

The Primacy of Politics in Separatist Dynamics

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What triggers separatist activism and violence? Answers to this question usually invoke economic opportunities, cultural differences or political grievances. Attempts at comparing the merits of these competing claims have suffered from several flaws, however, including difficulties in distinguishing secessions from other types of conflict and from its causal factors, reliance on biased samples, a lack of variance among observations; and a focus on states rather than sub-national regions. In this paper, we try to address these shortcomings and systematically compare the respective merits of economic, cultural and political theories of separatism, using 338 sub-national groups from around the world and data from numerous sources. Our dependent variables are separatist activism broadly conceived and separatist violence, which we observe to respond to somewhat different logics. In contrast to the currently popular economic models of civil wars, we find that political factors dwarf other approaches. Specifically, groups in failed and transitioning states, those who control or have historically controlled autonomous institutions, and those facing discrimination are the most likely to resort to separatist violence. We find no robust effects of “greed” or other economic theories. Finally, existing models tend to over-predict secessions in Latin America and Africa. We offer explanations and call for a renewed appreciation of the political nature of separatism in contrast to other types of civil wars.

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Introduction¹

What triggers certain groups to demand sovereignty over a territory? When do regional political elites decide to pursue separatist strategies and what determines their capacity to mobilize populations to this effect? There is no well established theory of secessionism despite the fact that many states, not least the United States of America, were born of secessions.² Much of the scholarship tends to be normative rather than positive, focusing on the theoretical and legal foundations of the rights of groups to secede (e.g., Buchheit 1978; Young 1983; Dahlitz 2003; Coppieters and Sakwa 2003; Horowitz 2003). As for the causal determinants of secessions, there is a widespread range of competing hypotheses revolving around economic, cultural and political factors. Empirical assessments of these hypotheses have so far lacked a systematic effort at comparing them, however, and have suffered from various methodological flaws. Few studies, for example, focus carefully on separatism, studying instead the determinants of “identity wars” (Collier and Hoeffler 2002) or “ethnic violence” (Fearon and Laitin 1999), both of which amalgamate separatist and non-separatist conflicts. Studies that have singled out separatism *per se* have been poorly served by the use of a “separatism index” loose enough to include “latent separatism” and endogenous to several explanatory variables (Gurr ____: Saideman and Ayres 2001). Others have limited their inquiries to a few cases or a single region of the world, such as Western Europe (Sorens 2005) or, more frequently, the former Soviet Union (Treisman 1997; Kisangani and Hesli ____; Hale

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² Although separatism typically includes demands for autonomy and federalism while secessionism is limited to the demand for independent statehood, we use them interchangeably in this paper as they follow similar logics and because most secessionist movements usually settle for less than secessionist outcomes, which makes it difficult to empirically differentiate them.

2000; Gorenburg 2001; Laitin 2001). Many studies have investigated instances of conflicts or secessions alone (e.g., Bookman 1992; Ross 2003), lacking variance in the dependent variable, while several quantitative studies have been unable to single out regional factors because of their use of national states as observations (Fearon and Laitin 1999; Sambanis 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2003).

These methodological and empirical problems have possibly led to biased and blurred analytical claims. Particularly, the inability of the literature to properly single out the separatist violence of sub-national groupings as a dependent variable and to jointly test competing hypotheses across the entire world, has hampered our understanding of separatism as a distinct form of civil war. Is seceding an act of political self-determination with its own parameters of collective action? Or is it akin other forms of civil wars, including quasi-criminal political violence, where the economic motivations of elites and fighters seem to play a major role? We sort things out in this paper. We catalogue theories of separatism and compare their predictive powers across 338 world-wide sub-national groups, identified from the Minorities At Risk project, paying particular attention to their relevance across regions of the world. Unlike other studies, we differentiate between the determinants of separatist propensity in general and of violent separatist action.³ This is the first time, to our knowledge, that hypotheses regarding secessionism are brought together and their respective explanatory merits systematically tested against both propensity and action, and across world regions. Contrary to currently popular arguments, our findings suggest that separatism is mostly a response to political conditions, rather than the manifestation of cultural differences or

³ Gurr and Pitsch (2003) compare levels of “open conflict with governments” among 154 groups which they identified as separatist, but the object of the conflict itself is not necessarily separatist.

the exploitation of economic opportunities. We also find that substantial regional variations in secessionist patterns remain broadly unanswered by existing theories. We conclude by calling for the restoration of a political understanding of separatism as an act of state formation, precipitated by tyranny and failure, and fueled by memories of a shared past.

Theories of Secession

Most theories of separatism focus on the behavior of groups or, occasionally, their leaders. They typically identify conditions which would either precipitate a desire by sub-national groups to leave the country, or facilitate the implementation of such a decision; they assume, therefore, a cost-benefit decision structure (for explicit statements of this, see Hechter 1992; Bartkus 1999; and Sorens 2005), whereby groups and their leaders weigh the costs and benefits of exit with those of remaining within the state. These hypotheses fall in one of four broad categories: economic, cultural, political, and other facilitating factors.

The Economics of Secession

As an intrinsic part of the recent literature on civil conflicts, many theories of separatism have a substantial economic component. Separatist regions are usually believed to be different from the rest of the country in terms of wealth, physical or human capital, or natural resources endowment. Discriminatory economic policies from the central state vis-à-vis its regions may also affect the costs and benefits of allegiance or exit. In

addition, a country's overall income level and its economic rate of growth may contribute to the separatist propensity of its constituent groups.

Regional income and wealth inequalities. Some authors argue that poorer regions are likely to break up (Hechter 1992:275) and others that secessionist sentiments develop in regions that are wealthier than the rest of the state (Hale 2000:33). Poorer regions may feel a greater sense of grievance and blame the state for their failure to develop, or they may fear competition with their neighbors (Horowitz 1981, 1985); yet they may also be more easily appeased by economic policy (Bookman 1992:44). Poorer minorities may also find rebel activity relatively more attractive (Fearon and Laitin 1999:30). Richer regions may be more confident about their future viability as independent countries or more cognizant of their group identity (Collier and Hoeffler 2002: 2), but they may also be more satisfied as they are. There are examples of both rich and poor groups seeking to secede: Bangladesh and Southern Sudan figuring among the relatively poorer separatists (Young 1976:485, 491), and Congo's Katanga among the relatively richer ones (Gérard-Libois 1963). Irrespective of the direction of the inequality, secessions are often believed to arise from a "perception of economic injustice," which leads a region to reassess the "relative cost or benefits of belonging to a national union" (Bookman 1992:39).

Available quantitative evidence on all these claims has been mixed. Looking at regions of the former Soviet Union, Hale (2000) has found that it was the richest regions (as measured by retail commodity turnover) which were the most likely to secede. Sorens (2005) found that the high-income regions of Western democracies are more likely to develop separatist activism as they pay more taxes. Yet, Saideman and Ayres (2000) could find no robust effect of economic differentials or discrimination on

separatism, using world-wide Minorities-at-Risk data. Fearon and Laitin (1999), for their part, found that minorities in rich regions were *less* likely to fight for separatism or other rebellious purpose, and that absolute deprivation mattered more than relative deprivation.

Regional availability of natural resources. Michael Ross (2003:11-12) identifies several cases linking oil and other minerals to separatist conflicts. He argues that “unlootable” natural resources heighten the likelihood of secession since they require foreign investment for which recognition as a sovereign state is needed. With “lootable” resources such as alluvial diamonds, people may prefer to back a local warlord and not bother with outright independence (Ross 2003:12). Le Billon’s (2001) study of the role of diamonds in sustaining UNITA in Angola provides support for this contention. Fearon and Laitin (1999:29) also believe that appropriable resources facilitate violence by “raising the stakes” of rebellion but were unable to find data to test this hypothesis.

Treisman (1997:222) makes a related argument which stresses the “bargaining power” of regions. If a region is dependent on the center for its revenues, it has less bargaining power to demand autonomy. If it has its own resources, however, it is more likely to be aggressive about autonomy. Bookman (1992:46) also argues that low “trade dependency” between a region and the center improves the chances of regional viability and increases the bargaining power of the region.

There is no systematic evidence of these claims for the world as a whole so far, although Collier and Hoeffler (2002) found that primary commodity exports were quadratically related to the probability of “identity wars” and that civil wars were more likely to be secessionist in countries with large oil exports. Their data did not, however,

identify whether the natural resources were located in the separatist regions, making their inference somewhat dubious.

Levels of (male) education and sub-national group skills. Some recent studies of civil conflict have argued that young males are more likely to engage in combat if they are less educated, as their lack of education reduces the opportunity cost of violence (Collier and Hoeffler 2001). In addition, the same authors suspect a negative relationship between schooling and the ability of nationalist leaders to mobilize populations, convincing them to “buy into” the rhetoric driving the secessionist movement. This argument is consistent with (but different from) Horowitz’s (1981) contention that groups with low skills are unable to compete and more likely therefore to seek a protectionist advantage by seceding. Large-N evidence of these claims is limited so far. Collier and Hoeffler (2002) found a negative relationship between male secondary schooling and “identity wars.” Hale (2000) found no robust evidence in the post-Soviet setting that group skills matter in either direction.

