation infrastructure is conventionally seen as having strengthened European state and nation building. Expanding railway networks boosted centralizing states' infrastructural power and enabled

increasingly direct forms of governance while spurring economic change, urbanization, and social contact over increasing distance.

Extrapolating from Eugen Weber's study of nationalizing France, many social scientists expect these changes to have strengthened national cohesion well beyond the French case.¹⁰⁴ Yet this chapter shows that if anything, railway construction in ethnic minority regions tended to threaten the integrity of European states and empires. Our analyses suggest that separatism became more likely after territories inhabited by nondominant ethnic groups were connected to the state's railroad network. Our conditional analysis reveals some structural dimensions that hindered national integration in multiethnic states, especially in Eastern Europe. Large minority groups, small population shares of state-leading groups, and weak levels of state capacity and per capita income posed formidable challenges for state centralization and top-down nation building. Thus, the French experience appears more as an exception than a paradigmatic case of nation building in Europe.

We also show how the aggregate effects of railroad access mask varying effects of the networks' overall structure. Results from our analyses of causal mechanisms suggest that separatism becomes more likely where railroads facilitate mobilization by improving internal connectivity of peripheral ethnic regions and less likely where it brings such regions closer to the state's capital. National market access does not seem to make a difference.

Railway construction was only one, though arguably the most important, vector of modernization in Europe from the nineteenth century through the mid twentieth century. In this sense, this chapter contributes to a broader literature that analyzes national integration or disintegration through various means of social communication and mechanisms of identity formation, such as telegraph lines, road networks, mass education, and mass media.

There is a growing research agenda analyzing how mobilization processes around the world are influenced by more recent technologies, including broadcasting,¹⁰⁵ cell phones,¹⁰⁶ and social media.¹⁰⁷ While our analysis serves as a reminder that technological advances sometimes have disintegrating effects, careful empirical research is needed before applying our findings to settings beyond the classic cases of European nation building.

¹⁰⁴ Weber 1976.

¹⁰⁵ Warren 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Shapiro and Weidmann 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Weidmann 2015; Gohdes 2020.

10 Nationalism, Right-Peopling, and Ethnic Cleansing*

Contemporary Europe consists of states that are comparatively ethnically homogeneous. Although often taken for granted, Europe's current ethnic geography is the result of a long history of ethnic homogenization that involved extreme levels of violence. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European states targeted many ethnic minorities with forced assimilation, resettlement, displacement, and mass killing in an effort to homogenize their populations. But the practice of right-peopling states¹ is not limited to Europe. Recent examples include the genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya, China's forced assimilation of Uyghurs, repeated displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh since 2020, and brutal ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population in Gaza and parts of the West Bank since October 2023. Despite the tremendous human costs of such campaigns, the conditions under which some minorities become targets of ethnic cleansing while others are spared and the extent to which ethnic cleansing has shaped today's societies remain unclear.

Relying mostly on qualitative case studies, existing research explains patterns of ethnic cleansing as the result of a security dilemma² or internal threats³ or analyzes its macrohistorical and ideological roots.⁴ Applying quantitative research methods, more recent studies make important contributions to explanations of ethnic cleansing at the group level⁵ and ethnically targeted one-sided violence.⁶ Yet their

* This chapter is adapted from the article "'Right-Peopling' the State: Nationalism, Historical Legacies, and Ethnic Cleansing in Europe, 1885-2020" in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2024. We thank Guy Schvitz for his contributions to the article and his permission to use the material.

¹ In analogy to "right-sizing," we use this term to refer to state efforts to homogenize their populations, without of course implying any legitimacy of such efforts, see O'Leary et al. 2001. See also Section 1.2.

² Posen 1993b.

³ Harff and Gurr 1988; Harff 2003; Straus 2013; Valentino 2004.

⁴ Mann 2005; O'Leary 2001.

⁵ E.g., Mylonas 2012; Bulutgil 2015, 2016; McNamee and Zhang 2019.

⁶ Balcells and Stanton 2021; Fjelde and Hultman 2014; Fjelde et al. 2021.

methodological progress comes at the cost of neglecting macrohistorical processes and legacies as well as spatial dynamics across country borders.

In keeping with the implications of our theory of nationalist state transformation, we argue that perceived territorial threats motivated many ethnic cleansing campaigns characterized by mass killings or ethnically targeted forced displacement. As we documented in Part II, rising nationalism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe came with the risk of multiethnic polities being right-sized through secession and irredentism. But states, were not entirely powerless in confronting these centrifugal forces and increasingly sought to homogenize their minorities to preempt the loss of territory settled by them. Violent homogenization efforts were concentrated in regions with a high risk of territorial conflict; regions where ethnic groups were divided by state borders⁷ and where past border changes invited revisionist nationalism.⁸ Building directly on the findings from earlier chapters, we expect that nondominant groups with transborder ethnic kin (TEK) and lost home rule, the historical experience of controlling an independent state, were more likely to challenge their host states, in particular, where autocratic institutions prevented accommodation. This ultimately made them more likely targets of ethnic cleansing than nondominant groups without TEK or lost home rule.

We test these arguments with HEG data that map Europe's ethnic geography since 1886.⁹ As we describe later, we complement these data with a new list of ethnic cleansing episodes from the same period that records 113 cleansing campaigns with a conservative estimate of fifty-six million victims.

At the level of ethnic groups nested within countries, our analyses show that nondominant groups with TEK and those with a history of lost home rule were frequent targets of ethnic cleansing by their host states. We find that nondominant groups with transborder ties to a group dominating another state face a yearly risk of ethnic cleansing that is 180 percent higher than non-TEK groups. Similarly, twenty years of independent home rule increases a group's risk of ethnic cleansing by 74 percent. These effects are mostly driven by autocratic states and are robust to alternative specifications. Although the results are not driven solely by ethnic cleansing during the world wars, we find that TEK links increase the risk of cleansing in particular in times of international warfare between the states a group is part of. This finding further

⁷ See Chapter 7.

⁸ See Chapter 8.

⁹ See Chapter 3.

supports our argument that threats of being right-sized are a main driver of state-led ethnic cleansing.

10.1 Literature

Following the resurgence of ethnic violence in the Balkans in the 1990s, a broad research community sought to explain its occurrence.¹⁰ Building on international relations theory, Barry Posen's seminal account explains ethnic cleansing as resulting from a security dilemma that leaves ethnic groups unprotected after the collapse of a multiethnic state, such as occurred in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.¹¹ Left to fend for themselves, some groups facing increased perceptions of threat may be motivated to strike first to rescue potentially vulnerable coethnics in ethnically mixed regions; such escalation can result in outright ethnic cleansing. A strength of Posen's model is its account of spatial patterns of ethnic violence, often targeted at enclaves. But in focusing entirely on ethnic violence in the wake of state collapse, the intergroup security dilemma says little about the vast majority of modern ethnic cleansing campaigns that were carried out by governments.

Differentiating ethnic cleansing and genocide from more general ethnic conflict, Mann takes a macrohistorical perspective and argues that the global diffusion of democracy often gave rise to exclusionary ideologies and racial definitions of the *demos*, resulting in forced assimilation, displacement, and outright genocide of outgroups.¹² In fact, this dark side of democracy implies that most liberal democracies are built on violent histories of ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, while singling out nationalist ideology as an important driver of ethnic cleansing, this argument fails to explain why exclusionary nationalism prevailed in some states but not in others. Moreover, although macrohistorical patterns explain temporal trends, they say little about why some groups became targets of cleansing while others were spared.

Focusing on the latter question, some studies argue that states resort to ethnic cleansing in response to perceived security threats, targeting groups they suspect of collaborating with internal¹³ or external enemies. Mylonas shows how states accommodate groups supported by their allies but tend to exclude, repress, and cleanse groups with ties to rival states.¹⁴ Similarly, Zeynep Bulutgil links ethnic cleansing to external threats while highlighting the mitigating effects of cross-cutting

¹⁰ Korb 2016.

¹¹ Posen 1993*b*.

¹² Mann 2005.

¹³ Harff and Gurr 1988; Harff 2003; Straus 2013; Valentino 2004.

¹⁴ Mylonas 2012.

class cleavages.¹⁵ Focusing on the border region between China and the USSR, Lachlan McNamee and Anna Zhang provide further evidence on ostensibly protective “demographic engineering.”¹⁶

While the literature highlights the strategic logic of ethnic cleansing, it exhibits four shortcomings. First, previous research mostly focuses on explaining ethnic cleansing within existing state borders. But this restriction to fixed territorial units risks mischaracterizing the link between ethnic cleansing and border-transforming events like secession and conquest. Second, studying the direct causes of ethnic cleansing can come at the expense of attention to its broader macrohistorical context. The occurrence of ethnic cleansing varies over time and is often connected to processes of nation-state formation. Ethnic cleansing should therefore be seen as part of long-term historical developments. Third, many large-N studies focus on country- or group-level attributes without giving much consideration to the effects of spatial configurations, yet analyses of more fine-grained data from single countries show that local geography plays an important role.¹⁷ Fourth, the macrohistorical transformation of states through violent ethnic cleansing remains understudied. We particularly lack evidence on the impact of ethnic cleansing on the sociodemographic structure of states. To better understand when and where ethnic cleansing occurs and how it affected European states’ demography, it is necessary to implement a historically deep large-N research design with mesolevel spatial precision, similar to single-country studies, that covers the whole of Europe.

10.2 Theoretical Argument

We seek to explain what triggers state-led ethnic cleansing campaigns.¹⁸ We define ethnic cleansing as the attempt to forcibly and permanently remove members of an ethnic group from a region through violence. Our definition covers two types of ethnic cleansing: forced displacement and ethnic mass killing. Forced displacement uproots ethnic groups, typically moving them from their host states’ territory to another state. Ethnic mass killing refers to efforts to annihilate an ethnic group as a whole or in parts by killing its members.¹⁹ The definition covers the

¹⁵ Bulutgil 2015, 2016. See also Hong and Kim 2019.

¹⁶ McNamee and Zhang 2019. See also Carter 2010; McNamee 2018.

¹⁷ E.g., McNamee 2018; McNamee and Zhang 2019.

¹⁸ Although nonstate actors can also engage in ethnic cleansing, the vast majority of Europe’s ethnic cleansing campaigns were carried out by states.

¹⁹ It is difficult to draw a sharp line between the two types of ethnic cleansing, as forced displacement is often accompanied by mass killings, and the latter also frequently involves mass deportations. Therefore, our analysis focuses on ethnic cleansing as an overarching category.

most violent strategies, including exclusionary politics,²⁰ but excludes homogenization policies that operate over a comparatively long time horizon.

We argue that governments strategically employ ethnic cleansing to establish control over contested territory.²¹ In cleansing the territory of a threatening group, states seek to prevent secession or foreign annexation. We focus on two main factors that increase the perceived threat potential of ethnic groups: the presence of transborder ethnic ties and the historical legacies of past home rule.

Nationalism and Territorial Contestation

Although often described as primitive or barbaric, ethnic cleansing is an inherently modern phenomenon.²² Most premodern states did not have the capacity to kill or displace entire ethnic groups, nor did they have the motives to do so, as ethnicity was mostly politically irrelevant.²³

Things changed in the nineteenth century as nationalism spread across Europe and beyond. In Western Europe, states introduced territorial approaches to citizenship that treated most inhabitants as potential members of the nation. In contrast, most aspiring nations in Central and Eastern Europe adopted organic brands of nationalism that viewed nationality as ethnically predefined.²⁴ In the latter cases, *ethnos* rather than *demos* grounded demands to realize Gellner's congruence principle.²⁵ Where this principle was violated, nationalist mobilization for self-determination, border change, and the creation of ethnically homogeneous nation-states often followed.²⁶

The ideological shift toward nationalism represented a fundamental challenge to the existing political order. Most affected were the large and ethnically diverse Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian empires, but many newly established nation-states, such as Greece, Serbia, and Poland, also faced mismatches between political and ethnic borders. Ethnic diversity made effective rule increasingly difficult and posed a security threat. Regions inhabited by nondominant groups threatened to secede, while neighboring states claimed or attempted to annex territories inhabited

²⁰ Mylonas 2012.

²¹ As suggested by O'Leary 2001, alternative "right-peopling" strategies are assimilation (forced or voluntary) and state-sponsored resettlement of dominant group members into contested regions, see also McNamee and Zhang 2019.

²² Mann 2005; Ther 2014.

²³ O'Leary 2001; Geiss 2012.

²⁴ Mann 2005.

²⁵ Gellner 1983, 1. See Section 2.2.

²⁶ See Chapters 5 and 6.

by their ethnic kin.²⁷ Such tensions were often fueled by major powers' efforts to destabilize their rivals.²⁸

In this environment, governments became increasingly preoccupied with homogenizing their populations. In principle, they could reduce geopolitical risks by right-sizing their territory and abandoning claims to regions populated by minorities. But given the high value of territory in Europe, they were unlikely to do so voluntarily.²⁹ Instead, many governments opted for right-peopling strategies that allowed them to retain their territory.

We argue that in contrast to nonviolent homogenization efforts,³⁰ some states chose forced resettlement and mass killing of ethnic groups as a last resort, particularly if the groups were viewed as an urgent threat to state survival.³¹ Ethnic cleansing can remove the nationalist incompatibility altogether or, if not all-encompassing, can reduce a groups' capacity for mobilization by fragmenting it.³² An ethnic groups' threat potential largely depends on its motives and opportunities for secession and on whether its presence in a region increases the risk of foreign annexation. Both are affected by the presence of transborder ethnic kin and a history of political independence through home rule.

Transborder Ethnic Kin

As a violation of nationalist principles, the division of ethnic groups by state borders can motivate resistance against the status quo.³³ Leaders of divided groups commonly portray the group's fragmentation as an injustice, setting the stage for tensions between the group and its host state government. Viewing current borders as illegitimate, divided groups are likely to demand political concessions that may range from regional autonomy to independence or unification with a neighboring state.³⁴ In turn, host states are more likely to target such groups with aggressive nation-building policies.

To consider the effect of TEK linkages in greater detail, we distinguish between three configurations of state borders and ethnic settlement areas, as shown in Figure 10.1. As we have done throughout the book,

²⁷ Weiner 1971.

²⁸ Mylonas 2012.

²⁹ O'Leary 2001.

³⁰ Darden and Mylonas 2016; Weber 1976.

³¹ Cattaruzza and Langewiesche 2013; Ther 2014.

³² See Schubiger 2023.

³³ See Chapter 7.

³⁴ Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022.

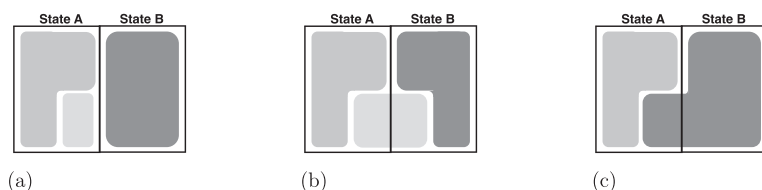


Figure 10.1 Configurations with and without transborder ethnic kin (TEK). (a) No TEK. (b) Nondominant TEK. (c) Dominant TEK.

Note: States are shown as rectangular boxes and ethnic groups as shaded areas.

we reserve the term ethnic groups for ethnic communities that exist independently of country borders and refer to group segments as the parts of an ethnic group that belong to a given state.³⁵ For example, the collapse of Austria–Hungary led to Hungarian group segments in Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Configuration (a) shows a nondominant group segment in state A without TEK, a situation in which the Scottish in the United Kingdom find themselves. Configuration (b) features a nondominant group segment in state A with ethnic ties to a nondominant segment in state B. An example of this is the Ottoman Empire Armenians who had stateless ethnic kin in both Russia and Iran. Given a contradiction between nationalist principles and a group's current territorial division, transborder ethnic groups are more susceptible to separatist conflict than groups without TEK linkages.³⁶ We posit that states are more likely to view such groups as a security threat, given their opportunity to stage cross-border insurgencies.³⁷ TEK groups also represent an opportunity for rival states to destabilize their neighbors by stoking ethnic tensions.³⁸ This situation was feared by the Ottoman government, which aimed to salvage its rule over Anatolia and counter the threats of Russian invasion and Armenian independence through genocide in 1915.³⁹ We thus expect that:

Hypothesis H10.1. Nondominant group segments with nondominant TEK are more likely to become targets of ethnic cleansing than nondominant group segments without TEK links.

Configuration (c) shows a nondominant segment in state A with ethnic ties to the dominant group in state B. Adding to risks of secession and foreign interference, this third configuration also increases the risk

³⁵ See conceptual discussion in Chapter 2.

³⁶ Cederman, Rügger and Schvitz 2022.

³⁷ Salehyan 2007.

³⁸ Mylonas 2012.

³⁹ Akçam 2012.

of annexation. The existence of a kin state and the unrealized potential of national unity can inspire irredentist claims on both sides of the border. Leaders in target state A may view the nondominant group as a fifth column that poses a security threat.⁴⁰ Even in the absence of open conflict or territorial disputes, the risk of instability may prompt states to preemptively resettle stranded groups to their homeland state across the border. The existence of a homeland state also creates an opportunity to negotiate formal population exchange agreements, which were long seen as acceptable on the international stage.⁴¹ The 1923 population exchange of more than 1.5 million people between the late Ottoman Empire and Greece exemplifies this logic. In particular, the Ottoman government feared Greek irredentism, while Greek nationalists eyed material gain and a modern, homogeneous Greek nation-state. This motivates the following hypothesis:⁴²

Hypothesis H10.2. Nondominant group segments with dominant TEK in neighboring states are more likely to become targets of ethnic cleansing than other group segments.

The dynamic underlying this effect may be weakened if (particularly large) states can deter their neighbors from violently targeting its ethnic kin.⁴³ While such deterrence may have a pacifying effect in normal times, it is unlikely to work once a TEK state has raised territorial claims or is engaged in active war with the segments' host state.

Lost Home Rule

Our analysis of restorative nationalism in Chapter 8 demonstrates that in addition to a group's current territorial division, historical legacies play a decisive role in shaping the risk of territorial conflict. Most territorial disputes are rooted in claims of historical ownership.⁴⁴ Such demands are widely seen as more legitimate than other types of claims and are more likely to attract domestic and international support.⁴⁵ Even when used as a pretext, historical precedents can still create opportunities for revisionism, for example, through their continued existence as subnational administrative units that facilitate secessionist mobilization⁴⁶ and

⁴⁰ Weiner 1971; Mylonas and Radnitz 2022.

⁴¹ Ther 2014.

⁴² Shields 2013.

⁴³ Van Houten 1998; Cederman et al. 2013.

⁴⁴ Carter 2017.

⁴⁵ Murphy 1990.

⁴⁶ Griffiths 2016.

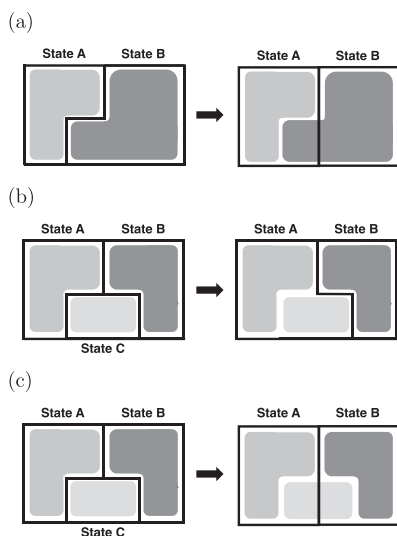


Figure 10.2 Transitions where border changes entail a loss of home rule. (a) Stranded TEK. (b) State death and annexation. (c) State death and partition.

Note: State borders are shown as thick black lines and ethnic groups as shaded areas.

through their lasting effects on the local social fabric,⁴⁷ which makes reinstating old borders more feasible than drawing new ones.⁴⁸

Historical border change motivates ethnic secession and irredentism, especially if such changes entailed a loss of political power for an ethnic segment. Three types of border change constitute such a loss of home rule, each also affecting groups' transborder ethnic ties, here illustrated in Figure 10.2. First, border change from secession or conquest can separate a segment from its surviving home state, as shown in panel (a). This was the case of Muslim populations stranded outside the collapsed Ottoman Empire and German populations outside Nazi Germany. Large parts of both groups were forcibly displaced with the goal of repatriation and prevention of future conflict.⁴⁹ Second, as depicted in panel (b), ethnic groups can lose their home rule through foreign annexation of their entire home state. This was the fate of Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians who lost their independence to the USSR in 1940 and subsequently experienced widespread deportation. Third, panel (c)

⁴⁷ E.g., Abramson, Carter and Ying 2022.

⁴⁸ Abramson and Carter 2016.

⁴⁹ İçduygu and Sert 2015, Snyder 2011, chapter 10.

reminds us that some instances of conquest and annexation can split a group across several states. For example, Poland's partition at the end of the eighteenth century divided its territory and population between the Russian, Habsburg, and German empires.

As shown in Chapter 8, groups with a history of independent statehood likely have strong national identities that can be mobilized through backward-looking myths of the group's glorious past and the trauma of status decline. The loss of autonomy thus creates powerful motives for group segments to push for revisionist border change⁵⁰ and threaten their host states' territorial integrity. In response, states are likely to target such groups with increasingly violent nation-building efforts. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis H10.3. Nondominant group segments with a history of past home rule are more likely to become targets of ethnic cleansing than other nondominant group segments.

Figure 10.2 clearly shows an inherent connection between the type of border change that led to the loss of segments' past home rule and the presence and type of their transborder ethnic ties. This raises the question of whether transborder ties to a dominant group and past home rule have cumulative or substitutive effects on the risk of ethnic cleansing. Past home rule could increase the risk of territorial change and reactive ethnic cleansing among segments with dominant TEK, indicating a cumulative effect. Yet this effect may be substituted by the effect of the dominant TEK group and is small as compared to segments with no or nondominant TEK. For the latter, the example of home rule in the past may substitute for the absence of an example of home rule in the present. We empirically investigate this issue later.

Although we claim that our argument about the roots of ethnic cleansing in nationalist territorial competition captures important historical dynamics, its applicability is likely restricted by a number of influential scope conditions. Most prominently, these consist of the absence of a bundle of liberal and democratic norms that have led to ever-stronger territorial integrity,⁵¹ reduced the likelihood of ethnic conflict by enabling power sharing and accommodation,⁵² and prevented interstate war.⁵³

⁵⁰ Hechter 2000; Siroky and Cuffe 2015; Germann and Sambanis 2021.

⁵¹ Zacher 2001.

⁵² Gurr 2000a; Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017.

⁵³ E.g., Imai and Lo 2021.

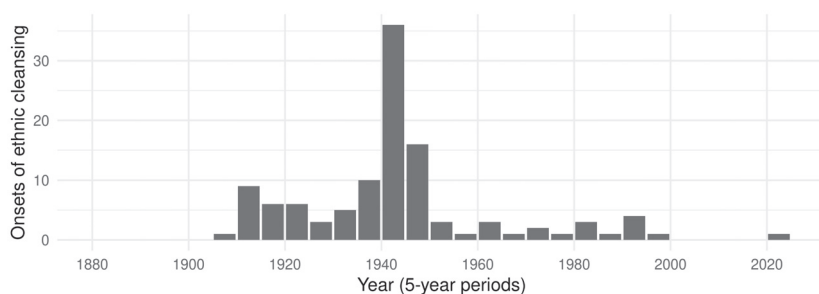


Figure 10.3 Onsets of ethnic cleansing by year.

Note: Binned into five-year periods.

10.3 Research Design

Similar to our analyses of secessionist conflict in Chapters 7–9, we test our hypotheses about the geopolitical origins of ethnic cleansing at the level of ethnic segments nested within states. As in Chapter 7, for each segment, we encode whether the group has politically dominant or non-dominant transborder ethnic kin abroad. And like Chapter 8, we also make use of historical data on state borders since 1816.⁵⁴

Our main outcome of interest is the onset of an episode of ethnic cleansing through mass killings⁵⁵ or forced displacement⁵⁶ with more than 1000 victims killed or deported by the host state of an ethnic segment since 1886. Information about such occurrences of ethnic cleansing comes from the HEG data that cover instances of rapid ethnic change, most of which were caused by violent cleansing.⁵⁷

The final dataset includes 113 onsets of ethnic cleansing carried out by host state governments, equivalent to an onset in 0.03 percent of all observed segment years.⁵⁸ Figure 10.3 shows that ethnic cleansing campaigns are mostly concentrated in the first half of the twentieth century, in particular, during the violent reigns of Hitler and Stalin over large parts of the continent, as well as in the aftermath of World War II. But

⁵⁴ We limit ourselves to this more recent past presuming that more recent border changes have a larger effect on territorial threats faced by a state.

⁵⁵ E.g., Bulutgil 2015, 2016.

⁵⁶ E.g., Garrity 2022.

⁵⁷ We differ from Bulutgil's 2015; 2016 operationalization mainly by using an absolute threshold of 1000 victims that reduces data requirements as compared to her relative criterion of 20 percent of groups' population.

⁵⁸ In comparison and because of her higher victimization threshold, Bulutgil 2015, 2016 identifies forty-one cases of ethnic cleansing in Europe during the same period. Butcher et al. 2020 use a yearly threshold of twenty-five deaths, enlisting 201 target mass killing episodes globally since 1946.

minorities are still at risk, as seen in the Balkans in the 1990s, in Azerbaijan in 2020, and in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine since 2014.

The overall number of victims of ethnic cleansing campaigns is extremely difficult to gauge, as definitions of victimhood are contested, historical sources at times are unreliable, and secondary studies are not always conclusive. Drawing on estimates from the secondary literature on the number of killed or displaced civilians during each campaign, our rough estimate of the victims of state-led ethnic cleansing since 1886 amounts to a staggering fifty-six million individuals⁵⁹ – more than 25 percent of the population of the affected ethnic group segments (198 million).⁶⁰ A back-of-the-envelope calculation indicates that individual Europeans' risk of becoming a victim of ethnic cleansing at any point in their life has been nontrivial since 1886, amounting to roughly 3 percent.⁶¹

10.4 Territorial Threats and Ethnic Cleansing: Results

Our analysis of the correlates of ethnic cleansing generally supports our argument. Nondominant ethnic segments with TEK are at higher risk of being targeted by campaigns of ethnic cleansing, especially if their kin has dominant status in another state. In addition, the risk of ethnic cleansing is higher in segments with a history of home rule. This effect partially works through the aforementioned dominant TEK mechanism but is also present for groups without dominant TEK.

We first assess the effect of ethnic segments with nondominant TEK and dominant TEK ties (H10.1 and H10.2, respectively), as well as past home rule (H10.3). Figure 10.4 shows the respective results. Ethnic segments that have exclusively nondominant kin abroad exhibit a yearly risk of ethnic cleansing, which is an estimated 0.1 percentage point higher than the risk of segments without any TEK links. Confidence intervals overlap with the null hypothesis of no effect, which we, therefore, cannot reject. This effect pales in comparison to that of segments with dominant TEK ties, which have a 0.62 percentage points higher risk – amounting to 1.8 times the average risk of ethnic cleansing.

⁵⁹ The estimate is likely conservative as we take the lower value where the literature indicates a range.

⁶⁰ This is the sum of segments' population in the years of onset of ethnic cleansing.

⁶¹ This computation is challenging without individual-level data. The number is calculated as the Europe-wide, individual-level probability of becoming a victim of ethnic cleansing in any given year accumulated over an assumed (and rather low) life expectancy of fifty years.

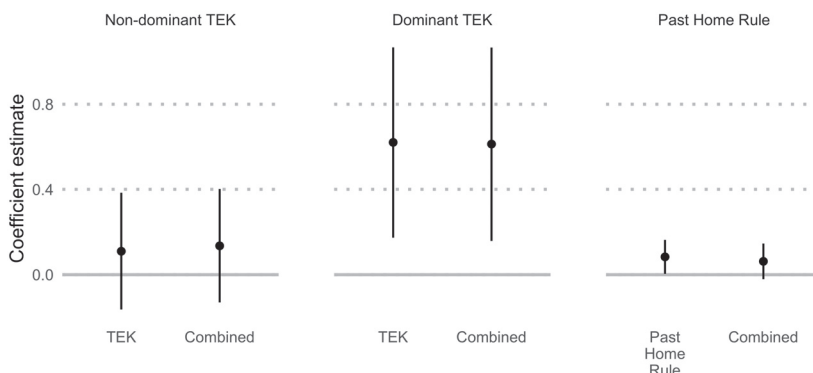


Figure 10.4 Group segments with dominant TEK are at increased risk of ethnic cleansing, as they are groups with a history of past home rule.

Note: The x-axis indicates the respective empirical models. The combined model includes the TEK as well as past home rule indicators. Based on models 1, 2, and 4 in Table S10.1.

H10.2 receives similar empirical support. Ethnic segments with a history of past home rule are consistently at higher risk of being ethnically cleansed by their states. A doubling of the number of years of ethnic home rule experienced by an ethnic segment since 1816 is associated with an increase in the risk of ethnic cleansing by 0.06 percentage points. Increasing the length of historical home rule from zero – the predominant case in our sample – to twenty years, which is close to the median number of years for segments with past home rule, raises the likelihood of ethnic cleansing by 0.25 percentage points or three-quarters of the average risk of 0.34 percent.

We then assess the joint impact of segments' TEK ties and history of home rule and shed light on the comparative risks of their possible configurations. These interaction effects can be more easily understood in a graph. Plotted in Figure 10.5, TEK and dominant TEK status without previous home rule have similar effects, as illustrated by panel (a). Past home rule, in contrast, only increases the risk for segments without dominant TEK groups but does so dramatically. A doubling of the years of past home rule increases the risk of ethnic cleansing for these segments by approximately 0.86 percentage points or more than twice the base rate.⁶² But past home rule does not further increase the risk of

⁶² Due to the small number of affected groups – more than 90 percent of groups without dominant TEK have no history of home rule – these estimates remain statistically significant but exhibit larger uncertainty when computing bootstrapped confidence intervals.

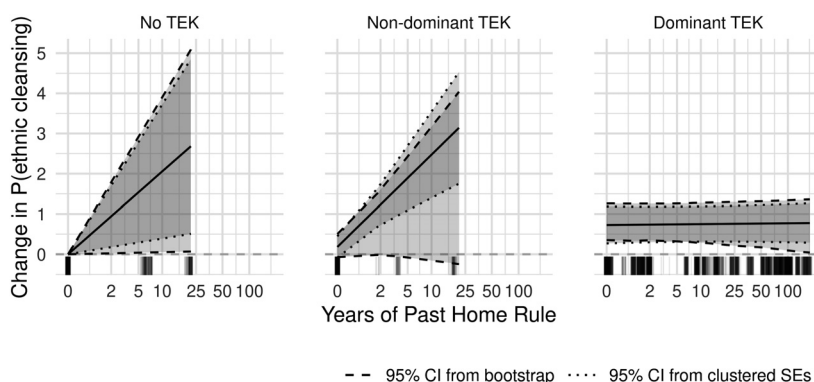


Figure 10.5 Change in the probability of ethnic cleansing by TEK status and past home rule.

Note: Comparison group is no TEK and no past home rule. Dotted lines indicate 95% CIs from clustered standard errors, and dashed lines indicate 95% CIs from an ethnic group-level bootstrap with 1000 iterations.

ethnic cleansing for segments with a dominant TEK group, at least partially because its effect is already captured in the dominant TEK dummy itself.

We take this absence of additional risk as a sign that part of the effect of past home rule works through TEK links. Many segments with extensive past home rule are minorities that were stranded outside their home states after the breakup of an empire. These segments, such as German populations across the former territories of Germany and Austria–Hungary, were often cleansed after the empires their coethnics commanded fell apart. Motivating the expulsion of Germans from post-WWII Poland as preventing future ethnoterritorial revisionism, Winston Churchill declared in 1944 that

[e]xpulsion is the method which, in so far as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble, as has been the case in Alsace–Lorraine. A clean sweep will be made.⁶³

Governments often implemented ethnic cleansing policies like Churchill’s “clean sweep” as a last resort in situations where the risk of territorial loss was most pressing. This claim concurs with our data. Although territorial claims from states with a TEK link to an ethnic segment alone do little to increase the risk of ethnic cleansing, interstate warfare with such a state does increase the risk substantively. The risk of

⁶³ Churchill 1944, 6.

ethnic cleansing increases by 1.8 percentage points, or almost five times the baseline rate, whenever an ethnic segment has a TEK link to a state with which its host state is at war. While this suggests that our findings are significantly driven by the two world wars, additional tests show that they hold – albeit to a weaker extent – beyond those wars.

We also find that democratic institutions moderate the effects associated with TEK connections and ethnic segments' histories of past home rule. Using electoral democracy (polyarchy) scores from V-Dem,⁶⁴ our results are almost exclusively driven by states with autocratic institutions. This aligns with the notion that liberal norms improve territorial integrity and peace within and across state borders.⁶⁵

In sum, our results support the argument that ethnic cleansing is oftentimes driven by territorial competition along ethnic lines. Once nationalism holds sway and territory can only be legitimately ruled by a state on the basis of a common nationality, the state has perverse incentives to violently remove ethnic minorities from its territory to eliminate the nationalist incompatibilities and uphold its rule.

10.5 Conclusion

Many contemporary nation-states in Europe were ethnically homogenized by violent means. Since the nineteenth century, ethnic cleansing was, and still is, among the most frequent sources of human suffering. As we demonstrated in Chapter 3, it is at the same time a root cause of the current ethnic homogeneity of European states, achieved in large part by violent right-peopling of populations.⁶⁶

Building on historical and political science literature, we argue that threats to the territorial integrity of states constitute an important driver of ethnic cleansing beginning in the nineteenth century. In the age of nationalism, the boundaries of ethnic nations became the paramount legitimizing principle of states' territorial rule. Multiethnic states were at risk of being right-sized through secession and irredentism, in particular, where groups could draw on transnational ethnic ties or follow a historical precedent of home rule. By ethnically cleansing these territories, states sought to reduce the disjunction between political and ethnic borders that nationalists despise. Ethnic cleansing is thus one of the perverse, if logical, consequences of ethnic nationalism that has shaped the European state system since the nineteenth century.

⁶⁴ Coppedge et al. 2021.

⁶⁵ E.g., Zacher 2001; Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017; Imai and Lo 2021.

⁶⁶ As Charnysh 2024 argues, forced displacements and population transfers additionally weaken existing social ties in the receiving communities and can thereby strengthen states' capacity.

We test the effect of transnational ethnic ties and past home rule of nondominant ethnic groups on their risk of ethnic cleansing with new data on the changing settlement areas of European ethnic groups since 1886. Combined with a new enumeration of episodes of ethnic cleansing, we find general support for our arguments. Nondominant ethnic groups with transnational kin that dominate another state are exposed to a severely increased risk of ethnic cleansing, while ties to groups that do not dominate a state have no sizable or statistically significant effect. Relatedly, ethnic segments that can draw on a history of home rule are at increased risk of becoming targeted by ethnic cleansing campaigns. These effects are weaker under democratic institutions, which can offer pathways to accommodation and power sharing. Importantly, the risk of ethnic cleansing is closely associated with the occurrence of interstate warfare, especially in states in which an ethnic group has transnational ethnic kin. Ethnic cleansing is thus often rooted in territorial competition structured along ethnonationalist lines.

Our argument and findings resonate with many past cases of ethnic cleansing, such as the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and in Nagorno-Karabakh, the cleansing of ethnic Turks from the Balkans, and the persecution of Poles under Hitler and Stalin.

Similar ethnic cleansing campaigns were carried out by states outside Europe, ultimately aligning ethnic boundaries more closely with state borders. Across the Americas, white government elites led extermination and assimilation campaigns against indigenous peoples in an effort to fit the population into a European mold. Prominent examples include the reservation system in the United States and some Latin American countries like Chile or ethnic cleansing campaigns such as the Conquest of the Desert in Argentina.⁶⁷ The Chinese government actions toward the Uyghur in Xinjiang follow a similar pattern. Given its Muslim religion and transborder ethnic kin in neighboring countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, this group was, and continues to be, perceived as a source of extremism and separatism by the government.⁶⁸ Despite the lack of geographic proximity, the Uyghur cause has also found support in Turkey, which hosts the largest Uyghur diaspora.⁶⁹ As such, the Uyghurs have been persecuted and sent to “reeducation camps” for practicing their religion, while the government promotes increasing Han-Chinese migration into Xinjiang.⁷⁰ The Rwandan genocide of 1994, the most violent

⁶⁷ Mamdani 2020; Rodriguez 2003; Larson 2020.

⁶⁸ Maizland 2022; Bhattacherji 2012.

⁶⁹ Elikucuk Yilidrim 2024.

⁷⁰ Maizland 2022.

case of ethnic cleansing in recent decades, was justified by the Hutu government's nationalist ideology that, as the majority ethnic group and thus the rightful leaders of the country, they should avoid a return to Tutsi power.⁷¹ Such fears became pronounced as the Arusha Accords, a peace agreement between Tutsi rebels and the Hutu government, benefited the rebels more than the government.⁷² Reversing the colonial ethnic hierarchy that favored the Tutsi constituted a key element in the justification of the genocide.⁷³

But our argument of ethnic cleansing as prevention against territorial losses does not apply to all cases of ethnic cleansing, nor does it exhaustively explain those cases where the logic is present. Some groups became targets for reasons unrelated to territorial threats, most importantly, Jewish and Roma populations during the Holocaust. In addition, even where ethnic cleansing can be linked to territorial threats, other factors, such as cross-cutting cleavages⁷⁴ or war-fighting strategies,⁷⁵ have determined the conduct, scope, and timing of governments' campaigns. Constrained by our macrohistorical abstraction and the scope of our empirical data, we have studied state-to-nation incongruences as structural drivers of the ethnic cleansing that violently right-peopled European states.

⁷¹ Straus 2015, 275–276.

⁷² Straus 2015, 273.

⁷³ Straus 2015, 275–280.

⁷⁴ Bulutgil 2015, 2016.

⁷⁵ Lichtenheld 2020.

Part IV

**Policy Consequences: Toward Nationalist
Geopolitics?**

11 Conclusions for Research and Practice

This book challenges conventional approaches to nationalism that ignore border change. It is well known that nationalist politics deeply affect a state's internal relations, yet our theory of nationalist state formation shows how nationalism also transforms the state's very shape, thus potentially destabilizing the geopolitical map. The reason for this subversive effect lies in the foundational nationalist principle that requires the borders of states and nations to be congruent. Employing spatiotemporal data, we use this basic insight to trace the effects of incongruence on border change and conflict in a systematic way. Our claim is that the seeds of the geopolitical instability and conflict that have firmly taken root across the world since the early twenty-first century were sown in the past two centuries of history. It is impossible to understand contemporary world politics without taking nationalists seriously in their destabilizing and often backward-looking endeavors.

The account of border change and conflict we offer centers on how nationalism brought about an ideological revolution in the principles of governance that dramatically and irreversibly changed world history since the French Revolution. To a large extent driven by intense military competition, territorial sovereignty emerged gradually in early modern Europe and the process set the stage for nationalism, which transformed the basis of political legitimacy from ruling dynastic elites to the nation. Whereas previous rulers had made their claims to political supremacy as a matter of family allegiances and dynastic bloodlines, the new order sought to define its source of legitimate rule in the people themselves.

While in the prenationalist past, borders were shifted around as a consequence of power politics, typically following peace treaties, nationalism's fundamental insistence on state-nation congruence made who lived where crucial. More specifically, this momentous shift toward direct rule created the conditions for the modern territorial state based on the principles of popular sovereignty. Starting in the late eighteenth century, this transformation rippled through Europe from west to east, ultimately upending power structures well beyond the continent. We

live with the geopolitical consequences of those events today. Far from fading away, nationalist politics is as salient as ever, fueling instability and conflict but also underpinning national solidarity and democratic governance. In this final chapter, we summarize the main findings from the empirical contributions of the book in Parts II and III, draw lessons for theory, assess whether there has been a return of geopolitics, and offer policy-relevant conclusions.

11.1 Summary of Our Main Findings

To begin, we take stock of our European findings before widening the scope to the rest of the world. Building on historical accounts, Part II attempts to capture nationalism's transformation of the state systematically using spatiotemporal data that span several centuries. Inspired by Tilly's famous, but contested, rendering of the rise of the modern state in Europe, Chapter 4 links this development to warfare.¹ Although dynastic politics, especially disputes over succession, played a central role in the formation of the European power centers, warfare triggered a centralizing process that produced a small number of geopolitical "winners." A war-driven dynamic process unfolded whereby large and successful states became even larger, especially if they had made previous gains, while less powerful states contracted further or were eliminated. Due to technological and administrative advances, this process of territorial concentration became the backdrop for modern nationalist politics and a catalyst for the decisive shift from indirect to direct rule. Our empirical analysis combines geocoded state borders with extensive data on inter-state warfare that together confirm Tilly's famous thesis, "war made the state, and the state made war."²

Taking a step beyond this prenationalist logic, Chapters 5 and 6 add the ethnonationalist dimension, which gradually became relevant to the transformation of the modern state beginning in the early nineteenth century. At that point, what mattered was not merely power differentials and alliances between competing states but also the very fit between the borders of states and ethnic nations. Following Gellner's lead, our theory focuses on state-nation incongruence to explain border change.³

Juxtaposing data on state borders with systematically geocoded ethnic settlements, Chapter 5 demonstrates that nationalism effected a series of border changes that help to account for why Tilly's theorized steady increase in state size instead turned into a powerful declining trend that

¹ Tilly 1990.

² Tilly 1975, 42.

³ Gellner 1983, 1.

continues through today. Spatial tracing of these changes allows us to analyze the conditions that triggered specific processes, such as secession, unification, and irredentism, that unleashed macrolevel change in Europe. While the nineteenth century saw a shift toward state integration that resulted in the unification of Germany and Italy during the second half of that century, the collapse of large multiethnic states and empires in the twentieth century triggered waves of fragmentation into smaller successor states through secession. In sum, split transnational groups unified and ethnically fragmented states fell apart, with irredentist transfers completing the picture.

Offering a more general view of nationalist state transformation in Europe, Chapter 6 complements the picture by showing how state borders came to align with ethnic boundaries without restricting the focus to any particular property of the state, such as its size. These findings confirm that at least in Europe, ethnic boundaries strongly affected the location of state borders even if one takes into account other determinants of border formation, including geographic obstacles like rivers and watersheds.

But nationalism did not merely affect state borders. Part III shows that nationalism's transformation of the state extended to the state's very behavior and to ethnonationalist groups' reactions to that behavior. Using state-nation congruence as the analytical starting point, Chapter 7 offers a systematic derivation of conflict outcomes that occur in specific nationalist configurations. We show that both alien rule and ethnonationalist division are strongly associated with civil and interstate conflict. Specifically, groups exposed to alien rule are more likely to rebel against their political masters. As suggested by Weiner's seminal study of the Macedonian syndrome, settings involving both partial alien rule and division are rife with civil and interstate conflict, as illustrated by Russia's aggression targeting Ukraine beginning in 2014.⁴ But unification itself is less likely to cause ethnic strife. What is more, our analysis indicates that rather than being isolated phenomena, intrastate and interstate conflict interact.

Beyond the spatial perspective on state-national congruence, we argue that nationalism is not merely about comparing the alignment of states' and nations' borders at any point in time; it is also about historical comparisons. Drawing on state borders dating back to 1,100, Chapter 8 analyzes restorative nationalism by revealing how past historical configurations affect the likelihood of conflict in the era of nationalism that began in the nineteenth century. Referring to more or less actual past golden ages, nationalists depict ostensibly lost home rule or lost national

⁴ Weiner 1971.

unity as justifications for violent changes to the geopolitical map. By aspiring to make their country great again, these nationalist revisionists attempt to restore prestige and power by overcoming historical humiliation and grievances through calls to action that increase the risk of political violence. European history exhibits a tendency to trace such claims back to the Middle Ages, for example, the Serbs' loss of independence to the Ottomans at the Battle of the Blackbirds in 1389, but more recent reversals also serve as powerful motivation, as illustrated by Putin's bemoaning the division of ethnic Russians resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Turning attention to reactive nationalism, Chapter 9 finds that European states' increasing penetration of their ethnically distinct peripheries often resulted in separatist backlash rather than successful nation building. From the nineteenth century well into the twentieth, the gradual expansion of railroad networks enabled centralizing states to extend their control by imposing direct rule on populations that had been governed indirectly. While this process was successful in France, as famously described by Eugen Weber, this was far from the typical outcome.⁵ In particular, the great European multiethnic empires – Habsburg, Ottoman, and Romanov – attempted to centralize their rule but experienced great difficulties in transcending ethnic differences, with fatal results for those polities.

These analyses above were predicated on the assumption that ethnic nations managed to right-size states, but the process of increasing state-nation congruence in Europe also involved the opposite process: right-peopling. Part III ends by investigating this logic in Chapter 10. The analysis again uses state-nation incongruence as the analytical starting point, but in this case, we study how its consequences triggered changes in the ethnic map through ethnic cleansing because state leaders feared right-sizing changes through secession or irredentism. By cleansing the ethnic map, leaders attempted to prevent these threats to their state's territorial integrity.

Do all these findings hold in a global context? Although this book focuses mostly on nationalism's initial effect in Europe after the French Revolution, we attempt to explore its consequences in other parts of the world. After all, the goal of this volume is not merely about European history – we want to shed light on contemporary geopolitical events around the world.

To a large extent, colonial empires served as conduits for the spread of nationalist politics. In this respect, the Wilsonian moment after World

⁵ Weber 1976.

War I crucially accelerated this dynamic.⁶ While US President Woodrow Wilson's architecture for the postwar order in 1919 included wide-ranging self-determination in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the great land empires, most parts of the world remained under European colonial rule for several decades more. This inconsistency prompted nationalists in those colonies to call for independence, setting in motion a process that would culminate in the disintegration of the European colonial empires in the course of the twentieth century.

Against this backdrop, it can be expected that many of our European findings would apply beyond the continent, which is indeed the case. While our global analyses are more limited in terms of historical depth and available data than our coverage of Europe, they clearly indicate that state size followed a similar but even more dramatic declining trend beginning in the early twentieth century. Circling back to Chapter 5 confirms that the decolonization process, which saw the collapse of the European colonial empires after World War II, was the main reason for this historical shift. Globally, states' ethnic fractionalization declined as in Europe, but ethnic groups' territorial fragmentation into different jurisdictions changed in the opposite direction – away from congruence – mostly because decolonization unfolded along the lines of past colonial borders, thus leaving many ethnic groups in the postcolonial era split. This implies that ethnic division remains a major potential source of conflict, especially in Eurasia and to some extent in Africa, but less so in Latin America.⁷

Chapter 6 offers further hints about the global applicability of the ethnonationalist perspective. Overall, state borders have become increasingly aligned with ethnic boundaries around the world, although the correlation is less pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, ethnicity's actual effect on state borders is mostly limited to Europe and parts of Asia.

Shifting the attention to conflict, many of the main findings in Chapter 7 that single out configurations of incongruence as a major cause of conflict in European history generalize to a global setting. As in the European analysis, this pertains to both alien rule and division, the former being linked to ethnic civil conflict. Divided ethnic groups are particularly prone to rebel if they are excluded from power in the state in which they reside or in irredentist configurations where they enjoy access to power in some states but not in others. Again, irredentism triggered both civil and interstate conflict around the world after World War II, although our findings for the latter are more uncertain in regard to open armed

⁶ Manela 2007.

⁷ See Figure 11.2.

conflict than to territorial claims. This weak result can be attributed to global norms curbing wars of aggression and conquest after 1945.⁸

Do the findings on restorative nationalism presented in Chapter 8 generalize to cases outside Europe? There are good reasons to believe that this is indeed the case. Covering ethnic groups around the world from 1946 through 2017, a recent study finds that groups that experience increases in their territorial fragmentation are particularly likely to rebel, as illustrated by postimperial revisionism and other cases of irredentism and secession.⁹ For instance, the split of the Punjabi and Sikhs between India and Pakistan after independence in 1947 sparked secessionist conflict in the Punjab region of India. The first attempt at unification made reference to a historical “community of the pure” established in 1699 by a Sikh guru.¹⁰ Other examples include the Pashtun in Pakistan and Afghanistan¹¹ and ethnic groups in Africa, such as the Bakongo and Tuareg.¹²

Regarding lost home rule, there is plenty of evidence that such reversals can be linked to the outbreak of civil conflict¹³ and to loss of autonomy status.¹⁴ But these results are mostly limited to the relatively immediate effects of political downgrading and thus call for more research on long-term legacies like that in the European analysis presented in Chapter 8. Outside Europe, much of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict finds its roots in diametrically opposed golden-age narratives in which one nation’s period of influence and growth is the other’s era of desolation and decline. As such, these groups refer not only to recent losses in status but also to the decline of the ancient civilizations to which they trace their origins.¹⁵

Recent research confirms that the forces of reactive nationalism also extend well beyond Europe. Using the evocative term “railway imperialism,” historians have documented how colonial governments built roads and railways to extract resources from their colonies.¹⁶ But the colonial infrastructure constituted a double-edged sword by offering new opportunities for nationalist countermobilization similar to the mechanisms analyzed in Chapter 9. Introducing systematic data for a large number of colonial holdings, Julian Go and Jake Watson show that the density of the

⁸ See, e.g., Fazal 2007; Zacher 2001.

⁹ Cederman, Rüdiger and Schvitz 2022.

¹⁰ Racine 2013, 161.

¹¹ Saikal 2010.

¹² Minahan 2002; Alesbury 2013.

¹³ Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013, chapter 4.

¹⁴ Siroky and Cuffe 2015.

¹⁵ Silberman 2013.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Maier 2016, 208.

railroad network is strongly associated with anticolonial nationalism.¹⁷ In a study that introduces a notion of “relational state capacity,” Carl Müller-Crepon and his colleagues find that the effect of African road networks can cut both ways, empowering states or rebellious groups.¹⁸

As briefly outlined in Chapter 10, states outside Europe turned to ethnic cleansing to align ethnic boundaries with state borders and prevent potential losses of territory. Historical cases range from the ethnic cleansing of indigenous populations in the Americas to the persecution of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. More recently, the cleansing campaigns against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Uyghur in Chinese Xinjiang, or the Palestinian population in Gaza provide further examples of governments choosing to respond to (threats of) rebellion with massive genocidal violence.

All in all, we find strong evidence that state-nation incongruence produces geopolitical instability in the form of border change as well as civil and interstate conflict. Because nationalist ideology originally emerged in Europe, the process of ethnopolitical alignment has so far proceeded further in Europe than in other parts of the world. But as illustrated by the war in Ukraine that began in 2014, even in Europe, deviations from the nationalist principle continue to cause internal and external conflict. Outside Europe, the destabilizing impact of nationalist politics applies widely, but sometimes less intensely, mostly because nationalist ideology has not fully penetrated regions like sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, where state borders are much more stable.¹⁹ But even in those regions, violations of state-nation congruence, especially foreign rule and ethnopolitical domination, have fueled armed political conflict.

11.2 Lessons for Theory and Future Research

Several conclusions can be drawn from our findings. Because this book focuses on the impact of nationalism, the most direct theoretical relevance concerns the literature covering nationalist politics. In Chapter 1, we outline four persistent weaknesses – nonspatial theorizing, methodological statism, ahistorical modernism, and incomplete empirical validation – that have haunted contemporary scholarship in this area. This book is a four-pronged attempt to overcome these limitations. In

¹⁷ Go and Watson 2019. See also Brooke and Ketchley 2018 who find similar results for Islamist mobilization in Egypt.

¹⁸ Müller-Crepon, Hunziker and Cederman 2021. The study uses similar, road-based measures of the mechanisms in Chapter 9.

¹⁹ In most cases, the colonial empires fell apart along their internal administrative borders according to the legal principle *uti possidetis*, see Griffiths 2015.

light of our empirical results, we return to these overarching themes to discuss the implications for future research.

First, throughout these pages, we have adopted an explicitly geographic perspective because nationalism is an inherently territorial phenomenon; nations are represented in space and claim statehood, which is itself defined in terms of territory. Indeed, the central notion of state-nation congruence cannot be fully understood, let alone empirically operationalized, without an explicitly spatial perspective. Whereas most previous theoretical work on nationalism tends to abstract away from spatial configurations, we hope that our work encourages future research to formulate theory and conduct empirical analyses in explicitly geographic terms.

Our research is inspired by and seeks to contribute to a long-standing stream of work in geography as well as more recent pioneering studies in political science. The former literature sets up a conceptual framework to study the territoriality of nationalism but says less about its geopolitical consequences. Such impact analysis is precisely where the more recent studies in political science are particularly helpful. A rapidly expanding strand of research focuses on states' territorial borders,²⁰ but most of this work does not analyze ethnicity or nationalism explicitly.²¹ The closest existing studies in this particular field have been authored by Nadav Shelef, whose constructivist coding of national homelands offers a nuanced and dynamic approach to the territoriality of nationalism, but at the cost of much more limited coverage of cases of interstate disputes.²² Our structuralist approach encompasses peaceful cases as well as separatist nationalism and conflict inside states. By extending the explicit coding of homelands to such cases, future research could offer new insights about the conditions under which territorial claims are made, modified, and withdrawn.