Absolute levels of income. Secession attempts clearly take place at all levels of income. Yet, some authors argue that country-wide low per capita income and slow growth rates are major secessionist “risk factors,” for they exacerbate the grievances of various groups and reduce the opportunity costs of warfare (Collier and Hoeffler 2002:5). Hechter (1975), on the contrary, suggests that modernization brings about ethnic protest and the rise of sub-nationalism. The evidence seems to support the former claim (Bookman 1992:62, Collier and Hoeffler 2002, Fearon and Laitin 1999: 14) Yet, Saideman and Ayres (2000) found that growth did not matter and, looking at actual cases of “ethnic partition”, Sambanis (2000:458) found that economic development had a

positive (albeit non-significant) relationship with partition, which he imputed to the greater prospects of economic viability of the successor state.

Cultural Determinants

Cultural theories relate the likelihood of separatism to cultural features of the country or of specific groups. Ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity is frequently argued to promote secessions. Government repression of certain cultural groups, even in relatively homogeneous national environments, is also believed to encourage them to seek their own political fortunes. Finally, when a group already has grievances vis-à-vis the central government, the existence of a diaspora is believed to facilitate the organization of collective action within the group.

Cultural heterogeneity. Whether ethnic, linguistic or religious, numerous scholars have posited that cultural pluralism within a country will increase the number of secessionist claims. There are different versions of this argument but they all rely on the basic notions of social heterogeneity and polarization (e.g., Horowitz 1985; Sambanis 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2002). The evidence is rather weak if not contrarian, however. Hale (2000) and Sorens (2005) find positive relationships between ethnic/linguistic distinctiveness and separatist propensity. Yet, Treisman (1997:231), Laitin (2001: 852) and Saideman and Ayres (2000) found no evidence that ethnic antipathies or attachments to ethnic identities are important determinants of separatism. Further, Fearon and Laitin (1999) and Collier and Hoeffler (2002) observed that social fractionalization actually reduced the likelihood of identity wars and rebellions—as it makes it less likely for a specific group to have a distinct and sufficiently large regional

base—while ethnic dominance, defined as the presence in a country of a demographically dominant group, somewhat promoted such wars and made it more likely for minority rebels to seek autonomy (Fearon and Laitin 1999:11). Sambanis (2000:457) also found that “as ethnic heterogeneity increases, the probability of a partition decreases significantly, suggesting that it may be difficult to coordinate and win in a secessionist war in extremely diverse societies.”

But Sambanis does note that the size of the ethnic group may matter for separatism. This is consistent with Gorenburg’s (2001) theory that the density of social ties within a region matters in shaping its separatist outlook, as this would be at least in part a function of ethnic homogeneity. As for empirical findings with respect to size, while Fearon and Laitin (1999) find positive significant effects of relative group size, Saideman and Ayres (2000) and Sorens (2005) find no significant effect either way for a group’s or region’s relative size. Sorens (2005) finds that the absolute size of a group relates positively to separatism.

Following this line of reasoning, another variation of the ethnic argument suggests that territorial concentration is a factor affecting ethnic groups’ desire for a separate destiny. A black minority dispersed across a country, for example, provides a weak foundation for separatist activism. Kurds concentrated in the northern region of Iraq, on the other hand, have a more intuitive and practical claim to territorial sovereignty. In their economic disparity argument Collier and Hoeffler (2002) also specify that groups have to be spatially concentrated to develop a separatist propensity. Using Minorities-at-Risk data, both Fearon and Laitin (1999) and Saideman and Ayres (2000) find that group

concentration and rural regional concentration, respectively, matter for separatist desire and rebellious activity.

Diasporas. Ethnic diasporas may also contribute to secessionist sentiment as they tend to keep grievances alive, offer irredentist support, magnify beliefs in ethnic purity, and provide funding to local organizations (Malkki 1995; Collier and Hoeffler 2002). Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers and Somaliland have both benefited from diaspora support (Venugopal 2003; Reno 2003). Yet, there is still little large-scale evidence of this link, for only Collier and Hoeffler (2002) have found a positive effect of diasporas on separatism. Their measurement, however, was limited to populations living in the United States, based on the 2000 census, which is likely to be a biased estimate.

In a related manner, Laitin (2001) argues that the existence of a new state with a rebellious ethnic minority which has a "national homeland" elsewhere may provide sufficient conditions for this minority to seek independence. The commonality with the diaspora argument is the presence of potentially supportive kinsmen across borders. Saideman and Ayres (2000) offer some evidence that a group is more likely to be separatist if it has separatist kin in a neighboring state.

The Politics of Secession

The third type of factors deals with the nature and dynamics of the political system. Unlike economic and cultural theories, arguments here tend to focus on the political characteristics of entire countries, and not merely the separatist region. Dynamics unleashed by democratization, discrimination, state failure and changes in the international environment feature predominantly in this literature. The politics of

neighboring states and their willingness to support insurgencies would also alter the costs and benefits of separatist activism. Finally, having once had a separate existence as a state, or currently being a separate administrative unit (state, province, etc.), may well promote a distinct identity and a desire to “realize” one’s political destiny.

Democracy. Democracy can theoretically affect separatism in two ways. On the one hand, democratic regimes offer minorities a voice and presumably some protection, thereby generating loyalty, and making it less likely that they will seek exit (Hirschman 1970). On the other hand, democratic transitions can exacerbate existing ethnic dynamics and tensions and favor state disintegration as happened in the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia (Saideman 1998). The persistence of separatist movements in Canada, France, India, Spain and the United Kingdom suggests that there may be little relationship between the level of democracy and secessions, an intuition supported by the findings of Saideman and Ayres (2000).

Political transitions. Rather than the nature of the regime, the extent and intensity of political change may matter a great deal for would-be separatists. Political transitions often make states vulnerable and can create climates that foster separatist movements (Laitin 2001). Saideman (1998) notes, for example, that periods of democratization and economic transition lead to intensified ethnic identities and security dilemmas which ultimately “drive” secessionism. Gail Lapidus (1998:11) also suggests that glasnost and democratization under Gorbachev “brought issues of identity to the forefront” in the Soviet Union. Gurr and Pitsch (2003:238), however, suggest that transition regimes that share features of democracy and autocracy may be better able than pure democracies to “contain violent ethnopolitical conflict.”

Security dilemmas. Groups will seek separatism when they face eradication or fear “cultural annihilation” (Young 1976:460; Bartkus 1999). According to this argument, heterogeneity by itself is not enough, but groups will opt out when in real danger. The United States’ declaration of independence offers an explicit example of the security dilemma, referring as it does to the “unbearable tyranny of the state” as reason and justification for secession.⁴ Studies by the Minorities at Risk project have consistently highlighted the effects of discrimination and repression on separatism (Gurr 1993; Gurr 2000; Gurr and Pitsch 2003). Yet, a more robust and systematic treatment of the same data by Saideman and Ayres (2000) found political discrimination not to be a robust predictor of separatism.

State collapse and propensity for non-separatist political violence. When the central state is weakened, overthrown or collapsed, its ability to resist and prevent a secessionist drive is greatly reduced. In addition, the collapse of the central state, as happened in different forms in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, or Somalia, makes it more likely for peripheral or constituent regions to seek their own path. The logic is two-fold. Seeing state-provided security as a benefit to members of the state, Bartkus (1999) expects that the erosion of this benefit will be conducive to separatism. At the same time, Bartkus and Fearon and Laitin (1999) suggest that the weakening of the state will lower the costs of secession, increasing the probability that secessionist movements will occur in failed states.

Of course, separatism is a game with two actors: the rebels and the government. To a significant extent, the government’s reaction to the initial voicing of separatist preferences will be determined by its capacity to respond and will affect the odds of

⁴ As quoted and argued by Bartkus (1999:11)

subsequent conflict. Thus, the net impact of state failure on secessionism demands investigation.

The extent to which a system or region is prone to political violence in general may also herald a greater separatist propensity. Non-secessionist conflicts can have secessionist effects, or both types of conflict may result from similar factors. Horowitz (1985:12-13) writes, for example, that “riots are a common forerunner of secessionist movements.” The secession of Somaliland amid continued clan-based fighting in the rest of Somalia provides an example of the parallel dynamics of factional and separatist politics. Saideman and Ayres (2000) found that other types of rebellion were associated with the likelihood of secessions, but they were unable to assess the causal direction.

Demonstration effects and the end of the Cold War. The international climate may also inhibit or encourage self-determination movements. The rigidities of the Cold War probably froze more than one separatist ambition, while the end of the Soviet Union signaled new possibilities for sub-nationalist movements, at least in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Balkans. Yet, while Hale (2000) found significant demonstration effects within the former Soviet Union, Saideman (1995) suggests that these effects do not carry across national borders. In other words, countries with separatist movements are likely to have multiple separatist movements, but cross-border contagion is not a significant phenomenon.