Moreover, our theoretical framework captures deviations from the nationalist principle both as alien rule, which denies a group segment self-determination, and as division, whereby the segment is cut off from its kin. Previous literature on nationalism tends to focus on the former at the expense of the latter.²³ Furthermore, we study how both types of incongruence converge in particularly conflict-prone irredentist configurations.²⁴ Rather than merely studying political exclusion or division,

²⁰ See, e.g., Simmons 2005; Simmons and Kenwick 2021; Abramson and Carter 2016; Schultz 2015.

²¹ Though see Carter and Goemans 2011.

²² Shelef 2016, 2020.

²³ Though see Cederman, R  gger and Schvitz 2022.

²⁴ See especially Chapters 7 and 8.

future research would profit from considering both types of violations of the nationality principle.

The second theme stressed in this book is how nations affect states rather than the other way around. Most scholarship on nationalism and nation building tends to trace the right-peopling of the state by studying how states rely on various institutions and policies in the areas of language, religion, education, and migration to manipulate the ethnonationalist identities of their populations. At the same time, such processes of assimilation and identity change result from bottom-up, market-driven processes as well as migratory flows. Although this perspective has inspired important studies that are clearly informative, it risks obscuring the influence of changing borders. For this reason, much of our analysis seeks to counter methodological statism by analyzing how ethnic nations put pressure on state borders in the quest for state-nation congruence.

Of course, our work is far from the first to investigate right-sizing processes, but we seek to offer a more comprehensive perspective that brings findings together in a unified framework rather than studying different types of border change separately, as has been the case in the literatures on separatism, unification, and irredentism. Such an overarching macrolevel perspective makes it possible to compare geopolitical low-probability events and to detect trends and causal patterns that would be more difficult to ascertain based on a more narrow theoretical and empirical scope.

Nevertheless, the main methodological restriction that has to be accepted is that with few exceptions, we have had to freeze ethnicity or at least treat it as exogenous while letting state borders vary. Over long time periods, the borders of states and ethnic nations coevolved. The state-nation convergence that occurred in Europe during the past two centuries was due to right-sizing and right-peopling in roughly equal amounts.²⁵ Future research needs to grapple with the difficult challenge of how to analyze reciprocal causal processes from ethnicity to state borders and back. Clearly, reciprocity poses tricky problems that render statistical estimation extremely difficult.²⁶

Rather than subscribing to ahistorical modernism, as a third theme, we take both restorative and reactive nationalism seriously. Current

²⁵ See Figure 3.7.

²⁶ Conceivably, an empirically calibrated computational approach could capture causal complexity of this kind. Previous macrolevel theorizing along these lines has so far relied on artificial data: Cederman 2002a, 2008, although see Weidmann and Salehyan 2013; Bhavnani et al. 2014 for empirical microlevel studies along these lines. In addition, qualitative, historical research will make a crucial contribution to confront this challenge.

theorizing about nationalism has been too dismissive of prenationalist legacies. Although nationalists' historical narratives have to be taken with a grain of salt, restorative nationalism usually contains a grain of truth that can be used to better understand their reasoning and thus to anticipate their behavior. Contemporary research on geopolitical instability could profit from adopting a macrohistorical perspective that looks at history's *longue durée*.

To integrate such historical insights in a wide-ranging study of nationalism's impact, we have adopted a structural perspective that compares current spatial configurations to past ones²⁷ and that analyzes nationalist mobilization in reaction to the extension of state power.²⁸ This research strategy enables us to make systematic comparisons in time and space, although at the cost of reduced historical precision compared to detailed qualitative studies. Instead of studying the actual text of the narratives, our structural approach has drawn on maps covering state borders and back-projected ethnicity. For more limited historical and spatial contexts, a more detailed, historically nuanced mode of analysis becomes possible. While systematic sampling of historical texts becomes increasingly difficult the farther back in history one goes, cliometric methods, including natural language processing, can be applied to historical sources.²⁹

One of the main limitations of our approach pertains to the exact timing of nationalist mobilization. The empirical chapters analyze ethnonationalist configurations that cause geopolitical instability while paying less attention to historical dynamics. As we have argued, in most cases ethnic traits tend to vary quite slowly. This fact allows us to use such structural conditions as proxies for nationalist mobilization. Yet in some cases, national identities can change more quickly than the underlying ethnic patterns because they are constituted by multidimensional selections of ethnic traits, which can be emphasized or de-emphasized at a much higher rate than assimilation affecting the traits themselves.³⁰ For this reason, our spatial approach needs to be complemented by time-varying information that captures mobilization processes and other time-critical forces that interact with the ethnic structure. Some of our chapters introduce time-critical indicators to say more about the timing of border change and conflict outcomes. For instance, in Chapter 8, we show that interstate conflict becomes more likely in periods of general

²⁷ See Chapter 8.

²⁸ See Chapter 9.

²⁹ Personal names can be leveraged to infer national identity, see, e.g., Fouka 2020; Kersting and Wolf 2024. Another possibility is to use library catalog data, see, e.g., Valli 2024.

³⁰ See Barth 1969 and Cederman 1997, chapter 8.

geopolitical turbulence and nationalizing governments.³¹ But these are somewhat crude analytical complements at a high level of aggregation.

Our analysis of reactive nationalism says more about the timing of nationalist mobilization.³² In this case, the arrival of railroads plays the role of a time-critical modernization treatment. Using a research design that compares reactions to such events reveals that indeed, at least in the short run, the likely response in Europe was a separatist backlash rather than a slow march toward integration.

Future research focusing on restorative and reactive nationalism will be able to offer a more dynamic picture of mobilization processes, although there are inherent limitations imposed by data availability as one moves back in time and widens the geographic scope. One set of factors that needs to be further explored relates to how nationalism interacts with international norms and organization, which clearly affect the likelihood of conquest and secession.³³

Our analysis of restorative nationalism focuses on the state's right-sizing rather than on right-peopling. Specifically, Chapter 8 analyzes calls for border change while refraining from considering cases in which restorative nationalism urges resettlement of territories that are no longer inhabited by the nationalists in question, as illustrated by grievances relating to the German areas that had to be evacuated after World War II.

Students of dominant nationalism tell us that it may be necessary to look beyond the congruence principle itself. As we noted in Chapter 2, nationalists sometimes rely on an imperialist logic to justify territorial expansion at the expense of other groups even if doing so decreases, rather than increases, state-nation congruence. Such situations could emerge if the expansionists aim for ethnopolitical domination by subjugating other groups, as illustrated by Israel's political marginalization of Palestinians in the occupied territories. But as supremacist claims spill over into ethnic cleansing, there is not necessarily any contradiction to the congruence principle. For instance, the Bosnian Serbs' campaigns targeting Bosniaks and the Croats evicting ethnic Serbs from the Krajina region served to increase the ethnic homogeneity of the relevant territories.³⁴

As illustrated by Putin's imperialist insistence on unity between Russians and Ukrainians, nationalists also stretch the state-nation principle if

³¹ See Chapter 8.

³² See Chapter 9.

³³ See, e.g., Fazal 2007; Griffiths 2010; Altman 2020.

³⁴ Silber and Little 1995; Weidmann, Kuse and Gleditsch 2010.

their claims deny the very existence of competing ethnonationalist identities. Yet in the expansionists' own view, the goal is to reduce state-nation incongruence by unifying populations that are ostensibly identical.³⁵

Our fourth advance breaks new ground by conducting systematic empirical research at the macrolevel. Although the dominant trend in conflict research – and in the social sciences more generally – continues to favor microlevel research, which allows for strong research designs to optimize internal validity, this book attempts to resurrect analysis of long-range causation affecting large areas, albeit without losing sight of causal inference. After all, as we have argued, the geopolitical challenges that the world is currently facing call for analyses that zoom out in terms of time and space.

Without abandoning an interest in global events and processes, the main thrust of our analysis has focused on European history, partly for substantive reasons relating to nationalism's origins on that continent but also in response to data limitations. Thanks to the availability of a wealth of historical data covering Europe, we have been able to trace nationalist politics covering the past two centuries, trends in state formation dating back half a millennium, and geopolitical legacies dating back almost a millennium. Although major advances have recently been made in the tracing of non-European polities,³⁶ information about such cases remains much more limited because of the general lack of written records and archival sources. This limitation concerns ethnic maps that date back before World War II, in particular.³⁷ Hopefully, such data resources will become available with future data collection efforts.

So far, we have drawn conclusions primarily for studies of nationalism and geopolitics. Beyond this more specialized literature, perhaps the most important lesson is that conventional approaches to political science and international relations need to be thoroughly rethought to grapple with nationalism's destabilizing potential. The central problem is a general failure to realize that nations constitute powerful actors that affect world politics alongside states and, more importantly, in interaction with them. Without acknowledging this, it is theoretically impossible to conceive of, let alone to measure, state-nation congruence. As we have shown, the alignment of ethnonationalist and political boundaries is key

³⁵ Putin 2022.

³⁶ See, e.g., Griffiths 2016; Wishman and Butcher 2021.

³⁷ Though see Murdock's 1981 historical atlas of ethnic groups in Africa. For this reason, we have been forced to rely on problematic backward projections of ethnic settlement areas before that period in our global samples. See especially Chapter 5. However, the European analysis is supported by historical maps dating back to the nineteenth century, as documented in Chapter 3.

to even a rudimentary understanding of contemporary geopolitics and world history in the past two centuries.

Realist thinking suffers from the most acute blind spot in this regard. Viewing nationalism as a power boost that reinforces and complements a state's mobilizational capacity within its fixed borders, realists vastly underestimate nationalism's subversive effect on the very foundations and existence of states.³⁸ While this limited perspective allows for an appreciation of how nationalist mobilization can profoundly affect power differentials, as evidenced by Prussia's effective use of national conscription,³⁹ it blocks a full view of geopolitical scenarios that involve border change, including secession, unification, and irredentism. For this reason, it is hardly a revelation that realists continue to be surprised by how nationalist ideology motivates the challenge of the current world order. Nationalism thus leads even hard-nosed realists to underestimate the difficulties of establishing geopolitical stability.

Leading liberal interpretations offer helpful guidance regarding the challenges to sovereignty posed by globalization and transnational processes.⁴⁰ But while such liberal accounts question the dominant role played by the state and even believe that the state will partly wither away, this individualist perspective usually loses sight of how nations affect geopolitics as collective entities. In fact, the return of geopolitics has rendered nearly obsolete the most optimistic borderless scenarios from the heyday of global optimism in the early 2000s. That optimism began to sour as the great economic crisis of 2008 upended world markets and the Arab Spring of 2010 ushered in a series of civil conflicts rather than successful democratic revolutions in the Middle East. The call for democracy after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe has been increasingly replaced by ethnonationalist mobilization, which puts democratic rule under strain. At the global level, the trend has been in an illiberal direction since the early 2010s, as illustrated by the powerful shift toward democratic backsliding that has seen democratization upended by authoritarian reversals.⁴¹ Additionally, rather than a decline in violence, we see the opposite trend.⁴² To what extent does our work shed light on this return of geopolitics?

³⁸ See also Cederman 1997.

³⁹ Posen 1993a. For empirical analysis, see Cederman, Warren and Sornette 2011.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Rosecrance 1986; Fukuyama 1992; Ohmae 1990; Held 1995; Beck 2000.

⁴¹ Waldner and Lust 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Knutsen et al. 2024; Grillo et al. 2024.

⁴² Davies et al. 2024.

11.3 Is the World Returning to Nationalist Geopolitics?

We began this book by arguing that nationalism accounts for some of the most salient conflicts in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the recent return of geopolitics without considering the role played by nationalist politics. Many observers who downplay nationalism were surprised by the events in Ukraine in 2014 and especially in 2022 but also by the eruption of intense conflict in the Middle East following Hamas' attack on southern Israel in 2023. Welcome back to the world of nationalist geopolitics, which has increasingly come to dominate world politics since the French Revolution.

The findings we present help make sense of both these conflict clusters while reminding us about the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. In fact, at the moment of writing in the mid-2020s, these three hot spots grab much public attention worldwide, especially since they affect domestic and international politics around the globe. The pro-Palestinian student protests that swept through university campuses in the United States and elsewhere beginning in October 2023 confirm the extraordinary political relevance of these developments. It is not an exaggeration to say that the outcomes of these geopolitical challenges will affect the world order for years to come.⁴³

Constituting a flagrant violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity as enshrined in international public law, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 arguably marked the first major step toward the return of geopolitics. This turning point, and even more so Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, would not have happened without the perception of state-nation incongruence after the collapse of the USSR, which left a large Russian-speaking population inside Ukraine. But what makes the Russian claims even more destabilizing are their references to the past. As a clear case of restorative nationalism, Putin's desire to revive Russia's imperial status represents an attempt to turn the clock back to days of glory and the tsarist grandeur of Peter the Great.⁴⁴ Combining nationalist claims with imperialist designs, Putin goes beyond a classic restorative program in that he denies the very existence of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a people.

Our focus on nationality questions also helps make sense of the seemingly endless conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Hamas' brutal incursion into Israel on October 7, 2023, and Israel's extraordinarily violent reaction merely constitute the most recent phase in a

⁴³ Callamard 2024.

⁴⁴ Plokhy 2017.

long history of violence between the two groups.⁴⁵ At its core, the conflict revolves around both sides' claims to the same territory.⁴⁶ Reacting to a long history of pogroms and antisemitism that culminated in the trauma of the Holocaust, Zionists worked ceaselessly to create the state of Israel as way to offer power and protection to the Jewish people. Their program sought to overcome both division and the powerlessness of alien rule as an exposed and often abused minority in the diaspora. In doing so, they prominently relied on restorative nationalist narratives to justify Israel's creation and the Jews' return to the holy land to which they claimed possession.⁴⁷ Having prevailed in the war of independence in 1948, Israel quickly established statehood in successful warfare against neighboring Arab states, but these efforts had a catastrophic effect for the Palestinian population, who were targeted with massive violence and ethnic cleansing.⁴⁸ Successive Palestinian leaders have invoked restorative nationalism to overcome their catastrophe, the nakba, by attempting to create a Palestinian state and allowing refugees to return to it. Specifically, the Palestinians' grievances highlight alien rule, which was intensified through Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, and division, after the 1948 Arab–Israeli War forced large numbers of Palestinians to flee their original homeland and settle in several jurisdictions. Many of the families stemming from this initial wave of refugees who settled in Gaza have been repeatedly victimized through displacement and death in the course of Israel's latest campaign targeting the area after Hamas' attack.

The potential conflict in Taiwan also hinges on a nationality question, at least as perceived by China's leaders. Chairman Xi Jinping insists that Taiwan belongs to the People's Republic of China and should be reunified with it through peaceful or other means.⁴⁹ This view represents a classic case of nationalist unification, even though many Taiwanese would beg to disagree because they do not identify with the mainland Chinese.⁵⁰ Yet what matters in terms of geopolitics is the perspective of Beijing, the potential disrupter of the status quo. Indeed, in its view, an independent Taiwan clearly violates Chinese unity. But the situation is not only about current incongruence. According to our findings, restorative nationalism adds a historical dimension that increases the risk of conflict. Beijing's narrative highlights a great golden age of strong dynasties that was brutally interrupted by colonial exploitation

⁴⁵ Pappe 2004; Shlaim 2009.

⁴⁶ Silberman 2013.

⁴⁷ Sternhell 1998; Sand 2009.

⁴⁸ Pappe 2004.

⁴⁹ Schubert 2024.

⁵⁰ Wang and Liu 2004; Wang 2017.

and humiliation in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ After Western colonialists brought domination and division well into the twentieth century, it was not until 1949 when the communists conquered the mainland and proclaimed the People's Republic of China that self-rule and unity were reestablished. The exceptions were Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the communists' nemesis Chiang Kai-shek had escaped to. After the British withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1997, Taiwan represents the final unfinished business, a humiliation that remains a thorn in the eye of China's communist elite, who are committed to restoring what they perceive as Chinese unity and dignity.⁵²

Obviously, the return of geopolitics does not merely hinge on these three prominent cases. Using data on political and ethnic borders from 2023, we offer an overview of state-nation incongruence around the world. Given the probabilistic nature of our theory, these deviations from the nation-state ideal should be seen as rough structural estimates of conflict risk rather than as sophisticated forecasts. Figure 11.1 illustrates the degree of alien rule globally by depicting the share of a country's population that is exposed to it.⁵³

The map reveals that, in 2023, there are very few parts of the world where the entire population is included in the executive.⁵⁴ Otherwise, virtually all countries exclude at least some part of the population. The Western Hemisphere boasts low levels of alien rule. In Europe, Estonia, Latvia, and Spain reach moderate levels of exclusion. A cluster of even higher levels of ethnopolitical marginalization exists in central and south Asia, including in Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. Africa is home to ethnically unrepresentative states such as Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco in the northwest and Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and particularly Sudan and the Central African Republic in the sub-Saharan region. The Middle East hosts some of the most ethnopolitically exclusive states in the world, namely Israel, Jordan, and Syria at least until the fall of Assad.

Shifting attention to the potential for irredentism both within and between states, Figure 11.2 reports the share of countries' population

⁵¹ Ding, Slater and Zengin 2021, 155.

⁵² Schubert 2024.

⁵³ The estimates do not include members of politically irrelevant ethnic groups. Here, we rely on the most recent version of the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset. See more information about EPR, see Vogt et al. 2015.

⁵⁴ Such examples include the Nordic states, Germany, where the Ethnic Power Relations dataset codes ethnicity as irrelevant in national politics, and some African states with inclusive power-sharing coalitions or those whose politics is not structured in terms of clans rather than ethnic groups.

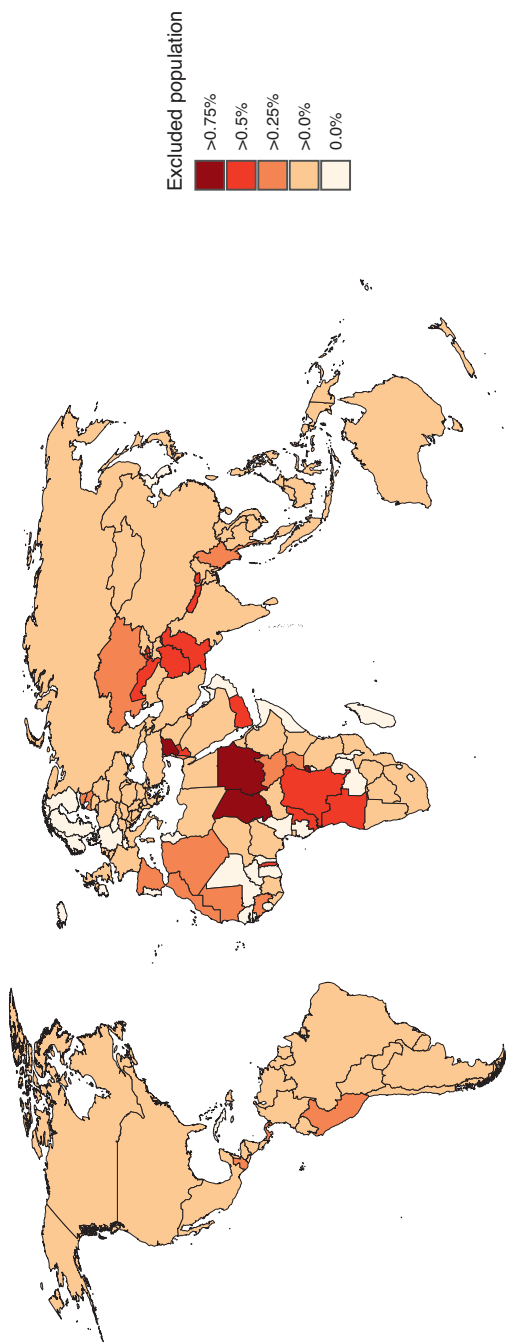


Figure 11.1 Share of country populations exposed to alien rule in 2023.
Data sources: CShapes 2.0; Ethnic Power Relations.

made up of excluded groups with state-leading kin abroad.⁵⁵ Closely corresponding to the Macedonian syndrome introduced in Chapter 7, this measure provides a risk assessment of whether the leading group will take irredentist action against the host country of its kin or that the excluded minority in any such country will rebel against its host government.

Figure 11.2 shows that the risk of irredentism is mostly concentrated in Asia and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa hosts several excluded kin groups, but there are few state-leading groups that could come to their rescue. In contrast, the Americas are almost completely free of excluded kin groups,⁵⁶ and Western Europe exhibits low levels of excluded transborder ethnic kin.⁵⁷ In contrast, the most important cases of potential irredentism can be found in the post-Soviet republics among the stranded Russian populations and across the Baltics and Eastern Europe, as well as Central and South Asia. The latter include cases involving India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

In all, the incongruence maps show that there is hardly any continent that is entirely free of potential nationality questions. But our spatial snapshots in Figures 11.1 and 11.2 say nothing about temporal trends, and as such, we turn to an analysis of temporal developments. While liberal optimists observed a wave of democratization and a steady decline in conflict at the turn of the millennium, history has turned toward a decidedly different course in most parts of the world. If geopolitics appears to have returned to wealthy, western countries in recent years, especially due to the rise of populism and the erosion of democracy, it never disappeared in the global south. Many in that part of the world have experienced high rates of conflict since the end of the Cold War.

Because of its structural character, the main analyses of this book are not ideally suited to detect trend shifts. Yet, global descriptive statistics may offer at least some clues about the timing of the disruption of the trend toward a liberal order that emerged after the end of the Cold War. According to Gurr, this “accommodationist regime” features several dimensions, including democracy, group rights, and ethnopolitical inclusion, as well as institutional support – such as peacekeeping – from international organizations.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ We again rely on EPR data. State-leading groups are defined as EPR groups that enjoy monopoly or dominant status or lone status as senior partners.

⁵⁶ The only exception being Arab Americans in the United States.

⁵⁷ The main exceptions in Western Europe are the Irish, with excluded kin in Northern Ireland, and the Germans who are excluded from executive power in countries such as Poland, Russia, and Italy. In both cases, however, regional power sharing and/or autonomy have defused tensions.

⁵⁸ Gurr 2000a. See also Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017.

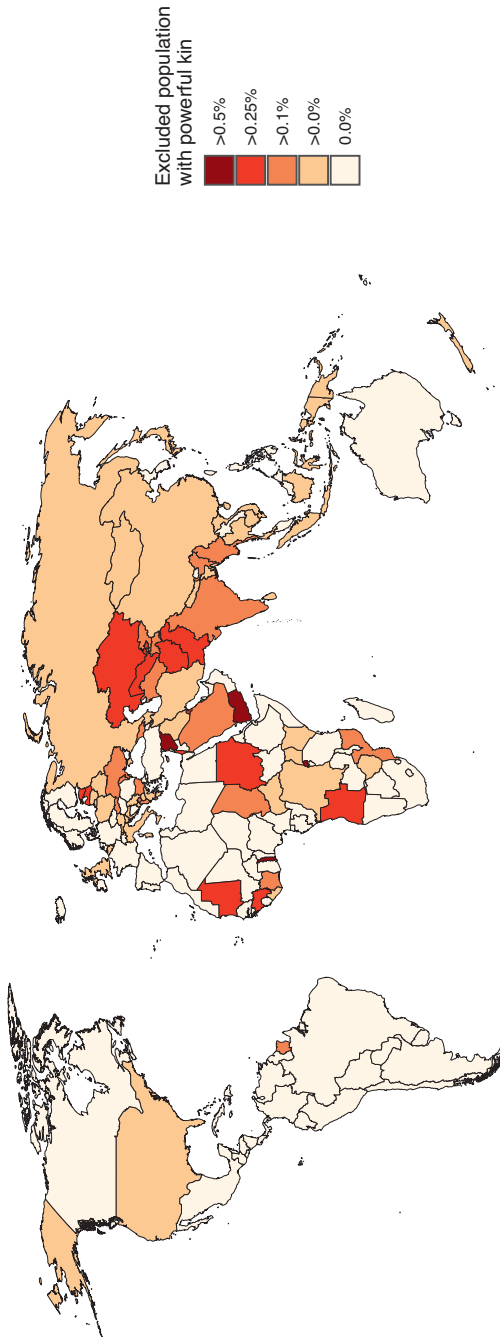


Figure 11.2 Share of country populations with powerful kin exposed to alien rule in 2023.
Data sources: CShapes 2.0; Ethnic Power Relations.

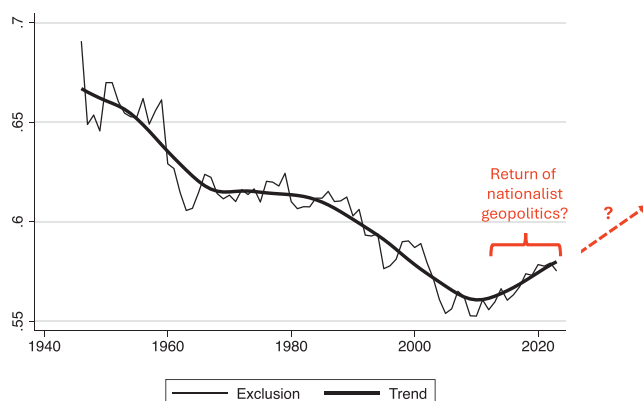


Figure 11.3 Trend in group exclusion around the world.

Data: Ethnic Power Relations.

Such a reversal in the trend toward accommodation can be called liberal backsliding, viewed as a more general shift toward illiberalism than the better-known, but more narrow, phenomenon of democratic backsliding.⁵⁹ Our incongruence theory expects that an upward turn in alien rule would potentially bring geopolitical trouble.

Figure 11.3 traces the probability of an ethnic group being excluded from political power within the country in which it resides and thus being exposed to alien rule.⁶⁰ The figure depicts a steadily declining exclusion trend with about 66 percent of all groups being excluded at the end of World War II and roughly 57 percent around 2010. The period after 2010 exhibits a trend in the opposite direction. Obviously, it is too early to confirm that a lasting shift has occurred, but the increase has continued for more than a decade and certainly stands in contrast to the decades of declining exclusion that followed World War II.

Is it possible to detect a corresponding trend in ethnic civil conflict? Such an effect cannot be expected to occur instantaneously because it takes some time for exclusion shocks to express themselves in terms of conflict behavior. Figure 11.4 displays a time series in the probability of ethnic civil conflicts per group.⁶¹ As first detected by Gurr⁶² and

⁵⁹ Waldner and Lust 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Knutsen et al. 2024; Grillo et al. 2024.