Leading events in specific countries and demonstration effects illustrate normative shifts or perceptions of such shifts in the international community. There may be times when the normative hierarchy of territorial integrity and self-determination is challenged. When the principle of self-determination gains popularity over the norm of

territorial integrity, the costs of secession may appear reduced to would-be separatists as the likelihood of recognition—the ultimate proof of existence—rises. This may have affected the decision of several groups to engage in, resume or intensify separatist conflicts in the early 1990s.

Support of neighboring state. The secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 provides the textbook case on the effects of supportive neighbors on the secession of groups or regions. At first, training camps were established in India which provided sanctuary for fighters and government in exile. Eventually, the Indian army intervened on behalf of secession in December 1971 (Young 1976:489). Friendly neighbors also played a role in the secession attempts of Katanga (Rhodesian Federation) and Northern Cyprus (Turkey). In addition, Khosla (1999) finds that some form of external support for ethnonationalist and indigenous groups was common in the 1990s. Yet, large-N empirical evidence suggests either no neighbor effect (Fearon and Laitin 1999) or a negative one (Sorens 2005).

Previous existence as a state or distinct administrative status. Having once been an independent state may facilitate contemporary mobilization towards separatist agendas (Gurr 1993:76-77). While the evidence for this apparently intuitive claim is mixed (Sorens 2005, Hale 2000), a neighboring argument could be made, regarding the greater ease of nationalist mobilization in regions which already have their own administrative existence and apparatus. In such instances, collective action is facilitated by established leadership and a preview of what independence could be. Gorenburg (2000; 2001) argues that regional administrative existence promotes the density of social ties through shared regional ethnic institutions, such as schools, newspapers, museums, etc.

Mobilization, he contends, depends on these social ties (2001:115). Bookman follows a similar argument when she writes that “republics want independence, the autonomous [regions] want republic status, and some minorities want the status of autonomous region” (1992:49). Yet, this argument is sometimes refuted with the notion that decentralization can reduce separatism as groups satisfy themselves of autonomy.

Another possible flaw in both the reasoning and evidence for this claim is that current levels of regional autonomy are likely to be endogenous to separatist sentiment, in which case regional autonomy may be a symptom rather than a cause of separatist sentiment. Hale suggests, on the other hand, that regions with more institutional autonomy are better at bargaining with the state. Further, Treisman (1997) found some evidence that the level of social mobilization (within nationalist parties) in the former Soviet Union also correlates with separatist sentiment, which provides some additional empirical support to the idea of institution-driven ethnic mobilization.

Additional Facilitating Factors

A few remaining arguments deal with facilitating circumstances for separatism. They address specific structures of countries, such as their age, size and geographical features.

The age of a country. Intuitively, the younger a country, the less likely it is to have already passed through the growing pains of nation-building and national integration and the more vulnerable it may be to dismemberment. Fearon and Laitin (2003:84), for example, find a positive effect of being a “new state,” that is, one within the first two years of its existence, on the onset of civil wars.

Non-contiguous land masses. Countries whose territory is separated by other countries or by water (*e.g.*, Pakistan before the secession of Bangladesh, Comoros) may see their distant component(s) turn more vulnerable to centrifugal forces. Yet, Fearon and Laitin (2003) find that this variable only matters in explaining insurgencies if the data includes anti-colonial wars, where separate geographies likely capture the colonial nature of the relationship rather than any insurgent tactical advantage. Sorens (2005), however, finds that the physical distance of a region from the political center favors separatist demands.

Population, country size and terrain. The larger a country and its population, the greater its potential for break-up. *Ceteris paribus*, larger populations are more likely to be diverse. Sambanis (2000:456), for example, found a positive association between population size multiplied by ethnic heterogeneity and state partitions. Indeed, the greater the country's overall population, the more likely each ethnic group to be large in absolute terms and reach minimal threshold of size for collective action. Also, following Collier and Hoeffler's (2002) argument, the greater a country's population, the more young men it will have (Sambanis 2000:455). Bartkus (1999:44) makes a related argument about the size of a country. She contends that there are scale benefits for distinct communities to belonging to the state as it increases their social, economic and educational opportunities. She expects therefore that larger countries offer greater benefits of belonging and should be less likely to produce separatist movements. While this refers to country size more than to population size these two dimensions should correlate. If both hypotheses are right they could partly cancel each other out. Finally, Fearon and Laitin (1999) suggest that rough terrain, and particularly "hills or mountains

at the perimeter of the state” (27), should favor all types of insurgencies by improving rebels’ military prospects.

Methodology

Our data and the codebook explaining measurements and sources are available at www.politics.pomona.edu/penglebert. The data set is based on the 338 groups identified by the Minorities-at-Risk (MAR) project.⁵ Variables are measured for the period 1990-2003 or a lesser segment of this period depending on availability. To control for problems of endogeneity, some variables are measured at the beginning of the period while others are averaged throughout.⁶ Many of our variables are group-specific, including a few derived from the MAR project. Others are measured at the country level and entered for all groups from the same country (see Table 1).

Dependent variables. Few empirical studies have so far properly focused on separatism and violent secession attempts, looking instead at variables such as “identity wars” (Collier and Hoefler 2003), “ethnic violence” (Fearon and Laitin 1999) or “ethnopolitical rebellion” (Gurr and Moore 1997), all of which include separatist and non-separatist events.⁷ Among those who have focused on separatism, most authors have used the propensity to develop separatist inclinations in one form or another as their dependent variable (Gurr 1993, Saideman and Ayres 2000, Sorens 2005). Such approach only captures one dimension of secessions, however, and does not fully account for what

⁵ For details on the project and access to its data, see <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar>.

⁶ It is possible in theory that separatism in an earlier period affects some of the explanatory variables, such as retaliatory discrimination against a group or state failure. Yet, the data does not suggest that this is the case, as separatist activism in the 1990s correlates negatively with separatist activism over the period 1940-1980 ($r=-.23$, $p<.01$), a pattern possibly related to post-Cold War dynamics.

⁷ Fearon and Laitin (1999)’s findings are relevant, however, as 64% of their instances of ethnic violence are separatist conflicts. Yet, their findings do not allow us to differentiate the causes of separatist conflict from those of other types of conflict.

groups put their weapons where their mouths are. From a policy perspective, the likelihood of resorting to violence for secessions is arguably a more urgent problem to understand than the mere expression of separatist preferences or more latent and peaceful demonstrations of a desire for otherness. Furthermore, the differential effects of some variables on separatist inclination and separatist violence can open up interpretations of the results which sheds new light on existing theories. We use, therefore, two dependent variables: separatist activism or propensity (SEP90), adapted from MAR, and separatist conflict (PRIOTERR), derived from the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO)'s "Armed Conflicts" data set. They correlate at $r=0.44$. The determinants of separatist conflict illuminate the causes of a manifestation of political violence. The determinants of separatist activism, including "conventional political means" and "militant strategies short of armed violence" (Khosla 2005), may highlight factors with lesser or different policy implications.

Both our dependent variables are measured over the period since 1990 and are expressed as dichotomous outcomes. Separatist activism is derived from the MAR data set, which has an index of separatism on a 0-4 scale from no separatism (0) to "latent separatism" (1), historical separatism between 1940 and the 1980s (2) and finally active separatist movements in the 1990s (3). We give a value of 0 to all values of the separatism index from 0 to 2; and a value of 1 for observations scoring 3, that is, experiencing actual separatist activism in the 1990s. This measurement is more stringent than those of all other users of the MAR data. Saideman and Ayres (2000), who also use a dummy adapted from MAR, assign a 1 to any positive value of the separatism index, including "latent" and "historical" forms. While there is a problem of time inconsistency

in using historical separatism as a dependent variable of factors measured ex post, the greater problem comes with latent separatism which is coded 1 for all groups which have autonomous regions; such measurement makes it impossible to assess the validity of causal arguments between regional autonomy and the desire for secession, and inflates separatist propensity. Our measurement avoids this problem of endogeneity.

Our second dependent variable, measuring separatist violence (PRIOTERR) is also exogenously measured to all predictors. Any group which experienced a conflict over territory over the period 1990-2003 with at least 25 casualties in a given year scores 1 on this variable. The requirement for substantial violence sets a high threshold and allows us to distinguish cases where communities and their leaders are willing to pay a substantial price in human life from those where demands are less costly. While 106 observations score 1 on our broad measure of separatist activism, only 46 do so on our measure of separatist violence.

Our study differs from previous ones in other important respects. Saideman and Ayres (2000), who also looked at groups from the Minorities at Risk database, limited their sample size to 207 minorities and, because of their focus on the choice between irredentism and separatism, did not systematically test for all hypotheses on separatism. They also did not include regional dummies. Also using MAR data, Gurr (1993, 2000) identifies some patterns of association but does not perform multivariate analysis and fails to control, therefore, for competing theories. Sorens (2005) also limits his enquiry to non violent separatist activism and further narrows it to cover Western democracies only. His dependent variable is the vote share of secessionist parties in elections by provinces. Secessionist parties are defined as those which “agitate” within a “substate

territorial unit for independence,” which is a low threshold of political activity, afforded by his specific focus on democratic systems. Similarly, Hale (2000) uses dates of declarations of sovereignty by former Soviet republics as his indicator of separatism, none of which involved a violent conflict and all of which depend on rather unique historical circumstances.

Regression methods. We use cross-sectional regressions. There is insufficient variation over time in most of the data to justify a longitudinal analysis (Saideman and Ayres 2000), and the use of a longer time period results in the loss of many variables for lack of observations. We use mostly ordinary least square (OLS) regressions. Although logit regressions are better at *predicting* dichotomous dependent variables, there is no bias in *estimation* from using OLS. Logit regressions yielded by and large similar results. However, because of the perfect predictive power of the Latin American regional dummy on separatist conflict (more on this later), the logit command (in Stata 8.0) automatically dropped the 33 Latin American observations from the sample. We used OLS to avoid this problem.⁸

Regressors. We use five different variables to test economic theories. First, we use MAR’s economic differentials index to capture the relative economic opportunities/status of each group (ECDIFF). We modified the MAR index, which provides ratings from 4 (group in question is extremely economically disadvantaged compared to the dominant group) to -2 (group in question is very advantaged), in order to

⁸ We also performed ordered logit regressions keeping the dependent variables on 0-3 scales (which, in the case of the PRIO data, captures minor, intermediate and major conflicts). Again because of Latin America, about a tenth of the sample’s observations still “completely determined” the dependent variable, with the result that the standard errors were questionable. Because the results for the OLS and ordered logit regressions were similar and the Latin American observations were problematic in the logit regressions, we only report the OLS findings.

provide an even distribution from 4 to -4, with -4 indicating extreme advantage. To capture the effect of natural resource wealth, we identified the region where each group is located and then used maps of mineral resource distributions from the United States Geological Survey.⁹ We generated a number of dummy variables for resources, including one that indicates whether petroleum and natural gas are in a region, a measure of the presence of diamonds, one capturing ten high-value minerals as well as uranium, and finally a dummy variable for the presence of “nonlootable” minerals such as copper, oil, iron, phosphates, etc. We only report results from the nonlootable resources variable, as it captures the most sophisticated hypothesis in the literature and provided more significant results than other iterations. We also include per capita GDP (GDP90) and male secondary education levels (MALESECED90), which we measure in 1990 to avoid capturing any effect that separatist activity in the 1990s may have on income and education, and average 1990-2003 real per capita GDP growth (GROWTH). All three of these were derived from the World Bank’s *World Development Indicators* (WDI).

Among cultural variables, we measure nation-wide social heterogeneity with Alesina et al’s (2003) index of linguistic diversity (LANGUAGE). For group distinctiveness, we use the MAR variable CULTURALDIFF, which adds up groups’ racial, religious, custom and linguistic distances from the country’s dominant culture. Whether a group belongs to a country which contains a dominant ethnic group is captured by PLURAL, the percentage size of the largest ethnic group in the country (Fearon and Laitin 2003). We test whether there is a size threshold to separatist action with measures of each group’s relative and absolute size (POPPERCENT and POPABS), jointly derived from WDI and MAR. Regarding the effects of territorial concentration, we use

⁹ <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/maps/>

REGIONAL, a MAR variable which indicates whether a group has a regional base *and* is dominant in that region, even if it is also dispersed throughout the country or beyond.

DIASPORA is derived from the MAR measurement of emigration in the 1980s, which we hypothesize should correlate with diaspora in the 1990s. A group reported to have had any level of emigration during the 1980s scores 1 on the DIASPORA variable.

Finally, we measure the presence of kin groups in neighboring countries with KIN, which recodes the MAR variable DISPERSION as a dummy variable scoring 1 if kindred groups exist across adjoining boundaries.

Moving on to political variables, we use Freedom House's score of political rights within a country in 1990 (POLRIGHTS90) to test the effect of democratic governance on separatism.¹⁰ We use the 1990 value to avoid endogeneity with separatist conflict. We also measure the standard deviation of political rights between 1990 and 2002 (DPOLRIGHTS) as an imperfect indicator of political transitions. For security dilemmas, we use DISCRIMINATION90, the mean of each group's scores on MAR's economic and political discrimination variables for the years 1980 through 1990. We opted to use the full decade because discrimination levels vary enough that this provides a better indication of the group's treatment and its interaction with the government than the score from 1990 alone. For state failure, we used three country-level variables from Political Risk Service: bureaucratic quality, law and order, and government stability.¹¹ Our state failure index (ALLFAILURE90) is the first principal component of these values. We also derived a measure of non-separatist political violence (PRIOGOVDUM) from PRIO data on violence for control of the state. Because our data set is limited to

¹⁰ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>.

¹¹ www.countrydata.com.

1990-2003, we do not control for the end of the Cold War. We do, however, measure possible domestic contagion effects (DOMCON) with a dummy variable scoring 1 for groups in countries where other groups engage in violent separatist activity. The presence of a friendly neighbor is measured by the variable POWERFULKIN, adapted from MAR, which takes on the value 0 if a group has no kin abroad to 4 if the kindred group abroad dominates state power. Finally, we use two additional variables from MAR to measure previous existence as a state or distinct administrative status. AUTLOST captures whether a group was once autonomous, what its status was prior to losing autonomy and when the loss occurred. AUTONREGION is scored 1 when the group currently governs one or more regions with at least limited autonomy.

The final variables control for facilitating factors. A dummy variable (NEWSTATE) captures whether a country had recently reached independence as of the 1990s. INPIECES measures whether the country has territory that is separated by other countries or by water. LOGPOP and LOGSIZE measure the natural logs of population in millions and country size in square miles. It proved somewhat difficult to measure difficulties of terrain. Available data are limited to a country's percentage mountainous terrain (Fearon and Laitin 2003) or forest (Buhaug and Gates 2002) without indication of whether the minority group lives in the mountainous part. We created TERRAIN, a dummy variable which takes a value of 1 if a group is based on terrain constituted largely of forests or mountains, using Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) data on forests and three-dimensional maps for mountains.

We also included regional dummies for Africa, Asia, Latin America (LAC), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the West. We collapsed Eastern Europe and

the former Soviet Union into the intercept as it provides the best yardstick by which to measure the other regions since many theories about separatism were generated by scholars of this region. In addition, Saideman and Ayres (2000), who used it as their only regional dummy, found that it generally did not matter, while Fearon and Laitin (1999) found that Western and Eastern Europe were on the regression line, whereas Latin America and Africa were below it and Asia and the Middle East above it.

Table 1: Summary statistics and sources of all variables

| Variable | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max | Source |
|--------------|-----|-------|-----------|-------|--------|---------|
| sep90 | 338 | .31 | .46 | 0 | 1 | MAR* |
| prioterr | 338 | .14 | .34 | 0 | 1 | PRIO |
| ecdifff | 335 | 1.57 | 2.09 | -4 | 4 | MAR* |
| nonloot | 337 | .38 | .49 | 0 | 1 | USGS/UT |
| maleseced90 | 338 | .56 | .29 | .06 | 1.05 | WDI |
| gdp90 | 338 | 3,740 | 6,838 | 100 | 45,952 | WDI/PWT |
| growth | 331 | .02 | .04 | -.07 | .22 | WDI/PWT |
| language | 338 | .49 | .28 | .002 | .92 | Alesina |
| culturaldiff | 336 | 5.79 | 2.70 | 0 | 11 | MAR |
| plural | 335 | .55 | .22 | .004 | .99 | F&L |
| popabs | 338 | 3.37 | 8.62 | 0 | 108.44 | MAR/WDI |
| poppercent | 338 | .12 | .15 | 0 | .87 | MAR |
| regional | 338 | .70 | .46 | 0 | 1 | MAR |
| diaspora | 331 | .34 | .48 | 0 | 1 | MAR* |
| kin | 335 | .78 | .42 | 0 | 1 | MAR* |
| politrigh90 | 338 | 4.43 | 1.99 | 1 | 7 | FH |
| dpolrights | 338 | .67 | .49 | 0 | 1.93 | FH |
| discrimin~90 | 336 | 1.84 | 1.33 | 0 | 4 | MAR* |
| allfailure90 | 338 | .05 | 1.30 | -3.26 | 2.54 | PRS |
| priogovdum | 338 | .46 | .50 | 0 | 1 | PRIO |
| domcon | 338 | .30 | .46 | 0 | 1 | PRIO |
| powerfulkin | 338 | 2.12 | 1.45 | 0 | 4 | MAR |
| autlost | 336 | 1.11 | 1.04 | 0 | 6 | MAR |
| autonregion | 334 | .27 | .45 | 0 | 1 | MAR |
| newstate | 338 | .06 | .23 | 0 | 1 | F&L |
| inpieces | 338 | .22 | .41 | 0 | 1 | NG |
| logpop | 338 | 3.13 | 1.55 | -.55 | 7.09 | WDI |
| logsize | 338 | 12.20 | 1.92 | 5.51 | 15.97 | CIA |
| terrain | 337 | .54 | .50 | 0 | 1 | FAO/UT |