⁶⁰ Again we use the most recent version of our Ethnic Power Relations dataset that covers the period from 1946 through 2023. For an overview of an earlier version, see Vogt et al. 2015.

⁶¹ Here, we rely on the Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) from the Uppsala Data Conflict Program and PRIO. Gleditsch et al. 2002; Davies et al. 2024.

⁶² Gurr 2000a.

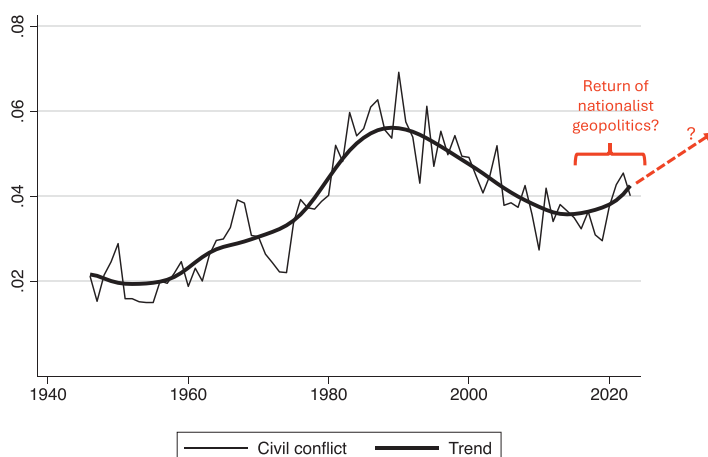


Figure 11.4 Global trend in the probability of civil conflict per ethnic group.

Data: Armed Conflicts Data; Ethnic Power Relations.

confirmed by more recent research,⁶³ the post-Cold War period saw a decrease in civil conflict beginning in the mid-1990s.

Thanks to recent data collection, we are able to complement this picture with the latest conflict data covering the time series until 2023. The picture that emerges may reveal the first signs of a potential trend reversal, although it is less salient than the possible turning point in exclusion. At least it seems that the post-Cold War decline has flattened out, and the curve may now be turning upward for the first time since the end of that era.⁶⁴

Can we attribute this uptick in ethnic conflict to the increase in ethnopolitical exclusion and thus to state-nation incongruence? For instance, the separatist violence in the Donbas region of Ukraine, inhabited by a large Russian-speaking population, erupted not long after the Party of Regions lost power in the aftermath of the 2014 Maidan Revolution.⁶⁵ The Taliban's takeover of the government in Afghanistan in August 2021 led to an immediate armed response by the Tajiks, Uzbeks,

⁶³ Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017 and Cederman, Hug and Wucherpfennig 2022, chapter 11.

⁶⁴ Furthermore, the shift toward an increase in ethnic civil conflict is much more clearly visible when shown in terms of intensity rather than the number of conflicts based on data from Davies et al. 2024. There has also been a major hike in nonethnic civil conflicts, mostly due to the Islamic State, but the casualty numbers are considerably lower in such conflicts.

⁶⁵ Kuzio 2015; Arel and Driscoll 2023.

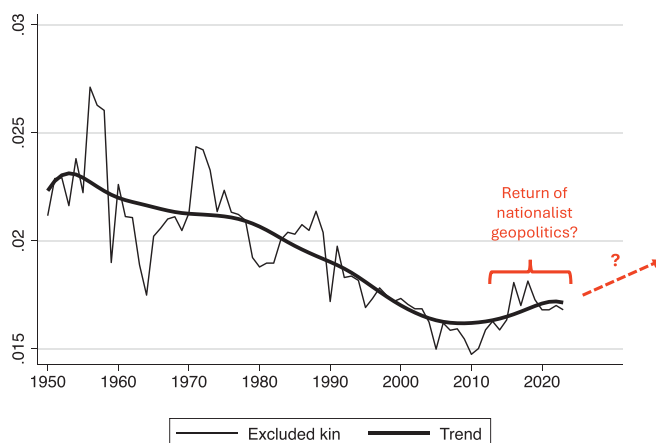


Figure 11.5 Trend in excluded groups with powerful kin.

Data: Ethnic Power Relations.

and Hazara, who formed the National Resistance Front when they were ousted from government.⁶⁶ In Ethiopia, conflict erupted in the Tigray region as the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPFL) became gradually excluded from executive power after 2018. As they held local elections in defiance of the federal government, the latter started the so-called Mekelle offensive, which also targeted Tigrayans with massive ethnic cleansing.⁶⁷

Beyond ethnopolitical exclusion, has irredentism also contributed to the rise in geopolitical conflict? Figure 11.5 considers pairs of states in which at least one state's leading ethnic group has excluded ethnic kin in the other state.⁶⁸ While the number of irredentist configurations decreased after World War II until around 2010, it has since started to trend upward.

This increase has been partly driven by transborder ethnic kin groups becoming politically excluded.⁶⁹ Such is the case of Hungarians in Slovakia, whose parties, the Hungarian Communists and Most-Híd, left the ruling coalition after the 2020 elections.⁷⁰ This shift to exclusion opened up the opportunity for irredentist claims from Hungary, whose leader, Viktor Orbán, has increasingly championed the idea of a "Greater

⁶⁶ Coffey 2024.

⁶⁷ Center for Preventive Action 2023.

⁶⁸ As shown in Figure 11.2, the leading ethnic groups is operationalized as any group that governs alone or as the only senior partner according to EPR's categories.

⁶⁹ Figure 11.3 shows that exclusion has increased in recent years.

⁷⁰ Mortkowitz 2020.

Hungary” that incorporates territories that were lost in the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.⁷¹ Similarly, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria became excluded from government after the 2014 parliamentary elections.⁷² The Bulgarian government viewed this minority as an irredentist threat, justifying ethnic discrimination and assimilationist policies during the socialist regime of the 1960s.⁷³ As in Hungary, irredentist and expansionist rhetoric have become more common in Turkey.⁷⁴ Irredentist claims of this kind also motivated Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its support for separatist violence in the Donbas region, particularly after the party representing Russian speakers was excluded from power.⁷⁵ In addition, the increase in irredentist configurations is also caused by the rise to the political power of ethnic groups with excluded ethnic kin elsewhere. Such is the case for the Pashtuns in Pakistan, whose secessionist efforts have been historically backed by their kin in Afghanistan, where they became politically dominant after the Taliban takeover.⁷⁶

As shown in Chapter 7, irredentist configurations are associated with a higher risk of both civil and interstate conflict. It is possible that the increased probability of irredentism accounts at least partly for the growing risk of ethnic civil war documented in Figure 11.4. But, so far, we have said little about interstate conflict. Although many conflicts of this type are unrelated to ethnic conflict, we would expect that at least some are related to irredentist complications. Because open interstate conflict has been less frequent since the end of World War II and has become less distinguishable from internal conflict,⁷⁷ we also consider internationalized civil wars that feature foreign states’ troop support of a party in a civil war.⁷⁸ Russia’s “green men,” the soldiers without insignia who invaded Crimea in 2014, illustrate how states often attempt to conceal their involvement in illegal activities in other countries.⁷⁹

Using a combined measure that adds internationalized internal conflict to interstate conflict, Figure 11.6 portrays the relevant trends in the share of all state dyads that experienced such a process. Based on this operationalization, the figure confirms that in the 1980s, a powerful

⁷¹ These territories include large regions in Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, and other neighboring countries, which include significant Hungarian-speaking populations, see Maltby 2020.

⁷² Euractiv 2014.

⁷³ Ivanov and Önsoy 2022.

⁷⁴ Danforth 2016.

⁷⁵ Kuzio 2015.

⁷⁶ Lieven 2021.

⁷⁷ Bellamy 2023.

⁷⁸ San-Akca 2016.

⁷⁹ Our analysis relies on UCDP’s coding of interstate and internationalized internal conflict, Davies et al. 2024.

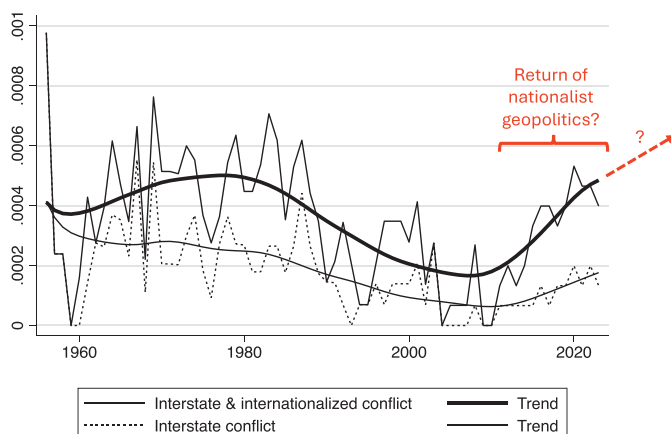


Figure 11.6 Trend in the share of state dyads that experience interstate or internationalized civil conflict.

Data: Armed Conflict Data; Ethnic Power Relations.

decreasing trend began to dominate but that this development was interrupted in the early 2000s and replaced by a clear increase since then. The figure also reveals that interstate conflicts on their own followed a similar reversing trend.

In sum, we detect several tentative signs confirming that the return of nationalist geopolitics is real and may be linked to nationalism's transformation of the state. But it is well beyond the analytical scope of this book to more convincingly link liberal backsliding to an increase in conflict. Such an extended analysis requires more data and needs to take into account related trends toward authoritarian rule and fundamental changes in the current world order, including an erosion of international norms and institutions.

11.4 Lessons for Policy

What are the policy implications of our analysis? Rather than merely representing abstractions, our theory of nationalist state transformation matters for important geopolitical decisions.

The first takeaway is that practitioners as well as scholars need to be sensitized to the disruptive power of nationalism. It is crucial that policy-makers liberate themselves from the blinders of methodological statism. The contemporary world is still primarily ruled by states, but an exclusive focus on such entities obscures that they are not the only actors

in world politics. Ethnically defined nations should be viewed as conceptually distinct and important structures that have played – and will continue to play – a central role in shaping geopolitical outcomes.

Nevertheless, today's dominant theories of international politics, including liberal and realist perspectives, fall into the trap of methodological statism. While liberals often believe that peace can be secured through democratization, democracy hinges on the existence of an uncontested demos.⁸⁰ But as we have shown, in the presence of unanswered nationality questions, border change and conflict rather than stable democracy may result. Likewise, although realist reasoning highlights a materialist balance of power among states, even the most fine-tuned calibration of power differentials can be upended by border-disrupting nationalist aspirations. To return to the metaphor introduced in Chapter 1, the main problem with these perspectives is that they see the state as the glass shell of a lava lamp showcasing malleable and fluid ethnic identities – whereas, in reality, ethnicity is more like real lava, perfectly capable of deforming and even destroying the lamp itself.

The second lesson is that nationalists are often obsessed with history and that this obsession is much more than a curiosity. George Orwell's famous quote applies with particular force to nationalism: "Who controls the past, controls the future."⁸¹ Any attempt to anticipate future nationalists' moves and to respond to geopolitical instability requires a proper understanding of how and why nationalists are inclined to use and abuse history.⁸² In the contemporary world, Putin is the undisputed master of strategic manipulation of history, but he is far from alone.⁸³ In view of these challenges, attempts at mediation and reconciliation need to pay attention to historical debates to search for common understandings anchored in historical facts while considering historical grievances and sensitivities as much as possible. In the current era of fake news, evidence-based historical accounts are going to be evermore contested. Indeed, these challenges may become even more difficult in the future, thanks to advances in generative artificial intelligence. But despite these difficulties, conflict resolution would profit if all parties can be encouraged to acknowledge legitimate grievances held by others in the search for inclusive compromises.

The third lesson pertains to the best way of handling nationalist claims. Nationalism is an inherent part of the modern state system and representative democracy; it can be contained but so far, little points

⁸⁰ Dahl 1989.

⁸¹ Orwell 1949.

⁸² Duara 1995.

⁸³ Stent 2022; Hill and Stent 2022.

to the possibility of transcending or even abolishing it entirely.⁸⁴ Yet, uncritically giving in to nationalist demands may undermine the current world order and trigger a flood of political violence. Because our analyses in Part III confirm that state-nation incongruence produces conflict, for pacification, it would be tempting to recommend the redrawing of borders to reduce state-nation incongruence. Conflict resolution through right-sizing is precisely what advocates of partition favor, but most scholars who reach this conclusion do so by relying on realist assumptions that highlight the ethnic security dilemma.⁸⁵

But it would be a major mistake to conclude that just because state-nation incongruence increases the risk of conflict, the best way forward is to give the nationalists precisely what they want by altering borders according to their desires. Doing so may address some nationality questions, at least in the short run, but partition often fails to produce a clean cut separating contesting groups and is associated with major side effects, including moral hazards that may undermine territorial integrity around the world.⁸⁶ Fortunately, ethnic power sharing offers an attractive, albeit imperfect, alternative that also attempts to pacify by addressing nationalist grievances.⁸⁷ Thus, although realists are right to caution against aggressive democratization that may trigger nationalist backlashes, as illustrated by the Bush administration's ill-fated intervention in Iraq beginning in 2003, which merely replaced Sunni with Shia dominance,⁸⁸ careful promotion of territorial and governmental power sharing has a proven track record of pacification.⁸⁹ The problem, then, is not too much liberalism but too little.⁹⁰

One of the most vexing problems with power sharing is that it represents a compromise that may or may not be accepted by nationalists. While shared power can eliminate ethnopolitical dominance through

⁸⁴ Hechter 2000, but see Mamdani 2020.

⁸⁵ Posen 1993*b*; Kaufmann 1996.

⁸⁶ Rather than being driven by a separation logic, Cederman, Girardin, Muñoz, Valli and Wucherpfennig 2024, "Partition, Power Sharing and Peace: A Spatial Analysis," argue that partition pacifies by reducing exposure to alien rule. Adopting a spatial approach, they reconceptualize partition as decreased cohabitation in dyads of transnationally defined ethnic groups. Difference-in-differences analyses based on a global dataset (1946–2017) reveal only mixed evidence that partition *per se* reduces intergroup conflict. Whereas its incomplete application is more likely to increase this risk, analysis using an index of domination shows that partitions that produce low-domination outcomes are more peaceful than those that do not. Moreover, the study shows that power sharing can also exert a pacifying effect, though without being associated with the destabilizing geopolitical side effects of border change.

⁸⁷ See also Cederman et al. 2015; Cederman, Hug and Wucherpfennig 2022.

⁸⁸ Mearsheimer 2018.

⁸⁹ Gurr 2000*a*; Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2017.

⁹⁰ Cederman et al. 2025.

alien rule, it cannot overcome ethnonationalist division without being combined with border change through unification. International organizations, such as the European Union, can contribute to curbing irredentist and unification nationalisms by softening interstate borders and thus reducing the demand for border change.⁹¹ The most prominent example of the EU's pacifying influence is the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, which depends critically on open borders. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, and more broadly, the rollback of liberal globalization and the reassertion of border restrictions globally undermine attempts to resolve conflicts by transcending borders.⁹²

Yet some particularly ambitious nationalists reject any sharing of power with other groups. Thus, national unity and the absence of alien rule may not be enough for purist ideologues and ruthless opportunists who exploit extremism because they reject any multiethnic cohabitation under a shared political roof. Combining an imperialist mindset with nationalism, the most extreme nationalists insist on removing members of other groups from the territory of their state through forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, or even genocide. A slightly less brutal version of majority nationalism would accept the presence of members of other groups as long as they are treated as second-class citizens without any real political influence.⁹³

The supremacist attitudes of dominant nationalism thus remain major stumbling blocks to compromise through either power sharing or partition, as illustrated by prominent politicians on both sides of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Hamas and Israel under Benjamin Netanyahu each aspire to territorial dominance “from the river to the sea.” Rather than bringing peace to the affected populations, the refusal to accept a two-state solution will perpetuate violence with endless human suffering as a consequence. Indeed, no long-term solution to the conflict seems possible without solving the nationality question for both sides. The theoretically more sustainable alternative of entirely transcending the politicization of national identities proposed by Mahmood Mamdani⁹⁴ seems to be even farther from the horizon.

Likewise, Putin's Russia refuses to even acknowledge the legitimacy of a Ukrainian identity or state.⁹⁵ De facto partition of Russian-speaking

⁹¹ Kelley 2004; Wilkinson 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2009. However, the effect should not be exaggerated, see McGarry and O'Leary 2013. Furthermore, it should be noted that not only inclusive but also exclusive practices can diffuse between states, see Cederman, Gleditsch and Wucherpfennig 2018.

⁹² O'Leary 2024; Simmons and Kenwick 2021.

⁹³ Bustikova 2014; Basta 2018; Juon and Cederman 2024; Kolstø 2019.

⁹⁴ Mamdani 2020

⁹⁵ Hill and Stent 2022.

areas may represent a viable way to stop the killing in Ukraine in the short run, but such an outcome would threaten to undermine the norms of territorial integrity in Ukraine and beyond, even without formal recognition of such a compromise.

Hopefully, the conceptual map provided by this book will make future nationalist challenges to the current world order somewhat less surprising. Any attempt to prevent or resolve conflict calls for an understanding of the key actors and their motivations. In practice, this means that it is crucial to take the narratives of restorative nationalists seriously, rather than dismiss them as irrelevant myths. This realization, of course, does not imply that one should accept such narratives as objective facts or as normatively acceptable accounts. It would certainly be wrong to treat the ethnic maps we rely on in this book as objective summaries of each and every group and time period. As we have argued, ethnicity is sometimes hotly contested. All the same, a proper understanding of today's geopolitical challenges requires us to enter the nationalist mindset and clearly see the ideological and historical obsessions that underpin strongmen's revisionist projects.

S4 War and State Formation in Early Modern Europe

In this companion text to Chapter 4, we offer further technical details underpinning the empirical analysis.

S4.1 Data Description

To test our hypotheses, we matched geocoded data on state borders with data on warfare, focusing on the period from 1490 to 1790. For measures of historic borders, we primarily relied on Abramson's spatial data on early modern European states.¹ Abramson provides data for every five-year period, based on the Centennia Historical Atlas,² Euratlas,³ and other sources. States are defined as territorial units that were not occupied by a foreign power, had the capacity to tax, and enjoyed a common executive.⁴ Furthermore, Abramson often considers units seemingly under outside control, such as those constituting the Holy Roman Empire or preceding the United Kingdom, as states in their own right as long as they acted "as if" they were independent.

For robustness checks, we also rely on the Centennia Historical Atlas,⁵ which covers European history until 2003 and defines states based on "de facto" control (see Section S4.5). Again, we restrict the sample to the period starting in 1490, but only go as far as 1915, since we anticipate that beyond that point the logic of state formation became increasingly transformed by nationalism, especially through the creation of new states and the disintegration of multiethnic empires.

¹ Abramson 2017. We thank Scott Abramson for generously sharing his data with us. We slightly reprojected the spatial data to align more closely with natural features.

² Reed 2008.

³ Nüssli 2010.

⁴ The latter condition treats "composite" units as single entities which, despite their quasi-independent institutions, shared the same common executive. As Abramson argues, this is particularly relevant for imperial families (such as the Wittelsbachs), whose holdings are all treated together as a single state.

⁵ Reed 2008.

As mentioned, this analysis in Chapter 4 also directly links border change to conflict data. We establish this link by matching state units recorded by Abramson and Centennia with data gathered by Brecke that record all violent conflicts since AD 1400 in which at least thirty-two people died.⁶ Our conflict list identifies the actors that fought on either side of each war, along with its start and end dates. Following Tilly, we consider interstate wars only. In total, our dataset records 346 interstate wars.

S4.2 Systemic Analysis

There are many possible ways of measuring territorial concentration. The simplest would be to count the units, and indeed, the number of states decreased from 263 in 1490 to 215 in 1790 in Abramson's dataset.⁷ However, this raw count ignores state sizes, which means that a very large number of tiny states would make the system seem much more fragmented than it was.⁸ Alternatively, one could attempt to capture concentration through the size of a "typical state" in a fitted lognormal distribution of state sizes.⁹ But this approach, too, may give too much weight to tiny statelets and downplay the role of great powers.¹⁰

Instead, we rely on a measure of territorial concentration: *terrconc* = $\sum_i s_i^2$ where $s_i \in (0, 1]$ is the territorial share of the system's total area occupied by state i .¹¹

S4.3 State-Level Analysis

We illustrate how to distinguish war-related territorial gains from peaceful ones. By overlaying country polygons at time t on polygons from $t - 1$, we can record territorial gains and losses between each state pair in Abramson's dataset. Since European history is replete with great powers

⁶ More precisely, Brecke 1999, 3, defines wars as cases "of purposive and lethal violence among two or more social groups pursuing conflicting political goals that results in fatalities, with at least one belligerent group organized under the command of authoritative leadership." While Brecke only records fatalities for less than half of all wars, most of them meet standard definitions of large-scale wars, with just 10 percent falling below the threshold of a thousand casualties.

⁷ Abramson 2017.

⁸ In fact, this is far from a hypothetical situation because, throughout the sample period, Abramson counts almost all tiny members of the Holy Roman Empire as independent states.

⁹ Abramson 2017.

¹⁰ Furthermore, while the size distribution is clearly skewed, the lognormal fit is far from perfect. See the online supplement to Cederman et al. 2023.

¹¹ See Abramson 2017, 21, for a similar application of the Herfindahl index to local territorial concentration within artificial grid cells.

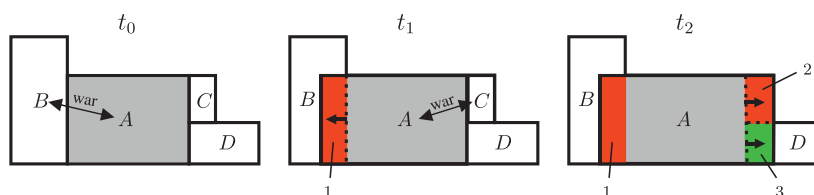


Figure S4.1 Computing cumulative territorial gains of state *A* from its neighboring states *B*, *C*, and *D*.

Note: In the first period, *A* and *B* fight on opposite sides of a war. State *A* gains area 1 from *B* through war. *A* fights another war against *C* and gains its entire territory 2. In addition, *A* receives area 3 from *D* under peaceful conditions. Each territorial gain is carried over to the next period unless reversed.

that fought noncontiguous states, as illustrated by Spain's conquest of the Netherlands, we will consider both contiguous and noncontiguous dyads. For each case of state *A*'s territorial gain against state *B*, our procedure sorts the gains into three categories.

Figure S4.1 illustrates this procedure in a hypothetical example, in which states *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* exchange territory under violent and peaceful conditions. Clearly, this dyadic linking of war to territorial gains constitutes a conservative measurement in only coding gains as war related if there is an explicit match between Brecke's warring parties and Abramson's political units. Thus, we are likely to underestimate the link between warfare and territorial change since our coding excludes conquests resulting from threats of violence or minor skirmishes that do not pass the threshold of war.¹²

More formally, the cumulative territorial gains described in our state-level descriptive analysis (see Figures 4.4–4.7 in the main text) are computed as follows. Essentially, the task is to decompose the growth of the state from the core area at the historical starting point $t = 0$ into three different types of growth: namely war related and peaceful gains from other states, as well as gains from unclaimed areas that we refer to as *terra nullius*. State size at time t , S_t , can be computed as the union of the core area C_0 , the cumulative war gains W_t , the cumulative peace gains P_t , and the cumulative *terra nullius* gains N_t :

$$S_t = C_0 \cup W_t \cup P_t \cup N_t.$$

The contribution through warfare W_t can be computed based on all war-related dyadic gains. Δw_{jt} with state j in time period t :

¹² See the supplementary material of the original article for details.

$$W_t = W_{t-1} \cup (\cup_j \Delta w_{jt}) \cap S_t \setminus C_0.$$

The corresponding cumulative peaceful gains P_t are calculated based on all peaceful dyadic gains Δp_{jt} with state j in time period t :

$$P_t = P_{t-1} \cup (\cup_j \Delta p_{jt}) \cap S_t \setminus C_0.$$

Finally, the cumulative contributions from terra nullius N_t amount to all such dyadic gains Δn_t in time period t :

$$N_t = N_{t-1} \cup \Delta n_t \cap S_t \setminus C_0.$$

The intersection with S_t assures that the gain areas are “handed back” in case of territorial losses, which are removed from the respective, mutually exclusive gain categories. If a territory that was first gained through peaceful means was lost and later regained through war, it is added to the latter category and vice versa. The mode of the most recent incorporation is what counts in the lasting categorization of gain areas.

In a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses, we systematically test Tilly’s theoretical expectations at the state level. The two main dependent variables are each state’s log-transformed territorial net gains and losses during each five-year period. Table S4.1 presents six models, the first three accounting for territorial gains and the remaining three for losses. Crucially, all of the models feature a country-level war dummy variable, derived from the dyadic indicator, that is one if the country was involved in any dyadic war during each period and zero otherwise. As a test of the dynamic aspect of bellicist theory, we also include cumulative variables that measure war-fueled and pacific growth from the first observation, as defined earlier. Furthermore, as a complement to these variables, the analysis introduces measures of *cumulative* losses, again using 1490 (or independence) as the reference point. In addition to the main independent variables, we include four geographic control variables: the log-transformed age of the state, whether it enjoys coastal access, its log-transformed number of contiguous neighbors, and the standard deviation of elevation (as a proxy for rough terrain). All models are estimated with standard errors clustered at the country level.

As a first tentative test of H4.1a, model 1 interacts the war dummy with (log) territory size.¹³ To evaluate the dynamic version of this association (H4.2a), model 2 interacts the war dummy with the cumulative-war-gains variable. For ease of interpretation, the table includes two interaction terms, one with war and the other one with peace (the complement of the war dummy).¹⁴ In agreement with H4.2a, the coefficient

¹³ See also panel (a) of Figure 4.8.

¹⁴ This configuration is equivalent to showing a simple term and an interaction term but shows the coefficients of war and peacetime without the need for a Wald test. Instead

Table S4.1 OLS models of territorial change at the country level, 1490–1890.