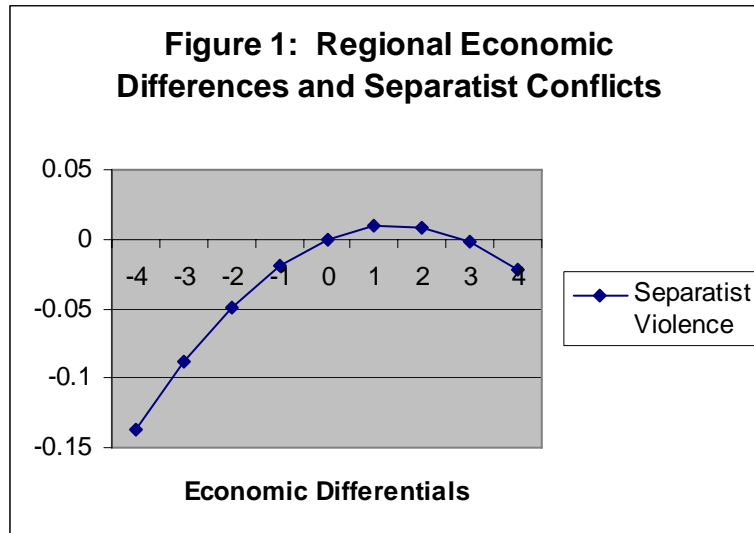
Sources: Minorities at Risk (MAR, MAR* if adapted or recoded); Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO); United States Geological Survey (USGS); University of Texas Castaneda Map Collection (UT); World Development Indicators (WDI); Penn World Table (PWT); Alesina et al. (2003); Freedom House (FH); Political Risk Service (PRS); Fearon and Laitin 2003 (F&L); National Geographic (NG); Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); University of Texas Austin Map project (UT).

Findings

In a first set of regressions, we test each dependent variable against the economic, cultural, and political variables separately, controlling for regional effects, before putting together “best of” models which combine all the significant indicators of these respective iterations. We then add the facilitating factors.

Table 2 about here

Economic findings. Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 summarize our findings with respect to economic variables. One of the most striking finding is the lack of any linear effect of regional economic differences, whether the region is poorer or richer than the rest of the country, although this is possibly the most systematic hypothesis in the literature. When entered by itself in the model, ECDIFF never approaches any level of significance and its coefficient hovers around 0, irrespective of the dependent variable. Using the absolute value of this measure (from 0 to 4) brings no significant effect on conflict but has a significant negative association with separatist activism. In order to clarify this perplexing finding, we tried a quadratic functional form in the hope of catching some non-linearity. In both cases, but more robustly with conflict, we found a puzzling inverted U curve relationship (reported in Table 2). Positive differentials and high negative differentials reduce the likelihood of separatism, whereas small negative differentials magnify it.



How can we make sense of this? The one uncontroversial part of this finding is that the relatively richer the group, the more likely it will be to avoid separatism, which refutes Hale's (2000) and Collier and Hoeffler's (2002) arguments and findings and, less so, those of Bookman (1992) and Sorens (2005), while supporting Fearon and Laitin's (1999). Things get more complex for groups that lie below the national average, however. Small negative economic differences seem to promote separatism whereas significantly worse-off groups are more likely to avoid it. One possible explanation may lie with different national economic characteristics between these groups and their degree of absolute poverty. The average per capita GDP of the countries of groups with mild economic disadvantages (scoring 1 or 2) is \$3,202. That of group suffering from greater inequality (scoring 3 or 4) is \$5,258. It is possible, therefore, that the groups with the greatest relative disadvantage are better off in absolute terms than those with lesser ones, because their country is richer on average. Since their disadvantage does not push them down to unbearable levels of economic deprivation, they are less likely to violently seek their own sovereignty. If this interpretation is right, the data could be construed as

supporting the idea that groups that are relatively better off than their national counterparts are always unwilling to separate, whereas groups that are both relatively worse off and absolutely deprived are marginally more likely to fight for autonomy.¹²

This finding by and large supports Horowitz's (1985) hypothesis on wealth differentials.

More straightforwardly, the presence of non-lootable resources significantly increases, as predicted, the likelihood of both separatist activism and secessionist conflict. Ross explains this effect by the need for sovereignty in the exploitation of these resources, which requires substantial foreign investments and subsequent contractual guarantees. Interestingly, however, this effect is almost twice as big for activism as it is for conflict. One possible explanation is that the availability of natural resources boosts popular faith in the feasibility of independence and contributes thereby to separatist agitation. Yet, when it comes to violent separatist action, conflict and the limited likelihood of diplomatic recognition for the foreseeable future deter foreign investors and reduce the promise of commodities.

As predicted, the effects of male secondary education come out as systematically negative. The effects of GDP, which correlates at $r=0.51$ with education, are insignificant, however. This suggests that, if the opportunity cost of violence increases with development, this relationship is mostly mediated through the opportunities afforded by education. Note also that GDP correlates at $r=0.86$ with the Western dummy. When male secondary education or the Western dummy is removed from the model, GDP has a significant negative effect on conflict (but not on activism). Finally, we find no significant effect of economic growth.

¹² In addition, MAR groups are less likely to be regionally based in higher-income countries than in poorer ones, which makes separatism a more likely response among the poorest ones.

Altogether, our economic findings suggest that poorer regions are more likely to be separatist than richer ones; the presence of non-lootable commodities increases a region's separatist propensity; and the level of male secondary education is inversely related to separatism.

Cultural Findings. Models 3 and 4 in Table 2 summarize our findings with respect to cultural arguments. We begin with two measures of cultural heterogeneity and distinctiveness: LANGUAGE (the probability that two randomly selected individuals belong to different linguistic groups) and CULTURALDIF (the index of cultural distance between a group and the country's assessed dominant culture). We removed PLURAL, the size of the largest ethnic group, because it correlates at $r=-0.63$ with LANGUAGE (the less likely any single group to be large, the more heterogeneous the country). When they are together in the model, they both lose significance. PLURAL without LANGUAGE is also insignificant, whereas the latter without the former matters for separatist sentiment.¹³ As hypothesized by many authors, linguistic diversity does appear to have a positive effect on separatism, but it is statistically insignificant in the case of conflict. Every 10% increase in ethnic heterogeneity would increase the probability of separatist activism by about 2% and that of separatist conflict by a little more than 1%. Although they lack robustness, these findings contrast with those of Fearon and Laitin (1999), Sambanis (2000) and Collier and Hoeffler (2003) who found a negative effect of heterogeneity on rebellions, partitions and identity wars, respectively. We suspect that the difference in our findings may come from the greater controls we offer and the more

¹³ This finding partly weakens Fearon and Laitin's (1999) claim that group dominance favors separatism. Yet, the largest group in a country could be the "minority at risk" in our data set.

focused definition of our dependent variable. In addition, we find no significant effect of absolute and relative group size and of cultural differences on either activism or violence.

The most powerful finding among cultural variables is the literally massive positive effect of group regional concentration, which increases the probability of separatist sentiment and violence respectively by 36% and 12%. To some extent, this finding (which confirms previous ones) is common-sensical and hardly cultural, although it describes a physical characteristic of groups. Broadly dispersed groups, without any region to call home, probably lack some pre-requisite for separatist action. Yet, regional concentration is not entirely a necessary condition as 16 groups which score 0 on REGIONAL have positive values for separatist sentiment, while three have actually engaged in separatist conflict: the Karens of Burma, and the Croats and Slovenes of Yugoslavia. Although these three groups do not dominate their region, they *are*, however, regionally concentrated. Nor is it, of course, a sufficient condition. Of the 235 regionally predominant groups, 111 have no separatist affinity and 192 have not engaged in separatist violence since 1990 (and most never have). Still, the inclusion of regional predominance improves the model and controls for the effects of some other variables.¹⁴

Our regressions also suggest that the presence of kinsmen abroad is not irrelevant to the development of separatism. Diasporas promote separatist activism, probably by spreading and supporting the expression of minority grievances and by funding political movements. They do not quite, however, generally succeed in prodding their kindred to violent separatist action. The presence of kinsmen across adjoining boundaries seems to have a somewhat reverse effect, significantly promoting separatist violence (probably by

¹⁴ One could argue that empirical tests should be limited to groups that are regionally concentrated. This is the approach taken by Gurr and Pitsch (2003). Redoing our tests within a sub-sample of the 235 observations that scored 1 on REGIONAL, yielded broadly similar results, however.

providing rear-bases and resources, as is the case of the Diolas of Guinea-Bissau for their kindred of Casamance) but failing to generate the separatist impulse per se.¹⁵ Because our KIN variable measures the presence of kindred across the boundary from the group's region, it assumes regional concentration and correlates therefore very highly ($r=0.62$) with REGIONAL. Dropping REGIONAL from the model very substantially boosts the effects and the significance of KIN in both regressions. Yet, to some extent, KIN then captures not only kindred groups abroad but also the regional predominance of the group. Its proper effect is therefore better assessed in conjunction with REGIONAL. When running regressions only for observations that score 1 on REGIONAL, the effects of KIN were similarly insignificant for sentiment and slightly significantly positive for separatist violence. There is therefore a distinct positive effect of boundary-straddling kindred on separatist violence.