	Territorial gain, log			Territorial loss, log		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
War	-1.9122** (0.6192)	0.9910*** (0.2580)	0.6501** (0.2306)	-1.0642* (0.5027)	0.7510** (0.2512)	0.4287 (0.2775)
War × state size	0.3057*** (0.0577)			0.1674** (0.0523)		
State size, log	0.1833*** (0.0223)	0.1500*** (0.0226)	-0.3637* (0.1752)	0.1873*** (0.0384)	0.1869*** (0.0300)	0.5372*** (0.1238)
War × cumul. war gains		0.1651*** (0.0425)	0.0537 (0.0489)			
Peace × cumul. war gains		0.0149 (0.0214)	-0.1229** (0.0418)			
War × cumul. peace gains		-0.0087 (0.0477)	-0.0919+ (0.0485)			
Peace × cumul. peace gains		0.0614*** (0.0140)	0.0038 (0.0242)			
War × cumul. war losses					0.0342 (0.0307)	0.0033 (0.0337)
Peace × cumul. war losses					0.0173 (0.0318)	-0.0572 (0.0494)
War × cumul. peace losses					0.0405 (0.0643)	-0.0674 (0.0709)
Peace × cumul. peace losses					0.0595** (0.0182)	-0.0412 (0.0262)
Geo. controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	13,705	13,705	13,686	13,705	13,705	13,686

Standard errors clustered on states in parentheses. FE, Fixed Effects.
+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

associated with war-driven growth is large and highly significant.¹⁵ Interestingly, peaceful growth is also linked to further expansion, but this effect is much smaller and limited to peacetime. To fully capture the internal growth logic of the bellicist model, model 3 adds country fixed effects to the same specification as in model 2. While the net effect points upward as expected, the estimate is now so small that it cannot be separated from zero. The weaker effects of territorial losses are shown in models 4–6, which follow the same structure as models 1–3.

In the survival analysis, we rely on the list of state units taken from Abramson, code a state's "death" if it ceases to exist in the subsequent five-year period, and estimate a series of Cox proportional hazard models. Standard errors are clustered on the country level. All models are stratified by survival period to account for dependencies between repeated events.¹⁶

The results are shown in Table S4.2. Model 1 tells us that while warfare in itself is only weakly associated with state death, state size exhibits a powerful positive association, in agreement with Abramson's findings.¹⁷ This result contradicts "Darwinian" accounts of state formation. However, we also need to account for the interaction between war and state size, as many states have ceased to exist for reasons unrelated to warfare, such as dynastic unions. Once we do this, the results are very much in line with the bellicist perspective. The coefficient for this interaction effect is negative and significant. To facilitate interpretation, Figure 4.9 visualizes these interactions. Again confirming the bellicist logic, and more specifically H4.1b, these results show that state deaths during wartime are far more common for small states than for larger ones, while the opposite holds in times of peace. As an additional test of the long-term dynamics of state mortality, model 3 introduces all four cumulative variables from the previous analysis. This addition suggests that states that experienced large territorial gains through war become "battle hardened" and are thus less likely to perish.¹⁸

of controlling for the full area of the state, we subtract the cumulative variables from the area since the area variable would otherwise overlap too much with the cumulative indicators.

¹⁵ This is shown in panel (b) of Figure 4.8.

¹⁶ Several states in the dataset experience repeated deaths due to recurrent occupations or repeated splits and mergers.

¹⁷ Abramson 2017.

¹⁸ Here, we interact the war dummy with the remaining area of the state once war and peace gains have been subtracted. Clearly, the negative size-dependent effect appears to be driven by past war gains.

Table S4.2 *Cox proportional hazard models of state death, 1490–1790.*

	State death		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
War	0.1544 (0.3544)	5.0168*** (1.0806)	4.3293*** (1.0679)
State size	0.2520*** (0.0622)	0.3340***	(0.0566)
War × state size		−0.4554*** (0.0968)	
State size, rest			0.4426*** (0.0602)
War × state size, rest			−0.3358** (0.1094)
Cumul. war gains, log			−0.2328*** (0.0702)
Cumul. peace gains, log			−0.0454 (0.0378)
Cumul. war losses, log			0.0398 (0.0507)
Cumul. peace lossess			−0.0931* (0.0392)
Pseudo R^2	0.010	0.018	0.027
Geo. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	14,342	14,342	14,332

Standard errors clustered on states in parentheses.

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

S4.4 Dyadic Analysis

In the dyadic analysis, the dependent variable is the log-transformed territorial net gain of state A from the territory of state B. Since by definition both states cannot gain simultaneously, the corresponding dyad directed from state B to A is dropped. Thus, by keeping all dyads in both directions unless state A gains territory from state B, each state has an opportunity to gain territory from any of the other states in the system. The factors driving losses can be studied through the variables associated with state B, which is by definition on the losing side.

The war variable is again taken from Brecke's dataset and matched to the states in the Abramson dataset. To reiterate, this variable equals one if state A and state B fight on opposite sides in the same war and zero otherwise. Note that conflict incidence is now directly matched at the level of the dyad rather than at the country level. As in the country-level models, the dyadic analysis interacts warfare with the main size variables.

Taking into account logistical constraints and decreasing returns to scale before the era of modern communication, we log-transform the relative state size of state A compared to state B as follows:

$$\text{RelLogSize}_{AB} = \frac{\log(S_A)}{\log(S_A + S_B)},$$

where S_A and S_B are the territorial sizes of states A and B. As an assessment of H4.1a and H4.1b, this comparison is more informative than one based on absolute state size.¹⁹

The models feature a series of control variables, including a dummy variable indicating whether the two states neighbor each other, and a variable measuring the log-transformed distance between them. We also control for the log-transformed area of state B since gains are by definition made out of that territory.²⁰ Finally, the models include the geopolitical controls that we relied on in the state-level analysis, for example, coastal access, age, number of neighbors, and the standard deviation of elevation as a proxy for rough terrain. The indicators for distance and rough terrain allow us to partially test whether negative feedback operates along with positive feedback.

Table S4.3 summarizes our findings. Model 1 displays the results from a model featuring dyadic conflict as the main explanatory variable and the relative size of state A compared to state B. As expected, both variables come with strong positive and highly significant estimates. However, H4.1a and H4.1b expect that the effects of warfare and state size interact. Thus, model 2 introduces an interaction term between the war dummy and the relative size variable (also see Figure 4.10).

In this and the remaining models, the confounders also behave as expected: neighbors and proximate states are much more likely to exchange territory. State A's gains and state B's losses increase with state age on both sides, coastal access of state A (but not in state B), and, as expected, decrease with rough terrain, especially in state B. Again, this confirms that the positive feedback mechanism in H4.2a is constrained by countervailing forces.

Model 3 gives an opportunity to evaluate H4.2a and H4.2b. Here, we interact the war dummy with the cumulative growth variables while showing the resulting wartime and peacetime effects in the same manner

¹⁹ This functional form reflects decreasing returns to scale imposed by severe limitations in transportation technology before the invention of the railways in the nineteenth century. A more sophisticated computation could feature an extended contest success function with explicit discounting of geographic distances and terrain.

²⁰ Gains cannot be larger than the size of state B. We refrain from including state A's size as an independent term in the two first models because they already contain a measure of relative state size.

Table S4.3 OLS model of gains state A and losses state B, dyadic level, 1490–1790.

	Gains A (gains B), log			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
War AB	1.1588*** (0.2139)	−0.4391* (0.1813)	0.2202 (0.2157)	−0.1401 (0.1922)
Rel. log size A/AB	0.0664*** (0.0148)	0.0658*** (0.0148)		
War × rel. log size		1.7793*** (0.4444)		
War × war gains A			0.0985*** (0.0274)	0.0644*** (0.0177)
Peace × war gains A			−0.0001 (0.0005)	0.0007 (0.0007)
War × peace gains A			−0.0183 (0.0314)	0.0029 (0.0253)
Peace × peace gains A			0.0021*** (0.0004)	0.0021*** (0.0005)
War × war losses B			0.0898* (0.0386)	0.0472** (0.0163)
Peace × war losses B			−0.0011+ (0.0006)	−0.0006 (0.0007)
War × peace losses B			0.0079 (0.0420)	0.0111 (0.0176)
Peace × peace losses B			0.0007+ (0.0004)	−0.0002 (0.0004)
Size A, log			0.0013+ (0.0008)	−0.0084** (0.0032)
Size B, log	0.0070*** (0.0014)	0.0070*** (0.0015)	0.0036*** (0.0010)	0.0032 (0.0027)
Geo. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dyad FE				Yes
Observations	3,308,669	3,308,669	3,308,669	3,293,989

Standard errors clustered on states and dyads in parentheses.

+*p* < 0.1; **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01.; ****p* < 0.001.

as was done in the state-level analysis (see Table S4.1). Taking one further step toward assessing the double positive feedback-dynamic in the bellicist model, model 4 introduces dyad fixed effects in addition to the year fixed effect of the previous models. This tougher test allows us to compare conflict periods to peaceful ones while disregarding cross-state/dyad heterogeneity. Lending strong support to H4.2a, the war-driven cumulative gains variable retains most of its effect, with a high level of precision in the estimate. While not shown in the table, negative

and significant coefficients for distance and rough terrain confirm that there are negative feedback effects that counterbalance the snowballing logic of H4.2a.

Peace Agreements

Covering the entirety of Europe over several centuries, the empirical validation has so far been pitched at the macrolevel. Our main analysis links territorial gains to warfare if they occurred either during or after a war in which the gaining and losing party fought on opposite sides. Although this approach establishes a relatively close connection between war and state expansion, it does not guarantee that all territorial transfers were in fact war outcomes. To close this gap, we gathered data on related peace agreements since most wars in early modern Europe ended by formal treaties.²¹ Studying these agreements also helps address concerns of reverse causation, as they enable us to show that states expanded as a result of war, rather than the other way around.

Figure S4.2 visualizes our data, showing the link between war-adjacent territorial transfers and peace agreements from 1490 through 1790.²² The vast majority of transfers were linked to peace treaties that either confirmed (67 percent) or reversed (12 percent) wartime gains. In the remaining 20 percent, we did not find evidence of peace treaties.²³

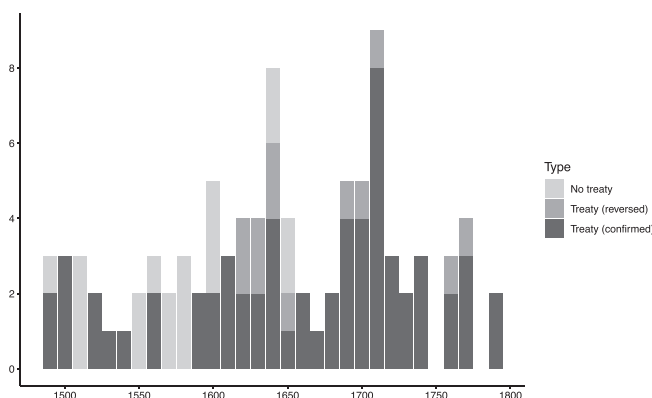


Figure S4.2 Linking war-adjacent territorial transfers to peace agreements.

²¹ Fazal 2013.

²² We rely mainly on data from Fisch 1979.

²³ Most cases without peace treaties were still linked to wars, some of which were either fought between states and non-sovereign groups, resulted in state death or were settled by alternative means (e.g., royal edicts and truces), see Duchhardt 2004; Fisch 1979.

The share of transfers linked to treaties also increased over time, which coincided with an increasing formalization of international politics.²⁴

Another example of a peace treaty that formalized territorial expansion is the Treaty of Nystad (1721), signed by the Swedish Empire and the Tsardom of Russia. This agreement ended the Great Northern War (1700–1721), as well as Sweden’s “imperial day.”²⁵ During this conflict, Peter the Great was able to conquer Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, and parts of Finland.²⁶ The Treaty of Nystad confirmed these conquests and allowed Peter the Great to found St. Petersburg, thus enabling Russia’s westward orientation.²⁷

In sum, our examination of peace agreements further confirms the close relationship between warfare and territorial expansion. Most of the territorial transfers we previously coded as war gains were indeed confirmed in peace treaties, while many remaining cases were linked to war through state death or alternative conflict resolution mechanisms.

S4.5 Robustness Analysis

Extensive sensitivity analysis can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.²⁸ The online supplement includes models focusing on (1) states’ decision to initiate wars and (2) the distribution of gains once this decision has been made as separate outcomes. To further address endogeneity concerns and to show that threats of war may also drive the process together with actual war fighting, the online supplement features models that remove all war variables from the analysis. The online supplement presents a series of additional analyses. First, to test the influence of economic development, it analyzes the effect of the urban share of each country’s population, as well as each state’s proximity to Europe’s densely populated “urban core.” In addition, we verify that the results do not hinge on specific great powers. For instance, removing two of the most belligerent states, Russia and Prussia, from the sample does not noticeably affect the main results. We also re-estimate our models for each century from 1400 through 1790, which shows that the estimates appear for all centuries, and tend to get bigger over time, as anticipated by the theory’s dynamics. Finally, as mentioned earlier, we replicate the main analysis using the Centennia historical atlas instead of Abramson’s state boundaries, which again leads to results that are mostly consistent with the bellicist model.

²⁴ Lesaffer 2004, 2018; Duchhardt 2004; Fazal 2013.

²⁵ Palmer, Colton and Kramer 2007, 219.

²⁶ LeDonne 2004, 38–40.

²⁷ Palmer, Colton and Kramer 2007, 219.

²⁸ Cederman et al. 2023.

S5 Nationalism and the Puzzle of Reversing State Size

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 5. While most of the data specifications can be found in Chapter 3, here we provide information on the regression models and variable definitions.

S5.1 Defining Ethnic and Territorial Fractionalization

To operationalize state S 's ethnic fragmentation, we use the standard measure given by the Herfindahl fractionalization index

$$\text{ethfrac}_S = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{n_S} \left(\frac{p_i}{P_S} \right)^2, \quad (\text{S5.1})$$

where n_S is the number of ethnic group segments i in this state, p_i is the population size of each segment, and P_S is the total size of the state's population.¹

We use a similar fractionalization formula to compute the extent to which the associated aggregate group AG is divided by state borders. Territorial fragmentation of the associated aggregate group with a population size of P_{AG} and n_{AG} group segments, each with a population size of p_i , can be written as

$$\text{terfrac}_{AG} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{n_{AG}} \left(\frac{p_i}{P_{AG}} \right)^2. \quad (\text{S5.2})$$

S5.2 Analyzing Border-Change Processes

This section contains details on the regression analysis that was used to produce the duration analysis of gains and losses in Chapter 6, see especially Figures 5.6 and 5.11. Because states endogenously change their ethnic makeup as they lose or gain territory, we model the process with a

¹ The population data were drawn from Goldewijk et al. 2011, who provide a back projection of spatially disaggregated population data.

Cox proportional hazard model that captures the yearly probability that a state's territory either grows or shrinks as

$$h(t)_{i,t} = h_0(t) \exp(\beta_1 \text{EthnicFrac}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \text{TerrFrac}_{i,t} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}), \quad (\text{S5.3})$$

where i stands for “state spells” at age t , that is, historical periods during which a state's borders remain unchanged. Depending on the model, the hazard h refers to the end of the spell by either a territorial loss or by a gain. In line with our theoretical arguments, the first model tests whether ethnic fractionalization increases the risk of territorial losses (i.e., $\beta_1 > 0$), and the second assesses whether territorial fractionalization increases the odds of territorial gains ($\beta_2 > 0$). $\mathbf{X}_{i,t}$ denotes a vector of control variables that capture potential common causes of border change and the ethnic makeup of states, including state size in terms of territory, population and age,² as well as its elevation and ruggedness.³ A second specification stratifies the model by calendar years to account for systemic shocks over time. The measurement of territorial fractionalization assumes that the dominant group is the largest ethnic segment that intersects with the capital. In the global sample, we operationalize the dominant group as the largest demographic segment regardless of the location of the capital since the capital-based rule is unreliable in massively multiethnic states experiencing strong urbanization.

Table S5.1 presents a first set of results. The findings are compatible with our theoretical expectations. In line with Hypothesis H5.1, territorial losses are more likely in ethnically fragmented states. This finding holds in the baseline specification (model 1) and when stratifying the model by year (model 2). Interpreted as hazard ratios, the results suggest that increasing the ethnic fractionalization of a state by one standard deviation (0.23) increases its risk of losing territory by a factor of 1.44–1.73. Hypothesis H5.2 also receives strong support. As expected, high levels of territorial fractionalization are associated with more territorial gains (see models 3 and 4). In terms of hazard ratios, this indicates that raising the territorial fractionalization of a state's dominant group by one standard deviation (0.34) increases its risk of gaining territory by a factor of between 1.88 and 2.90.

We also find consistent support for both hypotheses when extending the analysis to the global dataset based on CShapes 2.0 and backdated Atlas Narodov Mira (GREG) groups. To test Alesina and Spolaore's⁴ idea that trade and democracy should reduce the size of states,

² Time-variant within state spells.

³ Terrain ruggedness is measured as the standard deviation of the elevation.

⁴ Alesina and Spolaore 2015.

Table S5.1 *Cox proportional hazard models of territorial losses and gains, Europe 1816–2017.*

	Terr. loss		Terr. gain	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ethnic frac.	2.39940*** (0.59090)	1.60299* (0.70161)	0.78867+ (0.44308)	0.09049 (0.46818)
Terr. frac.	1.47573*** (0.38627)	1.41518* (0.59367)	1.86185*** (0.45900)	3.13774*** (0.67929)
Strata	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.044	0.071	0.076	0.129
Observations	7610	7610	7610	7610

Standard errors in parentheses.
+*p* < 0.1, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

Table S5.2 *Cox proportional hazard models of territorial losses and gains, World 1886–2017.*

	Terr. loss			Terr. gain		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ethnic frac.	0.82385** (0.29587)	1.05917** (0.36244)	0.81302 (0.53275)	0.12653 (0.47839)	−0.15363 (0.47065)	−0.93677 (0.63126)
Terr. frac.	−0.54804 (0.49031)	0.50367 (0.55961)	0.38994 (0.78444)	0.67408 (0.65656)	2.38321*** (0.66361)	1.69148+ (1.01224)
Democracy			−0.16231 (0.26946)			0.53496+ (0.31778)
Trade openness, log			0.31797 (0.21478)			0.09351 (0.18822)
Strata	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.094	0.249	0.322	0.070	0.139	0.199
Observations	13,849	13,849	7421	13,849	13,849	7421

Standard errors in parentheses.
+*p* < 0.1, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

Table S5.2 also includes two models that feature a dummy variable for democracy and a log-transformed measure of trade openness (see models 3 and 6). As in the European subsystem, states are more likely to shrink as ethnic fragmentation increases (see models 1–3). Furthermore,

territorial fractionalization is also associated with territorial expansion (see especially models 5 and 6). Unsurprisingly given the origins of nationalism in Europe and its incomplete spread across the globe, the associated effect sizes are somewhat smaller than in the European sample discussed earlier. Changing ethnic (territorial) fractionalization by the same amounts as in the preceding paragraph is associated with risks of losses (gains) that increase by a factor of 1.2–1.3 (1.3–2.3). While missing data introduce considerable uncertainty, democracy is associated with an increase, rather than a reduction, in state size (see models 3 and 6). There is some evidence that trade shrinks states, but this evidence is rather weak (see model 3).⁵

S5.3 Nationalist State Transformation and Border-Change Events

This section provides the model specification that we used to generate the duration graphs in Figures 5.10 and 5.11. Following the state-level regression analysis of overall gains and losses shown in Tables S5.1 and S5.2, we estimate the effect of ethnic and territorial fractionalization on the three main types of border change.

To account for these dynamics, we again estimate Cox proportional hazard models where each border change affecting a state's border marks the end of a state period. Failures occur when the state experiences the outcome in question. If a state period ends with a different border change, it is treated as being censored. We include the same state-level controls as defined earlier.⁶

The results from the European subsample with CShapes Europe and HEG data in Table S5.3 support these conjectures. Once again we report both models with and without stratification by calendar year. Models 1 and 2 show that states' risk of losing territory through secession increases with higher levels of ethnic fractionalization. As anticipated by Hypothesis H5.4, states with more territorially fragmented dominant ethnic groups are much more likely to expand. Stratification by year provides a less precise estimate because many of the unification events in the nineteenth century happened within the same year.⁷ Additionally, that ethnic

⁵ We reiterate that all the global analysis relies on backward projected ethnicity data, which are likely to undercount smaller ethnic units that were eliminated through forced or voluntary assimilation. This means that the disintegration results are likely to be biased downward, whereas the effects of gains could be overstated.

⁶ The controls are the state's territorial size and population, its age, as well as its elevation and ruggedness. Controls are all logarithmically transformed, and coefficients are not shown.

⁷ If unification is based on the winning state (state A), this result looks much stronger (see the supplementary material to the original article).

Table S5.3 *Cox proportional hazard models of border-change events, Europe 1816–2017.*

	Ethnic secession		Unification		Irredentism	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ethnic frac.	5.97399*** (1.45256)	7.83802*** (1.89341)	−1.42600 (0.94696)	−4.58420* (2.03761)	−0.93573 (0.60042)	−2.46694*** (0.57699)
Terr. frac.	−2.31241 (1.76799)	−3.09197 (2.30287)	5.84872*** (1.23267)	8.65288+ (5.14039)	2.42076*** (0.53849)	3.59641*** (0.97605)
Strata	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pseudo R^2	0.335	0.562	0.186	0.266	0.082	0.206
Observations	7610	7610	7610	7610	7610	7610

Standard errors in parentheses.
+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table S5.4 *Cox proportional hazard models of border-change events, World 1886–2017.*

	Ethnic secession		Irredentism	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ethnic frac.	1.05988+ (0.61079)	2.90984** (1.07136)	−1.56927* (0.71824)	−1.97628* (0.95093)
Terr. frac.	−8.12664** (2.89292)	−3.58896 (2.61256)	2.55279** (0.81136)	3.90667*** (0.88094)
Strata	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pseudo R^2	0.268	0.682	0.062	0.165
Observations	13,849	13,849	13,849	13,849

Standard errors in parentheses.
+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

fractionalization is negatively related to unification is unsurprising, given that the unifying state must be relatively homogeneous to act as an ethnic magnet for its kin. Last, in agreement with Hypothesis H5.5, we find that irredentist events are triggered by states with a leading ethnic group that is highly fragmented (see models 5 and 6). Again, ethnically fragmented states are much less likely to embark on reincorporating their kin from neighboring countries.

Based on global data since 1886, Table S5.4 presents similar, yet somewhat weaker results. Models 1 and 2 indicate that fragmented states are consistently more likely to experience secession (thus disregarding

the few cases of nonethnic secession, such as Taiwan's divorce from China).⁸ Because there are only three cases of ethnic unification in the post-1886 global state system, we cannot test the respective hypothesis robustly using this sample. We find evidence in line with Hypothesis H5.5 in regard to irredentism, which is positively linked to territorial fractionalization (see models 3 and 4). With much more ethnic diversity being present in the global sample, especially in decolonized states, country internal cohesion plays a less prominent role in irredentist processes.

S5.4 Robustness Analysis

All robustness analyses can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.⁹ First, we estimate conventional linear regression models that allow us to take the size of territorial gains and losses into account. Second, we further investigate the timing of our main effects in the European and global samples. We find that ethnic fractionalization and territorial fragmentation did not affect territorial gains and losses in European states between 1490 and 1790. This suggests that our main results are produced by post-French Revolution nationalism rather than ahistorical attributes of ethnicity. Furthermore, our main results hold before and after the World War II, even though the effects of ethnic fragmentation on territorial losses are notably stronger in the latter case. Finally, the sensitivity analysis confirms that the main findings hold for different datasets. To this effect, we replace the HEG Europe data with data from the Centennia Historical Atlas and use the GeoEPR dataset instead of the ANM/GREG data.

⁸ This assumes that both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan are dominated by the same aggregate group. This is a controversial point but conforms with the coding of the *Atlas Narodov Mira*.

⁹ Cederman, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2023.

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 6. Here, we provide information on the Probabilistic Spatial Partition Model and the empirical research design. Additional information can be found in the original article and its online supplementary material.¹

S6.1 The Probabilistic Spatial Partition Model

The Model

We model the distribution over all possible partitionings P of lattice G as a Boltzmann distribution:²

$$Pr(P = p_i) = \frac{e^{-\epsilon_i}}{\sum_{i=1}^{|\mathbb{P}|} e^{-\epsilon_i}}, \quad (\text{S6.1})$$

where the realization probability of partitioning p_i decreases with its energy ϵ_i . The term energy reflects the origin of the Boltzmann distribution in modeling the condition of a system in statistical mechanics.³ Because systems typically move toward a low energy, low-energy partitionings have higher probabilities. Applied to the partitioning of space into states, we can interpret the energy ϵ_i as the sum of inter- and intrastate tensions that result from a given partitioning.

Figure S6.1 illustrates this intuition for a simple graph of four vertices. The plot maps five (out of twelve possible) partitionings, with “countries” shown as nodes’ color and number. Solid edges run within country borders and dashed ones across them. The top and bottom edges span across the red boundary between two ethnic groups, while the top and

¹ Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2025.

² We provide an accompanying open-source R package and code for handling spatial network data. Available at github.com/carl-mc/pspm and github.com/carl-mc/SpatialLattice.

³ E.g., Park and Newman 2004. The PSPM can be reformulated as an Exponential Random Graph Model, where $P(Y = y_i)$ is the probability of the realization of subgraph y_i of lattice G where y_i exclusively connects members of the same partition.

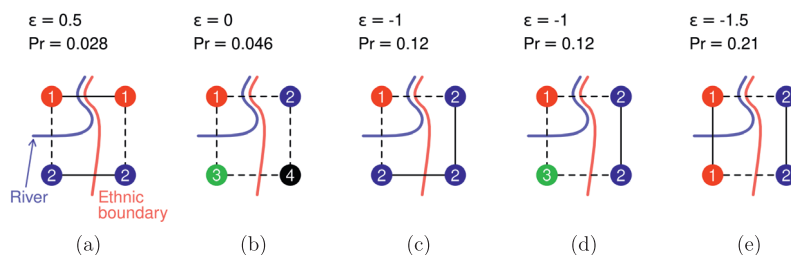


Figure S6.1 Illustration of the PSPM.

Note: See the main text for discussion. For illustrative purposes, we set parameters as $\beta_0 = -1$; $\beta_{\text{ethnic boundary}} = 1$, and $\beta_{\text{river}} = 0.5$. The potential energy of each edge (from top, clockwise) is therefore 0.5, -1, 0, and -0.5 (Eq. S6.4).

left edges cross the blue river. For illustrative purposes, we assume that political tensions ϵ result when states are too small (b, d), are multiethnic (a, c), or divided by the river (a, e). Intuitively, Eq. (S6.1) holds that partitionings with ubiquitous tensions on the left have a lower probability than those with less tension to the right. Note also the spatial consistency of the graph. We cannot, for example, switch the left edge in (a) from dashed to solid since this would make the partitioning intransitive.