By and large, however, the evidence for cultural hypotheses of separatism is weak. Aside from regional predominance, no variable comes out systematically significant and only kindred group in adjoining countries also matters for separatist violence. As for the cultural determinants of separatist activism, diasporas represent the only intuitive finding since linguistic differences actually come out in the opposite direction than that predicted by most authors.

Political Findings. Models 5 and 6 in Table 2 summarize our findings with respect to political hypotheses. The first striking element is the much better fit of these models compared to their economic and cultural counterparts. Model 5, with separatist

¹⁵ Buhaug and Rod (2005) also find that proximity to an international border promotes separatist conflict in Africa.

activism as the dependent variable, has an R^2 value of .33, compared to .15 and .25 for its economic and cultural equivalents. Model 6, with separatist violence as the dependent variable, has an R^2 value of .26, compared to .11 and .13 for its economic and cultural equivalents. In other words, political variables account, *prima facie*, for a greater share of the variance in separatism around the world than economic or cultural variables.

One of the main findings in the literature as regards the relationship between democracy and civil war is that both authoritarian and democratic regimes are relatively peaceful, while intermediate regimes experience more conflict (Hegre et al. 2001; Paris 2004). As a result, we entered the level of democracy in 1990 in quadratic form. We find, indeed, no difference in the impact on separatism from either democratic or authoritarian regimes. However, we find that being an intermediate regime in 1990 (i.e., scoring 3, 4 or 5 on our inverted Freedom House scale) substantially reduces the likelihood of separatist conflict compared to either democracies or autocracies. This seems to fly in the face of common wisdom, although a somewhat similar finding is reported by Gurr and Pitsch (2003:238) whose “ethnic rebellions” decline most “in quasi-democracies and failed democracies.” The time lag in our data may be crucial to understanding our finding. To avoid capturing the possible effects of separatism on democracy, our measure of democracy takes place in 1990; that of separatist violence over 1990-2003. Because democracies and autocracies are more stable regimes, countries which score either low or high on our democracy variable are likely to experience relatively few transitions in the subsequent period. Countries that are in the middle range of democracy in 1990 are likely to be countries in transition and therefore to be experiencing higher levels of conflict at that time, and to be moving either towards

democracy or autocracy over the subsequent period. A look at the standard deviation of political rights over the 1990-2003 period for observations grouped by their Freedom House values in 1990 supports this interpretation: countries scoring 1 (least free) average 0.38; countries in the middle ranges of 3, 4 and 5 average 0.90; finally, those scoring 7 (most free) average 0.11. Countries at middle values in 1990 were more likely to face conflict at that time. Since they are also more likely to democratize or authoritarianize in the subsequent period, the data may catch these countries as they reduce their likelihood of conflict. A look at the positive direct association between the democracy standard deviation (DPOLRIGHTS) over 1990-2003 and separatist violence over the same period supports our interpretation and shows its compatibility with the Hegre et al.'s (2001) finding. Controlling for the initial level of democracy, the greater the variation in the subsequent period (or the greater the amount of transition), the greater the likelihood of separatist violence over that same period, although this effect is not significant. Note also that democracy and changes in democracy have effects on separatist violence but not on activism broadly conceived.

The findings with respect to political and economic discrimination, averaged over the 1980s to avoid endogeneity, are particularly interesting. First, as with democracy, there is no effect of discrimination on separatist sentiment. This appears to provide support to those who suggest that identity conflicts are more a function of opportunity costs than of grievances, for it suggests that discrimination does not generally lead to the desire to separate. Yet, this finding is shattered as we turn to separatist violence in model 6. Here, we observe a significant positive effect of discrimination. Specifically, groups that face economic restrictions, political exclusion and repression are 24% more likely to

engage in separatist conflicts that those who are not discriminated against (the variable can take on values from 0 to 4). Particularly striking here as with democracy is the fact that the effects on violence are greater than on activism, which was not usually the case with economic and cultural variables. This does not imply that groups which suffer discrimination are not likely to develop separatist preferences before resorting to action. What it means, instead, is that so many other groups, which do not suffer discrimination, also develop separatist preferences that discrimination no longer is a credible predictor of such behavior. Yet, when it comes to translating these preferences into violent action, at the cost of one's life, the extent to which communities are victims of tyranny truly matters.

The results with regard to the effects of state failure are straightforward. The weaker the state, the more likely both separatist sentiment and violence. This finding, which is highly significant, probably encompasses a double effect as groups in weak, failing or collapsed states face a greater incentive to separate and are less likely to encounter successful state resistance in doing so. Again, this variable highlights the political logic of separatism as an act of state formation. It is when the state fails to live up to its social contract and to provide safety and services that communities are more likely to seek self-determination and sovereignty for themselves. In fact, a one standard deviation increase in state failure raises the likelihood of separatist violence by about 8%.

Turning to contagion effects, we found no discernible influence of non-separatist violence on separatism. We did, however, confirm the existence of a domestic contagion effect from other separatist conflicts (Saideman and Ayres 2001). A group which resides in a country where another group has engaged in separatism is more likely to do so too.

This pattern indicates of course, to a large extent, that these groups face similar circumstances which lead them to similar decisions. Yet, it also suggests the value of precedent and credible government response in separatist dynamics. If a government has been unable to put down a separatist insurrection, other groups with similar grievances may hope for similar successes and find the collective-action barriers to entry reduced. The examples of groups in Burma, Ethiopia or India come to mind. This finding supports Barbara Walter's (2006) recent argument about the importance of government reputation in fending off separatist attempts.

The presence of a friendly neighbor, measured by the extent to which groups have kinsmen in positions of power in neighboring governments, has no effect on separatist sentiment but displays a positive effect on conflict, which falls just short of statistical significance at conventional levels. This finding contrasts mildly with those of Fearon and Laitin (1999), who found no friendly neighbor effect at all, and those of Sorens (2005), who found a negative one in Western Europe.

The next two variables are probably among the most interesting in this study. Our data suggest that having once been an autonomous region (e.g., an independent country, part of a federal state, etc.) considerably magnifies the propensity of groups to engage in separatist activism and violence. This finding is similar to those of Gurr (1993) and Sorens (2005), although we manage to extend it to separatist violence. The lost autonomy index, obtained from MAR, is a complex measure, however, and these coefficients should be interpreted with care. The index ranges from 0 to 6 and increases value as a function of how recently the loss of autonomy occurred (the more recent, the greater the index), the magnitude of change compared to previous status, and the nature

of previous status (from traditional system to state or republic). As a result, this index is somewhat biased against groups whose autonomy never benefited from international (Western) sovereign or colonial recognition. For example, Eritrea, which was an Italian colony later swallowed up by Ethiopia (but which was not a political system before colonization), scores 4. The Buganda kingdom of Uganda, on the other hand, scores 2 although it was a powerful and independent kingdom for several centuries before British colonization in 1900. Yet, this bias may somehow replicate one that exists in practice as groups which did not once have internationally recognized statuses may infer from it that they have lesser chances of successful secession. At any rate, this finding suggests some quasi-“primordial” dimension to separatism. The less imagined the political community, the more likely one is to fight for its restoration or build on its legacy to demand emancipation. Such logic is miles away from the quasi-criminal intents of “greed”-driven elites in the economic opportunity models of civil wars.

Finally, having an autonomous regional status is unequivocally associated with separatism. Regions which have autonomous statuses are 18% more likely to engage in separatist warfare than others. This echoes the findings of lost autonomy as regional administrative existence confers institutional reality to the community and heralds the promises of independence. Having an administration also facilitates collective action and reinforces social ties (Gorenburg 2000 & 2001). Yet, as mentioned earlier, this variable is likely to be endogenous to separatism as groups that previously engaged in separatist activism are more likely to have obtained some measure of regional autonomy. Still, our data suggests that, in general, these groups are unlikely to be satisfied with regional

autonomy and may use their newfound institutional identity to push for greater concessions (see Bookman 1992).

By and large, these findings suggest how separatist conflicts may follow a different logic from other types of civil wars. The literature on “greed and grievance” in civil conflicts has promoted an economic understanding of domestic wars. The countervailing hypothesis of “grievance” has been shown, in contrast, to have little empirical robustness in comparison to opportunity costs (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Yet, these results are flawed in more ways than one. Particularly, the measurement of grievances through nation-wide ethnic and religious fractionalization, ethnic dominance and polarization is somewhat vacuous. Grievances arise from discrimination, persecution, inequality and tyranny; not from differences. When properly measured, as we claim to have done, the role of grievances in separatist dynamics is unquestionable. The following section assesses how this role compares with that of economic opportunities by bringing all relevant variables together.

Table 3 about here

The Primacy of Politics

In Table 3, we jointly test the effects of all variables which were statistically significant in previous iterations, together with the regional dummies and additional control variables. The findings confirm the political nature of separatism, as most political variables retain or increase their effects and significance after controlling for economic

and cultural factors. This is especially true of the determinants of separatist violence. The same cannot be said of economic and cultural theories, however. Of particular interest is the broad obliteration of economic variables, which underlines the empirical weakness of rational choice theories of political violence when it comes to self-determination. Cultural variables also perform relatively poorly.

We begin with a review of the economic results. Despite the salience of the economic-differential hypothesis in the literature on secessions, this variable loses all significance after controlling for non-economic factors. This suggests that, once cultural and political variables are taken into account, economic differences between a group and the rest of the country do not significantly promote either separatist sentiment or violence. Most previous studies have failed to identify this lack of effect because they have failed to sufficiently control for competing non-economic theories. Again, differences *per se* do not necessarily polarize communities and encourage demands for separation. As the political results suggest, however, worse-off groups are likely to fight for self-determination if their different status results from discrimination.

Equally interesting in view of the popularity of this hypothesis in academic and policy circles is the irrelevance of the availability of non-lootable resources. After displaying a strong positive effect on separatism in pure economic models, this variable no longer contributes to separatism. What accounts for this deflation? We suggest a simple explanation that may shed doubt on the general validity of this theory. In a nutshell, for a group to have natural resources in its region, it must first have a region. Once this regional preponderance is accounted for, however, the effect of resources disappears. In other words, measures of resource endowment may proxy for group

regional concentration instead of catching a *bona fide* resource effect. This interpretation is confirmed by regressing the economic model only for those groups that are regionally concentrated, which yields insignificant coefficients. The same findings obtain with broader measures of natural resources endowments. Finally, male secondary education, one of Collier and Hoeffler's (2002) main measures of the opportunity costs of young fighters, also falls below statistical significance.

Among cultural variables, models 9 and 10 confirm the effect of linguistic diversity on violence, although this effect disappears for activism. This contrasts with much of the existing literature, whether on civil wars at large or secessionist conflicts. We surmise that our findings come from the more focused definition of our dependent variable (as against that of Fearon and Laitin 1999, for example), our broader sample (as opposed to Sambanis 2000), and the more exhaustive specification of our model (in contrast to Collier and Hoeffler 2003).

Although regional concentration remains the most potent determinant of separatist activism, its effects disappear as regards conflict. As noted before, this variable correlates at $r=0.62$ with the presence of kin across an adjacent border. It appears therefore that, while regional concentration is a virtual condition for the development of separatist demands, its effects are overridden by the irredentist appeal of kindred neighbors or the military support they can provide when it comes to resorting to violence.

Turning finally to the effects of political variables, Table 3 offers a rather unambiguous picture: politics matters more than anything else. And the political variables that matter tell a story of separatism as a response to persecution, discrimination (and not merely differences), failure of the state to provide protection and quasi-

primordial attachment to a lost sovereign world, facilitated by the availability of institutional or administrative resources for action.

The U-curve effects of democracy identified in Table 2 are robust to the inclusion of all other control variables. This remains a difficult pattern to make sense of, however. As we guessed earlier, it may capture the fact that countries at middle levels of democracy in 1990 were likely to move towards more democracy or more autocracy in the ensuing period, both of which are associated with less violence. The level of political and economic discrimination faced by a group in the 1980s is a large and robust determinant of the group's willingness to engage in a war of self-determination in the subsequent decade. Groups that face social exclusion and restrictive economic policies are 28% more likely to fight for independence than groups that face no discrimination, irrespective of their different relative economic status. This provides support for the claims of minorities-at-risk scholars who see discrimination and grievances as the main source of self-determination conflicts (Gurr 1993; Gurr 2000; Gurr and Pitsch 2003). Failure of the state to provide law and order, a functioning bureaucracy and government stability also systematically encourages minority groups to seek their own destiny. And, when it comes to resorting to separatist action, the remembrance of a lost autonomous past will be a potent trigger, more than any appeal from economic opportunities. While having an already autonomous region does not further promote demands for autonomy, it does act as a significant and powerful facilitation factor for organizing separatist violence, probably endowing local governments with access to needed resources and allowing them to shield local activities from government oversight. In contrast, having a violent separatist movement in a country may open the floodgates of separatist discourses

from other groups, yet it does not quite lead them to greater use of violence for their own agenda. This again suggests the seriousness of separatism, away from short-term opportunistic consideration and representing a deeper commitment to state formation which comes from intrinsic grievances rather than facilitating environments. As a result, domestic contagion, while not inexistent, is limited.

Finally, we note the limited effects of the additional control variables. Only country size matters and it reduces the extent of separatism (while a larger population comes closer to promoting it). This could possibly echo Bartkus' (1999) argument about the scale benefits to country size for distinct communities in terms of improved social, economic and educational opportunities. As for the nature of terrain, which we measured as a dummy variable for the presence of mountains or forests, it is not a significant predictor. This contrasts greatly with the popular findings of Fearon and Laitin (2003) regarding insurgencies in general. To some extent, our dichotomous measure is rough, but not more than theirs, which failed to control for the region of the country that has rough terrain. This finding could, once again, illustrate the different nature of separatist warfare compared to other civil conflicts and undermine opportunistic theories of separatism. If one wishes to start an insurgency to overthrow a government, it makes sense to hide in forests or mountains and launch attacks from such relatively safe hideouts. In 2005, for example, Chadian rebels stole a few military vehicles from the government in Ndjamena and headed several hundred miles east to the mountains of the region bordering Sudan, from where they hoped to mount a successful insurrection to depose President Idriss Deby. If one wishes, however, to take control over territory and start a new country, then there is no real choice as to where to do this. For sure, separatist

rebels can weaken the government they fight by bringing violence to the capital, in the form of terrorism for example, but one cannot fight for, say, the independence of Katanga by hiding in the mountains of Kivu. Our findings are consistent with Buhaug and Rod's (2005) observation that territorial conflicts in Africa take place without significant rough terrain. In fact their measures of local proportion of mountains and forest for Africa systematically display a negative association with territorial conflict, insignificantly so for mountains (2005:15, 30).

Regional Effects

The Africa and Latin America regional dummies have nearly systematic significant negative effect on separatism. Asia and the Middle East typically fit the model. Western democracies also usually fit the model although they display a positive effect in the overall models of separatist activism, which suggests that democratic openness promotes the expression of separatist grievances (while it may marginally reduce their violent translation).

We offer different ways to make sense of the behavior of the Africa and Latin America dummies. Comparing their effects, the Latin America dummy is weakest when controlling for cultural variables, while the Africa one loses significance when modeling political factors. In the specific models of Table 2, the magnitude of the Latin America effects are typically stronger than the Africa ones. In the general models of Table 3, it is the other way around. This is particularly interesting to the extent that all 33 Latin American minorities at risk score 0 on the separatist conflict variable. In other words, there is no instance of violent separatism in Latin America between 1990 and 2003. In

contrast, nine of Africa's 98 groups have engaged in separatist violence. Although this is still about half the observed propensity for groups in other regions of the world, it makes Africa relatively less of an outlier than Latin America.

Yet, we suggest that the Latin American deficit is less mysterious than Africa's. By and large, Latin American groups are not constructed in ways that either promote separatism or make it a thinkable part of the registry of political action. Ten are categorized by the MAR project as "ethnoclasses" or "ethnically or culturally distinct peoples, usually descended from slaves or immigrants, most of whom occupy a distinct social and economic stratum or niche."¹⁶ The categorization of these groups as classes suggests that the mode of their relationship with the state and with other groups in society is not regional, even if they may occasionally inhabit a particular region. Apart from the "Chinese" of Panama, nine of these 10 groups are black minorities. The twenty other observations are all "Indigenous Peoples" or "conquered descendants of earlier inhabitants of a region who live mainly in conformity with traditional social, economic, and cultural customs that are sharply distinct from those of dominant groups".¹⁷ These indigenous groups will on occasion be regionally concentrated, yet their existence as a group is more often a function of external categorization than internal aggregate identity. As a result they make poor candidates for separatist collective action. Eleven of them are actually categorized in the plural, as "indigenous peoples" but aggregated as one group each. For Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, the data set differentiates between "lowland" and "highland indigenous peoples" but also treats each as a single, supposedly homogeneous group. For all of Latin America, the only indigenous groups that are named are the

¹⁶ MAR web site, www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/about/types.htm.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Amazonian Indians of Brazil, and the Mayans and Zapotecs of Mexico, the latter two of which actually score some positive value on the MAR separatism index.¹⁸ In conclusion, the preponderance of ethnoclasses and indigenous peoples among Latin America's minorities is partly a substantive reason for why this region has developed less separatism and partly a methodological problem of mixing Latin American apples with oranges from other parts of the world.