We assume that a partitioning's total energy ϵ_i is determined by the sum of realized energies of the edges that connect all first-degree neighbor node pairs L on the lattice:⁴

$$\epsilon_i = \sum_{j,k \in L} \epsilon_{j,k} * s_{j,k}, \quad (\text{S6.2})$$

whereby the potential energy $\epsilon_{j,k}$ of the edge between nodes j and k is realized if j and k are part of the same partition ($s_{j,k} = 1$, solid lines in Figure S6.1) and is not realized if they are part of different partition ($s_{j,k} = 0$, dotted lines in Figure S6.1). Our empirical interest focuses on the determinants of each edge's potential energy:

$$\epsilon_{j,k} = \beta_0 + \beta \mathbf{x}_{j,k}, \quad (\text{S6.3})$$

which defines the potential energy ϵ of the edge between nodes j and k as the sum of a constant β_0 that captures the baseline repulsion between nodes and edge-level characteristics $\mathbf{x}_{j,k}$ weighted by the parameter vector β . In our case and as discussed in the next section, $\mathbf{x}_{j,k}$ includes the indicator ethnic boundary $_{j,k}$ and additional edge-level covariates. While

⁴ More complex total energy functions could account for higher-level predictors working, e.g., at the level of emerging partitions (e.g., their size) or the partitioning as a whole (e.g., number of partitions or their size distribution).

we have manually set the β parameters in Figure S6.1 for illustrative purposes, our empirical goal is to estimate them from the observed partitioning of Europe.

Because the realization probability of a partitioning decreases with its total energy (Eq. S6.1), coefficient estimates can be interpreted as follows: Variables associated with a positive estimate exert a *repulsive* force on nodes and increase the probability of them ending up in different partitions. Those with a negative estimate exert an *attractive* force, decreasing the chance that a border separates two points.

Applied to Figure S6.1 where we have manually set $\beta_{\text{ethnic boundary}} > \beta_{\text{river}}$, this means that ethnically aligned state territories have the highest probability (see panels d and e). Borders along the river in panel (c) have a reduced probability. Finally, because of a baseline attraction between nodes ($\beta_0 < 0$), partitionings with many small countries have a low likelihood (panels b and d).

Because edges' values of $s_{j,k}$ are interdependent, it is difficult to interpret coefficients directly. This holds except for *bridge edges* that connect two otherwise disjoint network parts (i.e., a peninsula with the continent) and can therefore independently switch $s_{j,k}$ without violating transitivity. For these edges, we can interpret coefficient estimates as in a logistic regression model, computing odds ratios, predicted probabilities, and marginal effects.⁵

Estimation and Uncertainty

We estimate the β -parameters in Eq. (S6.3) using a maximum composite likelihood approach.⁶ Here, the likelihood function is the product over the conditional probabilities of vertices' observed partition memberships, defined based on their neighbors' memberships. We implement a Gibbs sampler that follows this logic to sample from the set of possible partitionings $|\mathbb{P}_G|$ of graph G , given edge-level predictors $\mathbf{x}_{i,j}$ and known parameters β . The sampler allows us to derive standard errors from a parametric bootstrap.

Validation

We test the validity of inferences drawn from our model in an extensive series of Monte Carlo experiments. Our estimator is asymptotically unbiased in the size and number of independent networks across varying

⁵ See also Cranmer and Desmarais 2011, 73.

⁶ Lindsay 1988; Varin, Reid and Firth 2011.

β parameter combinations, and parametric bootstrapping produces consistent frequentist uncertainty estimates.

S6.2 Empirical Strategy

In response to the limitations in previous studies of geographic causes of state borders, we introduce a simplified understanding of space as a planar network G of N points. Discretizing space makes tractable the problem of analyzing the partitioning of a continuous surface, which otherwise has infinitely many possible outcomes. Coupled with the partition model introduced later, the network structure of the data allows us to capture the spatial dependencies that characterize borders. Taking a network of points guarantees that G 's vertices have unambiguous partition memberships. G covers Europe⁷ as a hexagonal lattice with 1096 nodes and 2905 edges. Its nodes j are connected to their up to six first-degree neighbors k at a distance of ~ 100 km (Figure 6.1a).⁸ To test H6.1, we estimate the effect of ethnic geography on the partitioning of our spatial lattice G_t into states specifying the edge-level energy function as:

$$\epsilon_{j,k,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ethnic boundary}_{j,k,t} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{j,k}, \quad (\text{S6.4})$$

where β_0 is the baseline repulsion between nodes and $\text{ethnic boundary}_{j,k,t}$ captures whether the nodes of an edge are located in different ethnic settlement areas. To avoid bias from omitted spatial features, $\mathbf{X}_{j,k}$ must capture factors that cause ethnic as well as state borders. We, therefore, include time-invariant indicators for the length of each edge, the size of the largest river⁹ and watershed¹⁰ crossed by an edge, and the mean elevation along it.¹¹ Taken together, these covariates capture important geographic causes of ethnic geography and state borders.¹² We scale all variables to range between 0 and 1 to ensure coefficients' comparability.

Our second analysis uses a lagged dependent variable (LDV) model to test whether ethnic boundaries affect border *change* such that both become increasingly congruent and address reverse causality as the main inferential threat affecting the baseline model. If ethnic settlement

⁷ We avoid state-based definitions and define Europe's eastern border from the Bosphorus, via the Black Sea, the Carpathian mountain ridge, the Caspian Sea, and the Ural.

⁸ This minimizes geographic distortion.

⁹ Based on a river size scale in the Natural Earth data that ranges from small rivers such as the Marne (scale 2) via the Thames (5) to large rivers like the Danube (9): www.naturalearthdata.com/downloads/10m-physical-vectors/10m-rivers-lake-centerlines/.

¹⁰ We derive an ordinal variable from Pfaffstetter watershed codes. Lehner, Verdin and Jarvis 2008.

¹¹ Hastings et al. 1999.

¹² E.g., Kitamura and Lagerlöf 2020.

patterns result from identity formation within state borders,¹³ the estimate of β_1 in Eq. (S6.4) could be systematically biased. We, therefore, account for past borders, leaving ethnic boundary to affect only border change:

$$\epsilon_{j,k,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ethnic boundary}_{j,k,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{state border}_{j,k,t-1} + \beta_3 \text{deep lag}_{j,k} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{j,k}, \quad (\text{S6.5})$$

where we model edges' potential energy in period t as depending on ethnic and state borders twenty-five years earlier in $t - 1$. In other words, to explain state borders in 1936, we control for state borders in 1911 and construct ethnic boundary $_{j,k,t-1}$ from ethnic maps drawn between 1860 and 1910. Because ethnic boundaries are measured in data from the fifty years preceding the lagged dependent variable, border change between $t - 1$ and t cannot impact ethnic boundary $_{j,k,t-1}$. This avoids bias from reverse causality.

Furthermore, borders in the deep historical past may have caused ethnic boundaries and may form precedents for "new" borders.¹⁴ To avoid such omitted variable bias, we add a "deep lag" of state borders, the share of years in which an edge crosses a border in AD 1100, 1200, . . . , 1600, and 1790.¹⁵ Because we lack early nineteenth century ethnic maps, we cannot estimate the LDV model for the 1886 outcome data.

We first estimate our baseline and LDV models on the pooled sample of all periods. In a second step, we estimate separate models for each period to gauge the temporal variation of ethnic geography's effects. Throughout, we use a parametric bootstrap to derive confidence intervals.

S6.3 Robustness Analysis

We conducted a series of robustness checks of the analysis in Chapter 6. The results can be found in the original article and its online supplementary material. These tests assess differential effects of ethnic boundaries on border emergence and persistence, as well as potential bias from temporal dynamics in the lagged dependent variable specification that is not considered by the modeling framework. The tests also considered robustness with respect to the ethnic maps and linguistic distance.

¹³ E.g., Hobsbawm 1990.

¹⁴ Abramson and Carter 2016; Simmons 2005.

¹⁵ Data are drawn from Abramson 2017 and stop in 1790.

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 7. While most of the data specifications can be found in Chapter 3, here we provide information on the regression models and variable definitions.

S7.1 Data Description

Units of Analysis and Main Independent Variables

Spatially intersecting the aggregate group polygons with yearly data on European state borders drawn from the CShapes Europe dataset yields our main unit of analysis – ethnic segments years (*ect*) starting in 1816. For each segment year, as well as for the country and aggregate group years in which it is nested, we calculate absolute area in km² (square kilometers) to derive size-based control variables. Wherever ethnic polygons intersect, we equally divide the area among all locally overlapping segments assuming mixed settlements. The sample is restricted to ethnic segments that are larger than 500 km² and thus eliminates tiny units that emerge due to cartographic or digitization errors.

We assign dichotomous indicators for home vs. alien rule and national unity vs. division to each segment year. Home rule applies to the ethnic segment that holds most power in the respective country's capital in a given year. The largest ethnic segment that contains the capital serves as our first guess complemented by manually correction wherever necessary.

Division is present wherever an ethnic segment has a transborder ethnic kin segment. Combining values on alien rule and division allows us to operationalize the configurations illustrated in Figure 7.1. The nation-state ideal of united home rule serves as the baseline category. united alien rule apply to all segment years governed by a non-coethnic group but without transborder ethnic links. divided home rule captures governing segments that have governing or non-governing peers abroad. For segments with alien rule and division, we further distinguish whether the

foreign kin segment enjoys home rule or is also affected by alien rule to differentiate between partial home rule and divided alien rule.

Our analyses of territorial claims and interstate disputes use directed country dyad-years as the unit of analyses and require aggregating the ethnic segment data to this level. As argued earlier, nationalist interstate conflict requires division combined with home rule on at least one side of the border. As a result, the dyadic interstate analyses only use proxies for divided home rule and partial home rule.¹ Again, the nation-state ideal, that is a dyad-year in which the governing group in country A does not have a kin segment in state B, constitutes the baseline for comparison.

Conflict Outcomes and Two-Level Dynamics

This section offers more detailed information complementing the overview on conflict data in Section S7.1. Chapter 7 features three distinct outcome variables to operationalize intrastate and interstate conflict:

- First, we code a dummy of ethnic civil war onsets at the ethnic segment-year level covering the period 1816–2017 (see also Section 3.4). For the post-1945 period, we use existing data from UCDP/PRIO² linked to ethnic groups via the ACD2EPR dataset.³ We manually matched the post-1945 EPR conflict groups to the corresponding groups in our analysis data. For the period 1816–1945, we identify all civil wars listed in the datasets provided by Gleditsch⁴ and Sarkees and Wayman⁵ that correspond to the post-1945 definitional criteria of UCDP/PRIO and are fought in the name of a specific ethnic group. The coding rules are the same as in the ACD2EPR dataset, requiring explicit ethnic claims and recruitment from a particular ethnic group. The main analyses rely on an onset dummy that includes both territorial and governmental civil wars.
- Second, territorial claim onsets with coverage until 2001 are defined at the level of directed country dyads.⁶
- Third, the dyadic militarized interstate dispute (MID) dataset codes dispute initiation at the level of directed country dyad-years.⁷

¹ We identify all dyad-years in which the politically dominant ethnic segment in country A has a kin segment in country B and distinguish kin segments under home rule (divided home rule) from those under partial home rule.

² Gleditsch et al. 2002.

³ Wucherpfennig et al. 2012.

⁴ Gleditsch 2004.

⁵ Sarkees and Wayman 2010.

⁶ Frederick, Hensel and Macaulay 2017.

⁷ Maoz et al. 2019.

Combining information on interstate conflict, ethnic rebellion, and transborder ethnic kin relations allows to test H7.3a and H7.3b. In the civil war analysis, we identify all segment-years in which a specific ethnic segment *ect* has state-owning ethnic kin abroad, and there were territorial claims and/or militarized disputes between the ethnically related foreign government and the ethnically distinct host government in the past. We construct the variable past interstate trouble (host vs. TEK) as the total years with ongoing territorial claims or MIDs between 1816 and year $t - 1$. The idea is to capture governing groups' claims, fears, and grievances about potential fifth columns within the country. Repressive or assimilationist policies taken by the host government to address such fears are expected to make ethnic rebellion more likely. For the dyadic interstate conflict sample, we code all dyad-years in which the state-leading segment in country A has powerless ethnic kin abroad who violently challenged their ethnically distinct host government in country B. The variable past civil war (TEK vs. host) counts the years between 1816 and $t - 1$ with ongoing civil war of this type.

S7.2 Regression Tables for the Main Analysis of the European Sample

Table S7.1 reports our main results. Odd-numbered models show simple baseline regressions, while even-numbered models add country and border duration fixed effects. The coefficients for united alien rule, partial home rule, and divided alien rule yield positive and statistically significant coefficients across all three specifications and strongly support H7.1a, H7.1b, and H7.1c, respectively. As expected, division on its own does not significantly increase conflict risk relative to the nation-state ideal (row 2). When combined with partial home rule or alien rule, however, it does, as both relevant coefficients are significant and significantly larger than the one for united alien rule. The substantive sizes of these estimates are meaningful. In the most demanding specification (model 4), all configurations involving alien rule are associated with a 1.11–1.47-percentage point higher risk of civil war amounting to a 420–542 percent increase from the sample mean (onset in 0.27 percent of all ethnic segment years). Finally, we only find very limited support for H7.3a. While positive and close to statistical significance at the 10 percent interval, the estimated coefficient on past interstate trouble remains substantively small. A one standard deviation increase in past conflict between a segment's host government and an ethnically related foreign government (10.5 years) increases the probability of ethnic civil war by an additional 0.045 percentage points (16 percent relative to baseline) beyond partial home rule without past conflict across borders.

Table S7.1 *OLS models of ethnic civil-war onset, Europe 1816–2017.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Ethnic civil war onset \times 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
United alien rule	0.8802* (0.4127)	1.106* (0.4670)	0.8587* (0.3970)	1.109* (0.4552)
Divided home rule	0.1102+ (0.0653)	0.2242 (0.1469)	0.1087 (0.0657)	0.2339 (0.1489)
Partial home rule	1.199* (0.5113)	1.482** (0.5477)	1.133* (0.4796)	1.448** (0.5192)
Divided alien rule	1.237* (0.4980)	1.458** (0.5340)	1.221* (0.4845)	1.466** (0.5239)
Past interstate trouble (host vs. TEK)			0.0046 (0.0031)	0.0043 (0.0027)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country		Yes		Yes
Border duration		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	33,726	33,726	33,726	33,726
R^2	0.04445	0.04980	0.04453	0.04985
Within R^2	0.00574	0.00328	0.00582	0.00334

Notes: OLS estimates of ethnic civil war onsets. The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. Control Variables not shown: Relative territorial size of segment relative to state-leading segment, country and aggregate group territorial size (km², logged), distance to capital (km, logged), and past civil war incidence (total years). Standard errors clustered on country and aggregate ethnic group in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

Territorial Claims

The baseline models use all European country dyads but drop micro states not covered in the Correlates Of War (COW) list of independent states and the territorial claims data. A dummy for territorial claims made by country A against country B multiplied by 100 serves as the dependent variable. Our main predictors indicate whether the governing ethnic group in country A has a kin segment in country B that does or does not hold power (divided home rule vs. partial home rule). In addition, we use the variable past civil war (TEK vs. host) to assess whether past conflict between the governing group in country B and an ethnic kin segment of the state-leading group in country A makes irredentist territorial claims of A against B more likely.

Table S7.2 *OLS models of territorial claim onset, Europe 1816–2001.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Territorial claim onset \times 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Divided home rule	−0.1678** (0.0617)	0.0004 (0.0783)	−0.1695** (0.0616)	−0.0053 (0.0769)
Partial home rule	0.2875* (0.1322)	0.3878* (0.1506)	0.2261+ (0.1212)	0.3276* (0.1377)
Past civil war (TEK vs. host)			0.2007*** (0.0256)	0.1748*** (0.0377)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country A		Yes		Yes
Country B		Yes		Yes
Border duration A		Yes		Yes
Border duration B		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	161,198	161,198	161,198	161,198
R^2	0.01536	0.01864	0.01596	0.01906
Within R^2	0.00384	0.00299	0.00445	0.00342

Notes: OLS regressions of territorial claim onsets. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Control variables not shown: Territorial balance between countries A and B, country size of country B (km², logged), aggregate group sizes of state-leading ethnic groups in countries A and B (km², logged), minimum distance between countries A and B (km, logged), neighboring dyad dummy, and past territorial claim incidence (total years). Standard errors clustered on dyad, country A, and country B in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

The results are presented in Table S7.2. If anything, divided home rule reduces the risk of territorial claims (models 1 and 3), but these estimates drop to zero and lose significance in the more demanding fixed effects specifications (models 2 and 4). Even if their aggregate ethnic group is divided by country borders, governments seem to shy away from making claims against ethnically related peers abroad which confirms H7.2a. When division coincides with partial home rule H7.2b, however, the probability of territorial claims is significantly higher. Based on model 4, this configuration is associated with a 0.33–percentage point higher risk amounting to a 189 percent increase from the baseline probability of 0.17 territorial claim onsets in 100 directed dyad years. As expected by H7.2b, partial home rule appears even more dangerous if there was an intrastate conflict in country B, pitting ethnic kin of the governing group in state A against an ethnically distinct host government. More

Table S7.3 *Dyadic MID initiation, Europe 1816–2014.*

Dependent variable: Model:	MID initiation \times 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Divided home rule	−0.3926*** (0.1103)	−0.2013* (0.0896)	−0.3925*** (0.1104)	−0.2045* (0.0888)
Partial home rule & division	0.3386+ (0.1707)	0.3733* (0.1764)	0.2910+ (0.1679)	0.3339+ (0.1734)
Past civil war (TEK vs. host)			0.1492*** (0.0194)	0.1101** (0.0335)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country A		Yes		Yes
Country B		Yes		Yes
Border duration A		Yes		Yes
Border duration B		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	188,210	188,210	188,210	188,210
R^2	0.03140	0.03682	0.03155	0.03689
Within R^2	0.01339	0.00541	0.01354	0.00549

Notes: OLS regressions of dyadic MID initiation. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Control variables not shown: Territorial balance between countries A and B, country size of country B (km², logged), aggregate group sizes of state-leading ethnic groups in countries A and B (km², logged), minimum distance between countries A and B (km, logged), neighboring dyad dummy, and past MID incidence in the dyad (total years). Standard errors clustered on dyad, country A, and country B in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

specifically, a one standard deviation increase in past civil war (TEK vs. host) (0.53 years) predicts a 0.17 percentage point higher probability of A claiming territory in B, which adds another 53 percent increase relative to the sample mean to the estimate for partial home rule.

Militarized Interstate Disputes

The specifications, main predictors, control variables, and fixed effects remain the same as in the territorial claim models discussed in the previous paragraphs. The only notable difference is the observation period, which now lasts until 2014, the most recent year included in the MID data.

Table S7.3 reports all relevant coefficient estimates and their corresponding standard errors. In line with the territorial claim analysis given

earlier, we find, if anything, negative coefficients for divided home rule. Even if there might be a desire to overcome division and unify coethnic states, governments seem to be less likely to take military action against their coethnic peers abroad. Partial home rule, on the other hand, is associated with a substantial increase in the risk of military dispute initiation that is, however, only significant at the 0.1 level. The estimate of 0.33 percentage points in model 4 amounts to an 89 percent increase from the sample mean of 0.37 initiated MID's per 100 directed dyad-years. Finally, past ethnic rebellion in country B by a group with an ethnic link to the state-leading segment in A significantly raises the chance of state A initiating military action against state B (H7.3b). An increase in past civil war (TEK vs. host) of one standard deviation predicts 0.06 percentage points more interstate disputes which is equivalent to a 15 percent increase relative to the baseline risk (last row in Figure 7.5). The sum of coefficients for partial home rule and past civil war (TEK vs. host) is significant at the 5 percent level, indicating that the Macedonian syndrome is particularly likely to generate interstate conflict where ethnic kin of one state have rebelled against the other.

S7.3 Regression Tables for the Main Analysis of the Global Sample

Civil Conflict

Table S7.4 shows the results of linear probability models of ethnic rebellion onset in the global sample. Just as in the European analysis, all configurations involving alien rule significantly increase the risk of conflict onset. In model 4, united alien rule (H7.1a) is associated with a 0.68-percentage point higher risk of rebellion or, substantively speaking a 98 percent increase from the sample mean. The corresponding effect for partial home rule (H7.1b) is an 1.11 pp increase (+ 160 percent from the mean), while divided alien rule is linked to (H7.1c) an 1.06 pp higher conflict risk (+ 153 percent from the mean). Division, while insignificant for groups enjoying home rule, continues to reinforce conflict risk above and beyond the effect of alien rule on united ethnic groups.⁸ Compared to the European sample, the effect of previously observed interstate conflict (H7.3a) for divided segments with partial home rule is substantively even smaller and now far from statistical significance.

⁸ The coefficient for divided alien rule is significantly larger than the one on united alien rule across all four models. These relatively strong results on simple division proxies stand in some contrast with previous studies that find no straightforward effects of transborder ethnic kin, see, e.g., Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009.

Table S7.4 *OLS models of civil-war onset, global sample 1946–2017/1946–2002.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Ethnic civil war onset \times 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
United alien rule	0.4556** (0.1595)	0.5146** (0.1780)	0.5998** (0.1840)	0.6764** (0.2265)
Divided home rule	0.1317 (0.1051)	0.1102 (0.2401)	0.0639 (0.1154)	0.0818 (0.2450)
Partial home rule	0.9528*** (0.2327)	0.8854** (0.2847)	1.059*** (0.2588)	1.105** (0.3358)
Divided alien rule	0.9254*** (0.1906)	0.8258*** (0.2082)	1.057*** (0.2167)	1.057*** (0.2845)
Past interstate trouble (host vs. TEK)			0.0126 (0.0125)	0.0130 (0.0156)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peacyears	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country		Yes		Yes
Border duration		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	38,131	38,131	28,129	28,129
R^2	0.02551	0.04390	0.02537	0.04977
Within R^2	0.00796	0.00169	0.00986	0.00204

Notes: OLS estimates of civil war onsets. The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. Control variables not shown: Country and aggregate group territorial size (km², logged), distance to capital (km, logged), and past civil war incidence (total years). Standard errors clustered on country and aggregate group in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

Interstate Claims and Disputes

We now shift the focus from the ethnic segment to the interstate level. As in the European models, directed dyad-years serve as a unit of analysis. Following the theoretical logic introduced in Figure 7.1, we use the ethnic group in power of country A to identify nationality problems in the respective directed dyad-year.

Table S7.5 presents results using territorial claims as the dependent variable. Just as in the European models mentioned earlier, there is no effect for divided home rule but strong evidence that partial home rule significantly increases the risk of territorial claims (H7.2b). Surprisingly, however, the effect of past civil wars of country A's TEK segments in B is negative and significant, which goes against the intuition of the

Table S7.5 *OLS models of territorial claim onset, global sample 1945–2001.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Terr. claim onset \times 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Divided home rule	0.0302 (0.0621)	0.0332 (0.0636)	0.0300 (0.0621)	0.0319 (0.0636)
Partial home rule	0.1719* (0.0816)	0.1748* (0.0855)	0.2119* (0.0861)	0.2137* (0.0899)
Past civil war (TEK of A in B)			−0.0789** (0.0295)	−0.0784** (0.0286)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country A		Yes		Yes
Country B		Yes		Yes
Border duration A		Yes		Yes
Border duration B		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	953,748	953,748	953,748	953,748
R^2	0.00821	0.00975	0.00830	0.00983
Within R^2	0.00527	0.00506	0.00535	0.00514

Notes: OLS estimates of territorial claim onsets. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Control variables not shown: Territorial balance between countries A and B, country size of country B (km², logged), aggregate group sizes of state-leading ethnic groups in countries A and B (km², logged), minimum distance between countries A and B (km, logged), neighboring dyad dummy, and past territorial claim incidence (total years). Standard errors clustered on dyad, country A, and country B in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

Macedonian syndrome (H7.3b). A closer look at substantive effect sizes (see Figure 7.7) is instructive here. Territorial claims are generally a rare event, in particular, in the post-World War II era, where we only observe 265 cases in our sample, which translates into an average of 0.028 claims per 100 directed dyad-years. However, if we differentiate between dyads with partial home rule versus dyads without, the effect of ethnic kinship as a main driver of territorial claims becomes apparent. For non-irredentist dyads, the mean of claim onsets is a mere 0.016 per 100 directed dyad-years. In contrast, in dyads with the Macedonian constellation, the average rises to 0.389 territorial claims per 100 directed dyad-years. This stark difference is reflected in the large relative substantive effect in Figure 7.7.

The figure also contextualizes the counterintuitive finding of past civil war. While the negative effect goes against our theoretical expectations and the results we found for the European sample, the substantive effect is very small. In the European models, an increase of one standard deviation in past civil war years corresponds to an increase of 0.09 percentage points in onset probability, whereas in the global sample, one standard deviation increase (0.22 years) is estimated to reduce the probability of a territorial claim by state A in a given year, yet only by 0.015 percentage points.

Next, we turn to the initiation of MIDs. The results are shown in Table S7.6. Similar to the European results, divided home rule does not increase the risk of MID initiation. In striking contrast to the European analysis, however, we find no support for H7.2b, nor for H7.3b.

Table S7.6 *OLS models of MID initiation, global sample 1945–2014.*

Dependent variable: Model:	MID initiation × 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Divided home rule	0.1660 (0.1418)	0.2010 (0.1322)	0.1677 (0.1437)	0.2010 (0.1338)
Partial home rule	0.0790 (0.1893)	0.0913 (0.1964)	0.1692 (0.1909)	0.1841 (0.1964)
Past civil war (TEK of A in B)			−0.1053 ⁺ (0.0584)	−0.1095 ⁺ (0.0593)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country A		Yes		Yes
Country B		Yes		Yes
Border duration A		Yes		Yes
Border duration B		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	1,331,926	1,331,926	1,331,926	1,331,926
R ²	0.05431	0.05796	0.05436	0.05801
Within R ²	0.04358	0.03354	0.04364	0.03360

Notes: OLS estimates of dyadic MID initiation. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Control variables not shown: Territorial balance between countries A and B, country size of country B (km², logged), aggregate group sizes of state-leading ethnic groups in countries A and B (km², logged), minimum distance between countries A and B (km, logged), neighboring dyad dummy, and past MID incidence in the dyad (total years). Standard errors clustered on dyad, country A, and country B in parentheses. Significance codes: ****p* < 0.001, ***p* < 0.01, **p* < 0.05, +*p* < 0.1.

Support for Ethnic Rebels as a Strategic Substitute?

We test the notion that support for rebels acts as a substitute for interstate conflict using the Non-State Armed Groups (NAGs) data.⁹ The NAGs data codes, for all rebel groups from the UCDP/PRIO intrastate conflict data, whether they receive external support from a foreign state in a given year. The captured support types go well beyond outright military intervention and also code the provision of safe havens, rebel headquarters, training, financing, as well as weapon deliveries and logistical support. We identify all cases in which an ethnic armed actor in

Table S7.7 *OLS models of ethnic rebel support, global sample 1945–2017.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Support for rebels in B × 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Divided home rule	−0.0366 (0.0268)	−0.0523 ⁺ (0.0307)	−0.0367 (0.0272)	−0.0523 ⁺ (0.0308)
Partial home rule	0.3777** (0.1239)	0.3706** (0.1250)	0.3732** (0.1236)	0.3674** (0.1238)
Past civil war (TEK of A in B)			0.0052 (0.0596)	0.0038 (0.0604)
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Peace years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country A		Yes		Yes
Country B		Yes		Yes
Border duration A		Yes		Yes
Border duration B		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	1,324,828	1,324,828	1,324,828	1,324,828
R^2	0.00860	0.00995	0.00860	0.00995
Within R^2	0.00204	0.00179	0.00204	0.00179

Notes: OLS estimates of country A supporting ethnic rebels in B. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Control variables not shown: Territorial balance between countries A and B, country size of country B (km², logged), aggregate group sizes of state-leading ethnic groups in countries A and B (km², logged), minimum distance between countries A and B (km, logged), neighboring dyad dummy, and past rebel support incidence (total years). Standard errors clustered on dyad, country A, and country B in parentheses. Significance codes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ⁺ $p < 0.1$.

⁹ San-Akca 2016.

country B, as identified in the NAGs data, starts to receive at least one type of state support from state A.¹⁰ A corresponding dummy variable serves as the outcome in directed dyadic models equivalent to the analyses given earlier.

Summarizing our findings, Table S7.7 shows that governments are significantly more likely to support rebels abroad if they have politically nondominant ethnic kin in the respective target state (partial home rule).

S7.4 Robustness Analysis

A complete set of robustness analyses can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.¹¹ There, we confirm the robustness of the main results for alternative dependent variables, including secessionist vs. governmental rebellions as well as fatal MIDs. A second robustness exercise augments the dyadic specifications with controls for past civil war in countries A and B that does not involve ethnic kin of A in B. Third, we recreate our datasets based on the earliest available map for each group to address concerns about the endogenous change in ethnic settlement patterns. All findings persist but the estimates for MIDs lose some precision. Fourth, distinguishing plausibly irredentist territorial claims from cases without an identity basis reveals that our findings are entirely driven by the former category. Fifth, we show that the civil war and territorial claim results are stronger for the pre-1946 period and get weaker or disappear post-World War II, whereas the coefficients in the MID models remain similar in both subsets. Finally, we analyze territorial claims at the level of targeted ethnic segments rather than directed country dyads.

¹⁰ We restrict our focus to intentional state support and do not include cases of *de facto* support in which rebels establish safe havens or receive other support from a country without explicit permission or involvement of the government, see San-Akca 2016.

¹¹ Cederman, Pengl, Atzenhofer and Girardin 2024.

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 8. While most of the data specifications can be found in Chapter 3, here we provide information on regression models and variable definitions.

S8.1 Data and Operationalization

Historical State Borders

Spatial data covering state borders are drawn from the CShapes Europe dataset as introduced in Chapter 3. While our analysis period starts in 1816, coding lost golden ages requires data on state borders that go further back in time. Scott Abramson's dataset of historical European state borders covers 1100 to 1790 in five-year intervals.¹ Abramson's data allow us to identify potential golden-age polities between 1100 and any year $t - 1$ between 1816 and 2017.²

Ethnic Segment Years

Spatially intersecting the aggregate group polygons e with the borders of European state c in years t yields our main unit of analysis: ethnic segment years (ect) starting in 1816 (see, e.g., the three 1863 Polish segments in Figure 8.4). For each segment year, we calculate absolute area as well as territorial shares in the country and aggregate group in which the respective segment is nested. Wherever ethnic segment or aggregate group polygons overlap, we equally divide the relevant area between intersecting polygon parts.³

¹ Abramson 2017.

² There are no reliable data on country borders for the chaotic Napoleonic era between 1790 and 1816.

³ All baseline analyses rely exclusively on territorial information to restrict temporal variation to border change or changing ethnic settlement patterns, but the findings are robust to population-based data as well.

Most importantly, we assign dichotomous indicators for HOME RULE and NATIONAL UNITY to each segment year. HOME RULE is coded 1 for the ethnic segment that holds the most power in the respective country's capital. The largest ethnic segment that contains the capital serves as our first guess, which we manually corrected when necessary.

The nationalist ideal of unity requires that significant shares of an ethnic group's members find themselves in a common state. Complete national unity has hardly ever been achieved in Europe. The ethnic segment data enable us to calculate the territorial share of each segment in its aggregate group, which may or may not be composed of multiple segments in different states. We, therefore, define an admittedly arbitrary threshold for NATIONAL UNITY, requiring an ethnic segment to hold at least two-thirds of its aggregate group's total territory or population.

Coding Lost Home Rule and Lost Unity

Indicators for lost home rule, lost unity, and the combination of both for each segment-year *ect* are derived by comparing values on the home rule and unity dummies in year t to the respective values in all potential golden-age segments between 1100 and $t - 1$. These segments can be constructed by spatially intersecting the contemporaneous ethnic polygon of aggregate group e in year t with all country polygons between 1100 and $t - 1$. We further restrict the set of potential golden-age segments to those that spatially overlap with segment *ect* to ensure the geographic plausibility of restorative claims. Going back to the Polish example, the potential golden-age segment shown in Figure 8.4 comprises all Polish settlements in 1863 (shaded) within the 1620 borders of the Commonwealth (dashed line). This candidate segment overlaps with all three post-partition segments (A, B, and C) and thus serves as a valid historical reference point for all Polish segments in 1863.

We then assign home rule and unity dummies to all potential golden-age segments in the same vein as for the post-1816 data just described and compare the maximum across all identified potential golden ages to the current value in *ect*. The powerless and divided Polish segments (A, B, and C) in 1863 are affected by lost home rule and lost unity, as the 1620 golden-age segment comprised more than 67 percent of the 1863 Polish settlement areas, and we code the Polish as the most plausible "ruling group" of the Commonwealth. We repeat this procedure for all segment-years *ect* and code an indicator for any kind of golden-age loss (i.e., lost home rule *or* lost unity) as well as mutually exclusive dummies for lost home rule only (transition 1), lost unity only (transition 2), and both (transition 3). These indicators serve as the main independent variables in our analysis of ethnic civil wars.

For our analyses of interstate disputes and territorial claims, we slightly adapt the procedure to operationalize transition 3b (lost unity combined with lost home rule on one side of the border). Since these analyses use country dyad-years as the unit of analysis, it is necessary to aggregate our ethnic segment data to this level. We do so by identifying all dyad-years in which the politically dominant ethnic segment in country c_a (e.g., segment A in Figure 8.5) has a powerless kin segment in country c_b (B and C in Figure 8.5) and both of these segments spatially overlap with a potential golden-age segment (here, all 1863 Romanian settlements within the 1600 Wallachian/Romanian borders).

The requirement that both the dominant and the powerless segment in year t overlap with the politically independent golden-age segment in t_{ga} implies at least some division due to past border change. In such cases, lost home rule and lost unity go together. We repeat this procedure for all state-ruling ethnic segments in the post-1816 data to code lost golden ages at the level of directed country dyads. In our Romanian example, this variable is coded 1 for the Romanian–Habsburg and Romanian–Russian dyads in 1916 but 0 for the reverse dyads (Habsburg–Romanian and Russian–Romanian). We use the same procedure to operationalize transition 2b (lost unity only) involving two coethnic segments that govern two independent states but were part of a more unified independent state at t_{ga} in the past.

Again, our operationalization of nationalist golden ages does not rely on essentialist claims that our candidate segments accurately reflect any kind of ethnic population distribution in the deep Middle Ages. The accuracy of the historical border data is obviously more important, but even here, nationalists project modern notions of territoriality and neat demarcation lines onto geographically much fuzzier political units. We merely assume that the historical border data get the rough contours and spheres of influence of premodern polities right.

Conflict Outcomes

This chapter features the same three distinct outcome variables to operationalize intrastate and interstate conflict as Chapter 7. The reader is referred to Section S7.1 and Chapter 3 for details on the operationalization.

S8.2 Analyses and Results

Chapter 8 presents the main findings with effect diagrams (see Figure 8.6). Here, we offer details on model specifications and estimation methods and show full regression tables.

Ethnic Civil War

Our first set of analyses investigates civil war onset at the ethnic segment-year level. We restrict the sample to all nondominant ethnic segment years between 1816 and 2017, as our ethnic-conflict coding does not involve dominant ethnic groups rebelling against their ethnic peers in power. We present ordinary least squares linear probability models with year and, except for the first specification, country fixed effects. All models control for segment size relative to the state-leading ethnic group, a divided-group dummy for all segments with transborder ethnic kin, a national-unity dummy coded 1 for all segments comprising more than two-thirds of their aggregate groups' territory, and fixed effects for the time since last conflict and the calendar year. The sample restriction to politically nondominant segments and the controls for transborder ethnic links ensure that we capture the effects of our lost-golden-age proxies above and beyond the contemporary values of division and exclusion prominently highlighted in the literature.⁴ In additional models, we extend the set of control variables and add absolute country, aggregate group, and segment size (in km²), country-level ethnic fractionalization, aggregate group-level territorial fractionalization, and distance to the capital. These extended models also include segment-specific civil war history and fixed effects for years since the last border change affecting the host country since 1816 to account for likely sources of recent instability and conflict persistence that may confound our estimates.

Table S8.1 presents our findings. In a first test of Hypothesis H8.1, model 1 shows that ethnic segments that can claim LOST HOME RULE OR LOST UNITY are significantly more likely to rebel. Adding country fixed effects (model 2) and the extended set of controls (model 3) marginally increases the coefficient size and results in more precise estimates. In substantive terms, the coefficient in the most restrictive specification (model 3) implies that LOST HOME RULE OR LOST UNITY is associated with a 146-percent increase from the sample mean of 0.23 ethnic civil war onsets per 100 segment years (see row 1 in Figure 8.6 for a graphical illustration of effect size). Model 4 includes the disaggregated indicators for lost golden ages that correspond to transitions 1, 2, and 3, respectively. All three variables enter with positive and statistically significant coefficients. By disaggregating Hypothesis H8.1, we see that lost home rule, lost unity, and the combination of both increase the risk of ethnic rebellion. As expected, the estimated effect of lost unity only is substantively smaller than for the transitions involving past home rule. Finally, we investigate whether premodern golden ages make a difference beyond the cases of Poland and Romania mentioned earlier.

⁴ Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016.

Table S8.1 *OLS models of civil war onset in ethnic group segments, 1816–2017.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Ethnic civil war onset \times 100				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Variables</i>					
Lost home rule or lost unity	0.2783* (0.1055)	0.3352*** (0.0943)	0.3369** (0.1059)		
Lost home rule only				0.3947** (0.1238)	
Lost unity only				0.2005* (0.0945)	
Lost home rule and lost unity				0.3155** (0.1027)	
Lost home rule or lost unity (after 1816)					0.4470** (0.1546)
Lost home rule or lost unity (before 1816)					0.2545* (0.1046)
<i>Control variables and fixed effects</i>					
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peace year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Border duration FE			Yes	Yes	Yes
Baseline controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extended controls			Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	40,142	40,142	40,142	40,142	39,971

Notes: OLS estimates of civil war onsets. The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. Baseline controls: segment area relative to state-leading group, transborder ethnic kin dummy, and national unity dummy. Extended controls: logged country, aggregate group, and segment size in km²; ethnic fractionalization of country and aggregate group; logged distance to capital; war history (past years with ongoing civil war); time since last border change (FE). Standard errors clustered on country (108 AG, 50 country clusters) and aggregate ethnic group in parentheses.

Significance codes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Model 5 distinguishes between relatively recent (post-1816) and historically deep (pre-1816) golden ages. Both estimates are positive and significant, suggesting that our results are not merely explained by short-term revisionism but, as theoretically expected, also reflect mobilization around premodern reference points.

Territorial Claims

Turning to interstate conflict, we first focus on identity-based territorial claim onset encoded for each directed country-dyad year in post-1816

Europe. Irredentist territorial claims can be seen as a first step toward armed confrontation but may or may not escalate to the level of violent MIDs. We again run linear probability models with and without fixed effects for country c_a (initiator) and country c_b (target). All specifications control for important baseline variables, including the relative size of c_a versus c_b , the absolute size of c_b , a neighboring-dyad dummy, and logged minimum distance between c_a and c_b . All models account for transborder ethnic links from the governing group in country c_a to country c_b .⁵ As a result, the coefficient of interest again separates the effect of golden-age loss from any independent impact of contemporary ethnic division. Additional specifications expand the set of control variables, adding the share of the dominant ethnic group in c_a that is present as a kin segment in c_b , the share of that group in its “own” state c_a , the absolute size of the state-leading aggregate groups in c_a and c_b across all their constitutive segments, war history, area-based ethnic fractionalization scores of c_a and c_b , and border duration fixed effects for both countries.

All estimates for LOST HOME RULE AND LOST UNITY reported in Table S8.2 are large, positive, and significant, again supporting H8.2. The substantive size of the lost-golden-age coefficient in model 3 amounts to a 413-percent increase in the probability of identity-related territorial claims as compared to the average across dyad-years (see row 3 in Figure 8.6). The temporal disaggregation into separate coefficients for historically recent and deep golden ages reveals that both matter and that, if anything, the latter category yields stronger results.

Militarized Interstate Disputes

Second, we focus on fatal MID initiation encoded for each directed country-dyad year in post-1816 Europe. The unit of analysis is again the directed country dyad-year, as we know the state that claims territory from its counterpart. The baseline and control variables are equivalent to the previous MID analysis.

The results are summarized in Table S8.3 and reveal positive and significant coefficients for LOST HOME RULE AND LOST UNITY across all four specifications. The specification with fixed effects and all controls (model 3) suggests that this particular type of golden-age loss is associated with a 320-percent increase in the risk of fatal MID initiation from the sample mean (see row 2 in Figure 8.6). These findings confirm that lost unity combined with the partially lost home rule within a country dyad makes dyadic conflict more likely, as predicted by H8.2. The

⁵ We code two separate indicators to distinguish between politically dominant and excluded ethnic kin of c_a 's governing group in c_b .

Table S8.2 *OLS models of ethnic territorial claims in directed dyads, 1816–2001.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Ethnic terr. claim onset × 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Lost home rule and lost unity	0.2820* (0.1065)	0.3482** (0.1162)	0.3488** (0.1171)	
Lost home rule and lost unity (post-1816)				0.2532* (0.1105)
Lost home rule and lost unity (pre-1816)				0.4942** (0.1698)
Lost unity only	0.1008 (0.0945)	0.0914 (0.1318)	0.1068 (0.1371)	
Lost unity only (post-1816)				0.0441 (0.1467)
Lost unity only (pre-1816)				0.1838 (0.1369)
<i>Control variables and fixed effects</i>				
Baseline controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extended controls			Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peace year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State A FE		Yes	Yes	Yes
State B FE		Yes	Yes	Yes
Border duration A FE			Yes	Yes
Border duration B FE			Yes	Yes
Observations	161,198	161,198	161,198	161,198

Notes: OLS estimates of territorial claim initiation (identity-based claims). See the note to Table S8.3. Standard errors clustered on dyad, state A, and state B in parentheses (59 country A/B, 2820 dyad clusters). Significance codes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

separation of modern from premodern golden ages results in similarly sized and statistically highly significant coefficients (model 4). As theoretically expected, LOST UNITY ONLY does not lead to more disputes between conational state governments. With the exception of the pre-modern coefficient in model 4, the estimated coefficients remain small and statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table S8.3 *OLS models of fatal MID initiation in directed country dyads, 1816–2014.*

Dependent variable: Model:	Fatal MID onset × 100			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Lost home rule and lost unity	0.1339*** (0.0234)	0.1945*** (0.0336)	0.1889*** (0.0327)	
Lost home rule and lost unity (post-1816)				0.1738*** (0.0268)
Lost home rule and lost unity (pre-1816)				0.2058** (0.0732)
Lost unity only	0.0446 (0.0462)	0.0562 (0.0448)	0.0542	(0.0426)
Lost unity only (post-1816)				0.0222 (0.0476)
Lost unity only (pre-1816)				0.0988* (0.0392)
<i>Control variables and fixed effects</i>				
Baseline controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extended controls			Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peace year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State A FE		Yes	Yes	Yes
State B FE		Yes	Yes	Yes
Border duration A FE			Yes	Yes
Border duration B FE			Yes	Yes
Observations	188,210	188,210	188,210	188,210

Notes: OLS estimates of fatal MID initiation. The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. Baseline controls: relative territorial size of state A vs. state B; logged absolute size of country B; indicators for whether the governing group in A has governing or powerless kin segment in B; and dummies for peace and calendar years. Extended controls: logged aggregate group size of governing segments in A and B; ethnic fractionalization of A and B; share of aggregate group governing in state A located in state B; share of aggregate group governing in state A located in own country; conflict history (number of past years with ongoing MIDs involving A and B); and time since last border change involving A or B (FE). Standard errors clustered on dyad, state A, and state B in parentheses (60 country A/B, 2954 dyad clusters). Significance codes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

S8.3 Timing of Interstate Conflicts

We expect nationalist leaders to perceive periods of systemic instability as windows of opportunity to achieve their revisionist goals. Scott

Abramson and David Carter provide a summary measure combining information on annual changes in European great powers' military capabilities, inflationary crises, civil wars, interstate wars, proxy wars, and shifting alliances.⁶

We extend the fully specified dyadic baseline model in Tables S8.3 and S8.2 with an interaction between LOST HOME RULE AND LOST UNITY and a dichotomous indicator identifying all dyad-years with above-median values of REGIONAL INSTABILITY for country A. All dyad-years involving major European powers are dropped to ensure that the outcome variables do not overlap with the great-power-based instability measure. Results for fatal MIDs and territorial claims are reported in models 1 and 3, respectively, of Table S8.4. The constitutive term of our lost-golden-age variable shrinks in size and becomes statistically insignificant in both models. The interaction terms, however, indicate positive, statistically significant, and substantively very large marginal effects in years of regional instability. In line with our expectations and the findings of Abramson and Carter, nationalist leaders act on their revisionist goals primarily during strategically favorable windows of opportunity.

Second, official government ideology should affect when and where lost golden ages predict revisionist interstate conflict. Throughout this paper, we have argued that nationalist leaders are the most important actors in crafting restorative narratives that call for violent mobilization. As a result, available historical reference points should matter more where governments share or at least instrumentally use nationalist ideologies to legitimate their actions. If our historical golden-age proxies similarly affect conflict initiation by non-nationalist governments, we may have to worry that mechanisms other than nationalist mobilization frames and grievances are driving our results. The V-Dem database provides country-year data starting in 1900 on whether state governments promote specific ideologies to justify their rule.⁷ We use these data to identify all dyad-years in which the government of potential conflict initiator A explicitly promotes nationalist ideology and interact the corresponding dummy variable with our proxy for lost national golden ages.

The results, reported in models 2 and 4 of Table S8.4, suggest that lost golden ages mainly predict fatal MID and territorial claim onset when challenger state A has a nationalist government. The constitutive term of LOST HOME RULE AND LOST UNITY is significantly smaller but still significant for MIDs (model 2) and statistically indistinguishable from

⁶ We use the geographically weighted version of Abramson and Carter's 2021 measure to test whether regional systemic instability amplifies the effect of lost national golden ages on interstate conflict.

⁷ Tannenber et al. 2019.

Table S8.4 OLS models of golden ages and interstate conflict: timing.

Dependent variable: Model:	MID × 100		TC × 100	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Lost home rule and lost unity (Config. 3b)	0.0856 (0.0928)	0.1341* (0.0566)	0.0080 (0.0607)	0.2479 (0.1495)
Lost unity only (Config. 2b)	0.0425 (0.0655)	0.0852 (0.0884)	0.0922 (0.2244)	−0.1082 (0.1883)
Regional instability	−0.0243 (0.0270)		−0.0722 (0.0709)	
Nationalist government		−0.0152 (0.0261)		−0.0440 (0.0588)
Lost home rule and lost unity × Regional instability	0.3116* (0.1489)		1.020** (0.3222)	
Lost home rule and lost unity × Nationalist government		0.5056** (0.1843)		0.9427* (0.3670)
Lost unity only × Regional instability	0.0314 (0.0266)		0.1868 (0.1203)	
Lost unity only × Nationalist government		−0.0676 (0.1324)		0.6357+ (0.3684)
<i>Marginal effects</i>				
Config. 3b + Config. 3b × Reg. instab.	0.3972* (0.1542)		1.0277** (0.3132)	
Config. 2b + Config. 2b × Reg. instab.	0.0739 (0.0642)		0.2790 (0.2196)	
Config. 3b + Config. 3b × Nationalist gov't		0.6397*** (0.1455)		1.1907*** (0.3047)
Config. 2b + Config. 2b × Nationalist gov't		0.0176 (0.1144)		0.5275 (0.4317)
<i>Control variables and fixed effects</i>				
Baseline controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extended controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State A FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State B FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peace year FE (MID)	Yes	Yes		
Peace year FE (TC)			Yes	Yes
Border duration A FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Border duration B FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	90,128	111,479	90,128	86,811

Notes: OLS estimates of fatal MID initiation (columns 1 and 2) and identity-related territorial claim onset (columns 3 and 4). The unit of analysis is the directed country dyad-year. The baseline and extended control variables are equivalent to those in Tables S8.3 and S8.2. Standard errors clustered on dyad, state A, and state B in parentheses. Significance codes: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. TC, Territorial Claim.

zero for identity-based territorial claims (model 4). Both interaction terms and relevant marginal effects are large and significant. We interpret these results as further evidence that ideological narratives and mobilization around restorative nationalist projects, rather than any alternative causal mechanism, account for the strong association between plausible golden-age configurations and interstate conflict initiation.

S8.4 Alternative Explanations and Robustness Analysis

This section explains how we tested alternative explanations. First, as a test of structural legacies, we thus add two controls to the main models, capturing the share of years between 1100 and $t - 1$ with plausible statehood or unity. Our main results remain stable, suggesting that even short golden ages matter. Second, in a test of persistent conflict, we use Brecke's dyadic data on interstate conflict starting in 1400 as an additional control in our models of fatal MIDs and identity-based territorial claims. The results show that all main findings remain robust. Third, to account for nonethnic revisionism, we identify all territories historically held by country A or B or any of their predecessor states and code the largest area ever observed that was once part of state A but is now located in state B. Controlling for this territorial-revisionism proxy in the MID and territorial-claim specifications yields almost identical results as our baseline analysis.⁸

Further robustness analytics can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.⁹ First, we restrict our outcome variables to the theoretically most relevant subsets of secessionist civil wars and territory-related fatal MIDs. Second, we replicate all main specifications with population-based instead of purely territorial predictors. Third, we use alternative segment share thresholds (0.5 and 0.9 instead of two-thirds of the aggregate group's total territory) to define national unity in the civil war models. Fourth, we modify the ethnic polygons underlying our units of analysis and main explanatory variables. Finally, the main models were replicated with a logit link instead of linear probability. All results remain robust to these modifications.

⁸ See Tables A1–A8 in the online supplement to Cederman, Pengl, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2024. This document also includes a number of additional robustness tests.

⁹ Cederman, Pengl, Girardin and Müller-Crepon 2024.

S9 Railroads, Separatist Mobilization, and Conflict

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 9. While some of the basic data specifications can be found in Chapter 3, here we provide information on the railroad data, as well as variable definitions and regression models.

S9.1 Data Description

Geographic Data on European Railroads

Data Source and Digitization. Geographic data on the expanding European railway network comes from an antiquated website built by French train enthusiasts Bernard and Raymond Cima.¹ They provide construction dates and map representations of all known railway segments covering almost the entirety of geographic Europe, with the notable exception of England and Wales, which we exclude from the analysis. We georeferenced their yearly online map tiles and digitized all line features to construct a geospatial dataset of European rails covering the period from 1834 to 1945.

Description of Continuous Railroad Proxies. To get closer to causal mechanisms, we use the network structure of the railway data to compute continuous proxies for state reach and connectivity to urban markets. In a setup introduced by Müller-Crepon and his colleagues,² we first divide Europe into grid cells with approximately 10 km resolution, each of which is associated with a population estimate for the year 1830.³ We then build a planar graph using cell centroids as vertices and straight connecting lines to their eight queen neighbors as “foot-path” edges, which we overlay and intersect with the railroad lines for each year. On the resulting graph, we can query the estimated minimum

¹ train.eryx.net.

² Müller-Crepon, Hunziker and Cederman 2021.

³ Goldewijk, Beusen and Janssen 2010.

travel time between any two points in Europe for any year covered by our data. To derive the necessary edge weights, we assume a speed of 6 km/h on “footpath” edges⁴ and 60 km/h for rail travel. The latter is close to the maximum average long-distance speeds achieved by steam-powered trains in nineteenth-century France, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

The state reach proxy is calculated as a population-weighted mean of travel times between all cells in an ethnic segment and the cell that contains the respective national capital, using the 1830 population estimates. The market access proxy is defined as the average cell-level travel time to cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1800 located in the same country.⁵ Travel times to different cities are weighted by market size (i.e., city population), and distant cities are weighted down by a trade elasticity parameter based on travel times using parameters estimated by Donaldson and Hornbeck.⁶ We again aggregate cell-level market access values to ethnic segment-years by taking the population-weighted average across all cells contained in a segment polygon. Note that market access and travel time to capital do not only vary due to local railway construction within specific segments but also as a result of population dynamics and rails built elsewhere that increase the overall connectivity within national networks. However, we chose time-invariant cell-level population weights to aggregate these measures onto the ethnic segment level to avoid potentially endogenous internal population dynamics to affect the results. Finally, the internal connectivity proxy is constructed as the average travel time between any two inhabitants of an ethnic segment, again based on the 1830 population data.

Description of Separatism Data

Our main outcome variable captures violent and peaceful mobilization for separatism by combining successful secessions, onsets of separatist conflict, and political claims for national independence or regional autonomy. As described later, our main outcome variable captures violent and peaceful mobilization for separatism by combining successful secessions, onsets of separatist conflict, and political claims for national independence or regional autonomy.

Secessionist Conflict. First, we code a dummy of territorial ethnic civil war onsets at the ethnic segment-year level. For the period 1816–1945, we identify all unique civil wars that were fought in the

⁴ Approximately the speed of horse cart travel and walking.

⁵ Donaldson and Hornbeck 2016.

⁶ Donaldson and Hornbeck 2016.

name of a specific ethnic group. Here, we use the same dataset as in the previous two chapters.⁷

Successful Secession. We combine the secessionist conflict measure with a binary indicator of successful secession as an additional signal of national disintegration. The secession dummy is coded one for all noncore ethnic segments that become core group segments in newly independent states in year $t+1$. In combination, the disintegration measure takes on the value of 1 if a segment experiences a secessionist conflict onset or secedes in a given year and 0 otherwise.

National Independence and Autonomy Claims. As a complement, we also use the new dataset to code the first claim for full national independence or at least regional autonomy within given state structures made by a nationalist organization at the level of ethnic segment years.⁸

S9.2 Tables and Plots for the Main Results

Testing Hypothesis H9.1: Railroad Access and Separatism

Our baseline specification is a difference-in-differences (DiD) regression estimated as two-way fixed effects (TWFE) linear probability model with the time-varying railway access dummy described earlier as a treatment variable. The dependent variable is a combined indicator of national disintegration for all segment years with either a successful secession, a territorial civil war onset, or a separatist claim for independence or regional autonomy. We multiply this outcome by 100 to increase readability and facilitate interpretation in terms of percentage points. All baseline models include unit fixed effects for ethnic segments and time fixed effects for either years or country years – the latter control for the potential of regionally concentrated diffusion of secessionism and other temporal shock and trends that equally affect all segments within a given country.⁹ In addition, all models control for a count variable of past territorial civil wars since 1816 as well as peace year dummies for both civil war and nationalist claims to account for past secessionist mobilization and address concerns about reverse causation. The identifying assumption in this setup is parallel counterfactual trends, which we discuss in more detail later. Recent methodological

⁷ See Section S7.1 and Chapter 3 for details.

⁸ The data collection effort is inspired by the Self-Determination Movements dataset Sambanis, Germann and Schädel 2018, and Wimmer and Feinstein 2010.

⁹ E.g., Cunningham and Sawyer 2017.

contributions have highlighted problems with TWFE models when it comes to accommodating heterogeneous treatment effects across treatment cohorts and dynamically evolving effects after first treatment onset.¹⁰ As our empirical setup resembles a multi-cohort DiD with staggered treatment adoption, we also implement two-stage estimators recently proposed by Gardner, Liu, Wang and Xu.¹¹ By imputing counterfactual outcomes for treated units based on a first-stage regression, the 2S-DiD approach alleviates most of the weighting and comparison problems of conventional TWFE models.

Table S9.1 presents our main findings. Model 1 indicates that the probability of separatist claims, secessionist conflict fought in the name of a noncore ethnic segment, or successful secession increases by 1.48 percentage points after the first railway arrives. This effect is substantively large and amounts to an almost 2.33-fold increase compared to the sample mean of 1.12 instances of separatist mobilization per 100 ethnic segment years. Model 2 replaces year with country-year fixed effects, which reduces the estimated coefficient by 28 percent. Models 3 and 4 replicate the analysis but rely on the two-stage DiD estimator developed by John Gardner.¹² Both specifications yield substantively larger estimates as their TWFE-based counterparts in models 1 and 2. The difference in magnitude can be explained by the mechanical downward biases that TWFE models create in staggered treatment settings when temporal effect heterogeneity exists.¹³ Model 3 suggests a 195 percent increase from the sample mean, which drops to a 158 percent increase when replacing year with country-year fixed effects (model 4). These results suggest that, on average and contrary to naive interpretations of modernization theory, railway access contributed to separatist mobilization rather than stronger national cohesion and political stability in ethnic minority areas.

Interpreting these findings as causal requires the assumption of parallel counterfactual trends. As counterfactual outcomes are by definition unobservable, we have to assume that, in the absence of treatment, treated units would have evolved similarly after treatment onset as not-yet-treated or never-treated control observations. While this assumption cannot be empirically verified, we can investigate trends before treatment onset to assess the plausibility of the identifying assumption.

¹⁰ E.g., Goodman-Bacon 2021; Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021; Roth et al. 2023.

¹¹ Gardner 2021 and Liu, Wang and Xu 2024.

¹² Gardner 2021.

¹³ E.g., Goodman-Bacon 2021, 261.

Table S9.1 *Railroads and separatism (1816–1945).*

	100 × Secession, Terr. CW or Claim			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rails (Y/N)	1.486*** (0.352)	1.076** (0.341)	2.096*** (0.493)	1.693*** (0.446)
Segment FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country-year FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Estimator	TWFE	TWFE	2S-DiD	2S-DiD
Mean DV	1.115	1.115	1.076	1.069
Observations	13,007	13,007	11,711	9,818

Notes: The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. State-leading segments and segments smaller than 2,000 km² dropped. All models control for the number of past conflicts and peace years indicators. Segment clustered standard errors in parentheses. ⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Testing Hypothesis H9.2: Heterogeneous Effects

To test the conditional hypotheses described earlier, we replicate the baseline model from model 1 in Table S9.1 but now interact the railway access dummy with segment- or country-year moderating variables. Model 1 in Table S9.2 tests whether the destabilizing effects of rails are stronger in ethnic segments that are culturally more distinct from the state-leading group (H3a). We calculate linguistic distance from the core group by matching the ethnic categories from our maps to the Ethnologue language tree. Interacting our rail treatment with linguistic distance yields a positive but statistically insignificant coefficient (Model 1 in Table S9.2). One interpretation of this non-result is that conditional on some cultural difference, group-level politicization and mobilization processes are more important than cultural distance.

Model 2 interacts the rail indicator with the country-year-level population share of the dominant national core group. Consistent with Hypothesis H9.2b, the interaction coefficient is negative and significant, suggesting that local railways are particularly likely to spur nationalist independence campaigns in countries with relatively small ruling groups. However, the binning plot in Figure 9.4(b) suggests that the significant linear interaction term is likely due to a small number of cases with particularly small core groups. The binning coefficients show that there are no significantly different effects at typically low, intermediate, and high

Table S9.2 Separatism: linear interaction models.

100 × secession, terr. CW or claim						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Rails (Y/N)	0.493 (0.611)	3.484*** (0.817)	−10.291*** (2.103)	16.278*** (4.308)	2.761*** (0.629)	2.331*** (0.506)
Rails × ling. dist to core	1.373+ (0.820)					
Pop. share core group		0.505 (2.328)				
Rails × pop. share core		−3.834** (1.202)				
Group population (log)			−0.141 (0.255)			
Rails × group pop.			0.908*** (0.170)			
GDP per capita (log)				0.922 (1.033)		
Rails × GDP p.c.				−1.882*** (0.533)		
Fiscal capacity (VDEM)					−0.229 (0.254)	
Rails × fiscal cap.					−0.912** (0.339)	
Liberal democracy (VDEM)						0.141 (1.309)
Rails × lib. dem.						−2.317** (0.818)
Segment FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean DV	1.115	1.115	1.115	1.134	1.134	1.146
Observations	13,007	13,007	13,007	12,788	12,788	12,649

Notes: The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. State-leading segments and segments smaller than 2,000 km² dropped. Segment clustered standard errors in parentheses. +*p* < 0.1, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

values of the respective national core group's population share. Model 3 tests our argument about the opportunities of noncore groups to mobilize for secession. The treatment and interaction coefficients reveal that railways mainly spur territorial conflict in demographically large ethnic segments, in line with Hypothesis H9.2c.

Testing Hypothesis H9.3: Causal Mechanisms

Finally, we attempt to separate the three mechanisms through which railway construction affects center-periphery bargaining and separatist mobilization as outlined in the theory. Thus, we compute railway-based proxies for (1) segments' economic market access (H9.3a) as their average travel time toward large cities (logged due to its skew), (2) local state's reach (H9.3b) as the inverted average travel time to the capital, and (3) their internal connectivity (H9.3c) as the inverted¹⁴ average travel time among their inhabitants.¹⁵ In the main analysis, we use time-invariant population data from before the arrival of railroads to avoid biases from endogenous population developments.. Table S9.3 shows TWFE models of separatism where these variables replace our baseline railway dummy variable. Given the continuous nature of our network measures, we cannot estimate DiD models as in the main analysis, thus requiring stronger assumptions on the absence of (time-variant) omitted variables and reverse causality.

All coefficient estimates point in the expected direction and, with the exception of national market access in models 1 and 4, reach conventional significance levels. In line with top-down mechanisms of state-sponsored nation building, better links to the national capital come with substantive reductions in the likelihood of separatist mobilization as predicted by Hypothesis H9.3b. Improving state reach by one standard deviation leads to a decrease in the risk of separatism onsets by 0.79 percentage points or 70 percent of the average risk. The effect of internal connectivity (M3 in Figure 9.1) points toward a higher capacity of local elites and populations to organize collective action against the state, which is consistent with Hypothesis H9.3c. Increasing segments' internal connectivity by one standard deviation comes with an increase in the risk of separatism onsets by 0.34 percentage points. The negative and borderline significant coefficient of national market access turns substantively small and statistically insignificant when also including state

¹⁴ Inversions are computed as $x_{inv} = \min(x) + \max(x) - x$ to ensure that larger values capture greater state reach and internal connectivity.

¹⁵ Lacking precise data, travel times are computed assuming constant speeds of 60 km/h on railroads and 6 km/h elsewhere.

Table S9.3 *Network structure and causal mechanisms.*

	100 × secession, terr. CW or claim			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
National market access	−0.143 ⁺ (0.083)			−0.001 (0.075)
State reach		−0.008** (0.003)		−0.008** (0.003)
Internal connectivity			0.015* (0.007)	0.016* (0.007)
Segment FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean DV	1.131	1.115	1.115	1.131
Observations	12,643	13,007	13,007	12,643

Notes: The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. State-leading segments and segments smaller than 2,000 km² dropped. All models control for the number of past conflicts and peace years indicators. Segment clustered standard errors in parentheses. ⁺*p* < 0.1, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001. DV, dependent variable.

reach, which suggests that most of the negative effect in the first model seems to be driven by better connections to the capital city.

These results provide stronger support for the political and mobilization-related mechanisms M2 and M3 than for nation building via market integration and social communication (M1). Another interpretation is that increasingly integrated national railroad networks exert heterogeneous effects across different contexts and that, on average, integrative and disintegrative responses balance each other out.¹⁶ The fact that our baseline analysis shows positive effects of the first railway link in a segment may thus be due to peripheral connections in historical Europe mainly strengthening local ties rather than effectively boosting state capacity or integrating national markets.

That said, these findings by no means imply that reactive nationalism and local resistance against direct rule are irrelevant. Such resistance needs to occur before it is too late, that is, after railway access and internal connectivity improve local mobilization capacity but before the state assimilates peripheral populations.¹⁷ In addition, a more selective

¹⁶ Data limitations prevent us from exploring this possibility in more detail. For a study of the heterogeneous effects of railroads on local population dynamics in Britain and Wales, see Bogart et al. 2022.

¹⁷ Deutsch 1953.

indicator for culturally distinctive direct rule of “nationalizing” states¹⁸ could yield different results.

S9.3 Instrumental Variable Approach and Further Robustness Analysis

Our DiD research design allows us to rule out most sources of unobserved variance. Still, the very decision to build railway lines in certain segments over others could reverse the causal arrow, at least to the extent that fear of rebellion prompted construction projects.

An instrumental variable (IV) strategy based on simulated railways addresses remaining potentials for reverse causality and omitted variable bias, by which security considerations or other proximate causes of conflict motivate railway extensions. We simulate the evolution of railway networks by heuristically placing railroads for each country year such that they maximize the connectedness of a state’s population. The simulated development of the European railroad network is thus only determined by the yearly mileage built in each state, their borders, and the *time-invariant* population distribution as estimated for 1830,¹⁹ thus excluding potentially biasing military, demographic, or economic causes of railroad construction.

We use the presence of a simulated railroad in a segment as an instrument for observed railway access in a TWFE estimation strategy. The exclusion restriction assumes that the instrument affects separatism only through observed railroads and is not systematically affected by unobserved causes of conflict. Our segment fixed effects account for potential time-invariant omitted variables, and year fixed effects capture temporal fluctuation in railroad expansion. We additionally show robustness to country-year fixed effects, which account for state-specific railroad investments and border changes.

Model 1 in Table S9.4 shows that our instrument is strongly predictive of actual railway construction in ethnic segments (F-stat of 39). Model 2 replicates our TWFE baseline to facilitate comparing naive to IV estimates. Models 3 shows the reduced form regression of separatism on the instrument, whereas model 4 shows the second-stage estimate of instrumented rail access. Both coefficients are positive and statistically significant, yet less precisely estimated than the baseline TWFE effect. The second stage yields an estimate larger than the TWFE but similar in size to the 2S-DiD estimate (Table S9.1, model 3). These findings increase our confidence that the estimated effects are not merely

¹⁸ Brubaker 1996.

¹⁹ Goldewijk, Beusen and Janssen 2010.

Table S9.4 *Instrumenting railroad access.*

	Rails (Y/N)	100 × Separatism		
	First Stage	OLS	Reduced Form	Second Stage
Rails (Y/N, simulated)	0.335*** (0.054)		0.785* (0.321)	
Rails (Y/N)		1.514*** (0.375)		
Rails (Y/N, instrumented)				2.341* (0.975)
Segment FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
First Stage F	38.746			38.746
Mean DV	0.512	1.115	1.115	1.115
Observations	13,007	13,007	13,007	13,007

Note: The unit of analysis is the ethnic segment year. State-leading segments and segments smaller than 2,000 km² dropped. All models control for the number of past conflicts and peace years indicators. Segment clustered standard errors in parentheses.

⁺*p* < 0.1, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

reflecting reverse causation resulting from strategic railway construction or biases from temporally varying omitted variables.

Further robustness analysis can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.²⁰ A first set of analyses concern sample definitions. As an alternative to controlling for past conflict in our baseline models, we run a robustness check that drops all ethnic segment years as soon as they experience a secessionist civil war or nationalist claims. In addition, we replicate our baseline results using a subsample that excludes all never-treated units. Finally, we replicate our main findings by censoring the sample in 1922, year in which our railway data stops. A second set disaggregates the outcome variable and reports separate regressions for successful secessions, secessionist civil wars, and national independence or autonomy claims. A third set focuses on irredentism. The combined outcome in the main analysis does not include irredentist claims, that is, demands of noncore groups to secede from the current state and be transferred to a neighboring ethnically kin state. These claims mostly co-occur with independence claims. As an additional robustness test, we replicate the main analysis including irredentist claim onsets.

²⁰ See Pengl et al. 2025.

S10 Nationalism, “Right-Peopling,” and Ethnic Cleansing

This chapter provides technical details for Chapter 10. While some of the basic data specifications can be found in Chapter 3, here we provide information on the coding of ethnic cleansing, as well as variable definitions and regression models.

S10.1 Empirical Strategy

Our analysis proceeds with a test of H10.1–H10.3 conducted at the level of ethnic group segments. After presenting the research design and results, we return to the macrolevel and measure the impact of ethnic cleansing on the homogenization of European states.

Main Data

Unit of Analysis. Our main unit of analysis is the segment s of ethnic group e present in country c at time t between 1886 and 2020. As in the previous chapters, segments are derived by intersecting the HEG raster data¹ for year t with the respective set of state borders retrieved from the CShapes 2.0 dataset.² The resulting dataset contains 39,003 group segment years across 6125 country years and 120 ethnic groups.

We systematically assign dominant group status to group segments that have the largest population share in a state’s capital, resolving conflicting cases by recurring to secondary sources. Our analysis focuses only on nondominant ethnic group segments since dominant groups are theoretically unlikely and have not been empirically observed to be cleansed by states that are governed by their respective coethnics.

¹ See Chapter 3 for details on the Historical Ethnic Geography dataset.

² Schvitz et al. 2022. We drop segments that are smaller than 10,000 inhabitants and less than 1 percent of group e to remove tiny artificial “spillover” segments along international borders. Population estimates rely on the 1800 HYDE 3.1 data, see Goldewijk, Beusen and Janssen 2010.

Ethnic Cleansing. Our main outcome of interest is the onset of an episode of ethnic cleansing through mass killings³ or forced displacement⁴ executed by the government of the host state of an ethnic segment since 1886.⁵ We use our data on ethnic change presented above to retrieve this information and code all post-onset years during an episode of ethnic cleansing as missing.

Our final dataset includes 113 onsets of ethnic cleansing with more than 1000 victims carried out by host state governments,⁶ equivalent to an onset in 0.34 percent of all observed segment years. The overall number of victims of ethnic cleansing campaigns is extremely difficult to gauge, as definitions of victimhood are contested, historical sources are at time unreliable, and secondary studies are not always conclusive. Drawing on estimates from the secondary literature on the number of killed and displaced civilian individuals during each campaign, our (imprecise) estimate of the victims of state-led ethnic cleansing since 1886 amounts to a staggering 56 million individuals⁷ or more than 25 percent of the population of the affected ethnic group segments (198 million).⁸ A back-of-the-envelope calculation indicates that individual Europeans' risk of becoming a victim of ethnic cleansing at any point in their life was nontrivial since 1886, amounting to roughly 3 percent.⁹

Main Independent Variables. We construct two independent variables to test our main arguments. First, the TEK status of each ethnic segment captures whether, in a given year, it has (1) no transborder ethnic kin (TEK, approximately 23 percent), (2) only TEK without dominant status (approximately 41 percent), or (3) at least one dominant TEK group (approximately 36 percent). These categories are mutually

³ E.g., Bulutgil 2015, 2016.

⁴ E.g., Garrity 2022.

⁵ Group segments and their host governments are derived from the CShapes data using state borders as observed on January 1st in each year. Note that this 'conservative' approach does not include cases of ethnic cleansing in the immediate aftermath of territorial conquest.

⁶ In comparison, Bulutgil 2015, 2016 identifies forty-one cases of ethnic cleansing in Europe during the same period. Charles Butcher and his colleagues use a yearly threshold of twenty-five deaths, enlisting 201 target mass-killing episodes globally since 1946, see Butcher et al. 2020.

⁷ The estimate is likely conservative as we take the lower value where the literature indicates a range.

⁸ This is the sum of segments' population in the years of the onset of ethnic cleansing.

⁹ This computation is challenging without individual-level data. The number is calculated as $1 - (1 - (\sum_{y=1886}^{2020} \text{Victims}_y / \sum_{y=1886}^{2020} \text{Population}_y))^{50} = 0.0306$, i.e., the Europe-wide, individual-level probability of becoming a victim of ethnic cleansing in any given year accumulated over an assumed (and rather low) life expectancy of fifty years.

exclusive. We assign a TEK status to all groups located in more than one state at time t . Group segments are assigned the dominant status in a country if they make up a majority of the population in the capital.

Second, the geocoded historical state borders from 1816 in the CShapes Europe dataset¹⁰ enable us to trace each group segment’s recent history of past home rule. In particular, we compute the number of years since 1816 in which the average inhabitant of a group segment’s settlement area at time t belonged to a state in which the segment’s ethnic group had dominant status.¹¹ The larger the fraction of a group’s settlement area that has been under the rule of a coethnic state for a longer time, the higher our indicator of past home rule. On average, 12 percent of the noncore segments in our data have a history of any past home rule since 1816. Of those with a history, the median number of home rule years is eighteen years and the mean forty-four years. We log-transform the variable in our analysis to account for this right skew.

Control Variables. We use the HEG raster data on ethnic segments in combination with various other geographic datasets to measure a series of factors that may affect our main independent variables and the likelihood of ethnic cleansing. Unless otherwise noted, these control variables are population-weighted averages across each groups’ settlement area.

For each segment, we first measure the log-transformed population size as larger segments may be more likely to become targets of ethnic cleansing and more often have transborder ethnic kin (TEK) as well as past home rule. In addition, we control for the population size of the country and the entire ethnic group a segment belongs to.

Second, we account for segments’ average distance to their host state’s capital since peripheral segments are more likely to have TEK and may be at a higher risk of ethnic cleansing. In a similar vein, we measure segments’ geography as their average altitude, ruggedness, temperature, precipitation, evaporation, and the ratio of the latter two.¹²

S10.2 Estimation Strategy

We use these data to estimate the effect of TEK status and past home rule on the onset of ethnic cleansing in an OLS fixed effects setup:

¹⁰ See Chapters 3 and 5.

¹¹ As above, we derive dominant groups for historical states by taking the largest ethnic group in their capitals. We use the earliest set of ethnic maps for that purpose but are not aware of any case in which the largest group in capitals changed dramatically.

¹² All from the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) Global Agro-Ecological Zones (GAEZ) database, see <https://gaez.fao.org>.

$$\text{onset}_{g,s,c,t} = \gamma_c + \tau_t + \beta_1 \text{TEK status}_{s,t} + \beta_2 \text{past home rule}_{s,t} + \beta_3 \text{TEK status}_{s,t} \times \text{past home rule}_{s,t} + \mathbf{X}_{s,g,c,t} + \epsilon_{s,g,c,t}, \quad (\text{S10.1})$$

where the risk of an onset of ethnic cleansing in a segment-year is modeled as the sum of a country-specific (γ_c) and year-specific (τ_t) risk, the effects associated with our control variables \mathbf{X} , and segments' TEK status, past home rule, and their interaction. We introduce these main treatment variables one-by-one.

As foreshadowed in the theoretical argument, we model their interaction in the last step to account for the close connection between TEK status and past home rule and test for the effect of all theoretically possible configurations. We note that TEK status is often causally *posterior* to past home rule as states dominated by large ethnic groups (e.g., the Ottoman and Habsburg empires or the Soviet Union) often shrank but survived as rump states with “stranded” segments abroad. These non-dominant segments (e.g., ethnic Turks in the Balkans) have a history of past home rule and links to a dominant TEK group. TEK status, therefore, captures part of the effect of past home rule.

We cluster standard errors on the level of ethnic groups s to account for dependence over time and between segments. In order to account for the small number of groups with a history of home rule but no or nondominant TEK, we also compute bootstrapped standard errors for the full interaction model.

Table S10.1 presents the results from our main empirical specification. We start by assessing the effect of ethnic segments with nondominant TEK and dominant TEK ties in model 1. Ethnic segments that have exclusively nondominant TEK (H10.1) exhibit a yearly risk of being ethnically cleansed, which is an imprecisely estimated 0.1 percentage point higher than the risk of segments without any TEK links. Confidence intervals are overlapping with the null hypothesis of no effect, which we, therefore, cannot reject. The effect associated with nondominant TEK is also significantly smaller ($p < 0.01$) than related to dominant TEK ties (H10.2), which have a 0.62 percentage point higher risk, which amounts to 1.8 times the average risk of ethnic cleansing (0.34 percent).

Model 2 presents similar support for H10.3 in that past home rule has a consistent association with the risk of ethnic cleansing. A doubling of the number of years of ethnic home rule experienced by an ethnic segment since 1816 is associated with an increase in the risk of ethnic cleansing by 0.06 percentage points. Moving from zero years of past home rule – the predominant case in our sample – to 20 years, which is close to the median number of years for segments with past home rule, thus raises the likelihood of ethnic cleansing by 0.25 percentage points or three-quarters of the average risk of 0.34 percent.

Table S10.1 *Ethnic cleansing 1886–2020 (OLS): TEK links and past home rule.*

	Ethnic cleansing (0/100)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Nondominant TEK	0.110 (0.140)		0.136 (0.136)	0.182 (0.136)
Dominant TEK	0.621** (0.228)		0.613** (0.232)	0.728** (0.233)
Past home rule (years, log)		0.084* (0.041)	0.063 (0.043)	0.858* (0.355)
Nondominant TEK × past home rule				0.098 (0.414)
Dominant TEK × past home rule				−0.848* (0.357)
Country FE:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean DV:	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34
Observations	32,578	32,578	32,578	32,578
Adjusted R ²	0.021	0.020	0.021	0.022

Notes: OLS linear models. Sample excludes dominant groups. Control variables described in the main text. Standard errors clustered on the ethnic group level. Significance codes: [†] $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Models 3 and 4 then assess the joint impact of segments’ TEK ties and history of home rule. Combining all three main variables of interest into the same model, model 3 shows a diminished and imprecisely estimated, yet positive, effect associated with past home rule.

Lastly, a full interaction of TEK links and past home rule in model 4 sheds light on the comparative risks of all possible configurations. We find that TEK and dominant TEK status without previous home rule to have similar effects as in model 1. Past home rule, in contrast, only increases the risk for segments without dominant TEK groups but does so drastically. A doubling of the years of past home rule increases the risk of ethnic cleansing for these segments by approximately 0.86 percentage points or more than twice the base rate. However, past home rule does not further increase the risk of ethnic cleansing for segments with dominant TEK groups, at least partially because its effect is already captured the dominant TEK dummy itself.

S10.3 Robustness Analysis

Extensive robustness analysis can be found in the supplementary material to the original article.¹³ Because past and current state borders are our treatment in that they determine past home rule and TEK status, some attributes of ethnic segments such as their (relative size) and geography are codetermined by these very same borders. As a remedy, we drop all controls and obtain very similar results as in the main specification. In a similar vein, we show robustness to dropping all fixed effects. On the other hand, there are a host of characteristics of ethnic segments and states left out of the baseline specification that may constitute omitted variables. We, therefore, add a series of covariates that capture ethnic segments' dispersion and share of the state's population, the overlap of their settlement area with that of their state's dominant group, a segments' distance to the border, and the ethnic fractionalization of their host state and fractionalization of their larger kin group across state borders.

Because the onset of ethnic cleansing is a comparatively rare (yet still too common) event that affects 113 observations in our data, our results may be due to pure chance or driven entirely by particular historical (sub-)episodes such as the world wars. We find neither to be likely. We first conduct a randomization inference test in which we randomly reallocate the onsets of ethnic cleansing across observations in our data 1000 times. Our main estimates are located at the very margins of the resulting distributions of estimates. Second, we test whether our results are exclusively driven by the two World Wars. While they constitute "most-likely" historical episodes for our argument and contain half the ethnic cleansing episodes we analyze, their complexity increases the risk of unobserved confounding. Dropping the respective years (1914–1918 and 1939–1945) decreases the effect of dominant TEK and past home rule by 50 percent and increases uncertainty ($p = 0.10$ and 0.12 , respectively). These findings suggest that our findings are weaker outside these two episodes of large-scale violence in Europe and further motivate the subsequent analysis of the effect of territorial claim and war on ethnic cleansing.

¹³ Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman 2024.

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