Things are more complex when it comes to Africa since many of its groups are regionally based "tribes" with plausible political claims for autonomy. Some explanations for the survival of Africa's weak states have included the strong norms of the Organization of African Unity against boundary change (Neuberger 1991), the territorial nature of Africa's post-colonial nationalism (Young 2002), the fact that any partition would be as arbitrary as current colonially-inherited borders (Horowitz 2003), and the "juridical" guarantee of their existence, however empirically weak, by the international system (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). Our data suggest that African sub-national groups value the sovereignty of their states more than others and are therefore less likely to challenge it. The two variables that make the negative African effect disappear in the political regressions are "autonomous region" and "domestic contagion." To some extent, domestic contagion simply correlates with the frequency of separatism in any region and, therefore, with the regional dummy, causing some multicollinearity. More importantly, however, if one sets aside Ethiopia which is unique among African states as not having been colonized, there is a no domestic contagion effect in Africa, unlike other regions with separatism. In other words, Africa may have fewer secessions

¹⁸ The three remaining Latin American minorities-at-risk groups are the "East Indians" and "Africans" of Guyana, and the "Jews" of Argentina.

because secessionist groups in its countries typically do not lead to other groups wanting secession. This suggests some sort of deterrence to separatist action in Africa. A look at the next variable may shed some light on it.

The second variable that matters is being an autonomous region. Around the world, having an autonomous region promotes separatism. Only 13% of Africa's minorities have autonomous regions, however, as opposed to 33% elsewhere. This is a reflection on the centralization of power in Africa where personal rule remains the norm even in partially democratized regimes (van de Walle 2003). Furthermore, being an autonomous region does not lead to greater separatism in regressions among African groups only. In other words, it may well be that African minorities seek access to the state rather than separation from it (see Scarritt 1993). From this perspective, regional autonomy is a form of access to decentralized sovereignty, which is a resource to many Africans given the continent's general paucity of private economic opportunities. Fewer Africans, therefore, seek secessions than their level of persecution and the failure of their states would suggest, because they value access or potential access to state sovereignty, irrespective of their relative power position at the center (Reno 2003; Englebert and Hummel 2005). Domestic contagion and regional autonomy capture some of these sovereignty elements and deflate the regional dummy. In the general model, however, after controls for ethnic heterogeneity, neighboring kin and state size, all of which would promote separatism in Africa, the sovereignty effect is once again very significantly captured by the Africa dummy.

At any rate, the systematic significance of the Africa and Latin America dummies, and the occasional effects of the Western democracy dummy, highlights the lack of

general relevance of most theories of separatism around the world, a fact which may derive from their origination in regional studies, particularly the former Soviet Union and Asia. The significance of the Africa dummy, particularly, suggests the different logic underlying political action on the continent.

Conclusions

The recent scholarly focus on “ethnic,” “ethnopolitical,” or “identity” conflicts has blurred our understanding of separatist dynamics and done a disservice to the field. By blending different conflicts together, it has promoted a profit-maximizing, resource-exploiting and opportunity-seeking understanding of civil conflicts, which may be more appropriate for quasi-criminal violence than for violent acts of self-determination. Our results suggest that separatism is the expression of an aspiration for statehood, a deeply political statement. It is an act of state formation, which is more likely to occur the more communities are discriminated against, the more the states in which they live fail to provide any form of social compact and restrain violence, and the more they can rely on the remembrance of a once autonomous life. Opportunity costs, natural resources, cultural differences, diasporas and difficult terrains are little more than noise. Is it because the norm of territorial integrity of states has been so well internalized by scholars, like others, that challenges to it can only be understood in negative terms? Our work suggests that separatism, as a manifestation of the broader political act of state formation, must be conceptualized as an act of communal survival and emancipation and restored to political science. If nothing else, this paper has illustrated the remarkably

resilient appeal of the state as a perceived instrument of emancipation, despite all its excesses and failures, especially in less developed countries.

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Table 2: Regression results: Separatist activism and conflict, 1990-2003

| | (1) Activism | (2) Conflict | (3) Activism | (4) Conflict | (5) Activism | (6) Conflict |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| AFRICA | -0.39*** (3.55) | -0.27*** (2.93) | -0.28*** (3.36) | -0.15* (1.94) | -0.07 (0.92) | -0.08 (1.32) |
| ASIA | -0.16 (1.32) | -0.06 (0.50) | 0.06 (0.70) | 0.08 (1.00) | 0.003 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.17) |
| LAC | -0.46*** (5.36) | -0.29*** (3.95) | -0.20*** (2.74) | -0.14*** (2.64) | -0.19** (2.34) | -0.19*** (3.34) |
| MENA | -0.03 (0.29) | -0.14 (1.50) | 0.09 (1.00) | -0.05 (0.57) | 0.14 (1.25) | -0.05 (0.62) |
| WEST | 0.17 (0.99) | 0.02 (0.15) | 0.18* (1.95) | -0.07 (1.00) | 0.24** (2.15) | -0.04 (0.52) |
| ECDIFF | 0.02 (1.14) | 0.01* (1.92) | | | | |
| ECDIFFSQ | -0.01** (2.33) | -0.01* (1.78) | | | | |
| NONLOOT | 0.15*** (2.78) | 0.09** (2.05) | | | | |
| MALESECED90 | -0.34** (2.03) | -0.31** (2.34) | | | | |
| GDP90 | -5.7e-6 (0.72) | -5.6e-6 (1.26) | | | | |
| GROWTH | 1.43 (1.32) | 0.55 (0.71) | | | | |
| LANGUAGE | | | 0.20* (1.89) | 0.12 (1.30) | | |
| POPABS | | | 0.002 (1.58) | -0.001 (0.92) | | |
| POPPERCENT | | | -0.23 (1.41) | -0.10 (0.92) | | |
| CULTURALDIFF | | | -0.01 (0.67) | 0.01 (0.80) | | |
| REGIONAL | | | 0.36*** (5.93) | 0.12*** (2.58) | | |
| DIASPORA | | | 0.10* (1.89) | 0.05 (1.13) | | |
| KIN | | | 0.04 (0.60) | 0.09* (1.75) | | |
| POLRIGHTS90 | | | | | -9e-4 (0.01) | -0.12* (1.99) |
| POLRIGHTS90SQ | | | | | 0.001 (0.14) | 0.02** (2.18) |
| DPOLRIGHTS | | | | | -0.02 (0.31) | 0.08 (1.60) |
| DISCRIMINATION90 | | | | | 0.01 (0.67) | 0.05*** (3.77) |
| ALLFAILURE90 | | | | | 0.05** (2.13) | 0.06*** (3.08) |
| PRIOGOVDUM | | | | | 0.01 (0.18) | -0.04 (0.88) |
| DOMCON | | | | | 0.18*** (2.72) | 0.10* (1.91) |
| POWERFULKIN | | | | | 0.01 (0.63) | 0.02 (1.56) |
| AUTLOST | | | | | 0.15*** (6.75) | 0.07*** (3.17) |
| AUTONREGION | | | | | 0.18*** (2.93) | 0.18*** (3.47) |
| Method/N/R ² | OLS/327/.15 | OLS/327/.11 | OLS/326/.25 | OLS/326/.13 | OLS/332/.33 | OLS/332/.26 |

Note: OLS estimations. White-robust t statistics in parentheses. *, **, *** = respectively 10%, 5% and 1% significance levels.

Table 3: Regression results with previously significant variables only and additional controls

| | (7) Activism | (8) Activism | (9) Conflict | (10) Conflict |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| AFRICA | -0.31** (2.56) | -0.27** (2.24) | -0.28*** (2.78) | -0.27*** (2.70) |
| ASIA | -0.04 (0.45) | -0.06 (0.57) | -0.11 (1.36) | -0.16* (1.76) |
| LAC | -0.18* (1.84) | -0.12 (1.21) | -0.23*** (2.97) | -0.17* (1.92) |
| MENA | 0.11 (1.15) | 0.11 (1.03) | -0.09 (1.23) | -0.09 (1.19) |
| WEST | 0.34*** (3.98) | 0.35*** (3.78) | -0.05 (0.58) | -0.12 (1.07) |
| ECDIFF | -2e-4 (0.03) | 0.003 (0.24) | -0.01 (0.91) | -0.01 (1.06) |
| ECDIFFSQ | -0.003 (0.81) | -0.004 (1.02) | -0.003 (0.86) | -0.003 (0.90) |
| NONLOOT | -0.08 (1.40) | -0.06 (1.07) | -0.01 (0.18) | 0.01 (0.31) |
| MALESECD90 | -0.22 (1.46) | -0.19 (1.26) | -0.20 (1.62) | -0.20 (1.57) |
| LANGUAGE | 0.11 (1.06) | 0.12 (1.10) | 0.15* (1.67) | 0.19** (2.09) |
| REGIONAL | 0.30*** (5.02) | 0.34*** (4.36) | 0.02 (0.47) | -0.001 (0.02) |
| KIN | | | 0.09* (1.65) | 0.09* (1.75) |
| DIASPORA | 0.02 (0.37) | -0.01 (0.22) | | |
| POLRIGHTS90 | | | -0.14** (2.14) | -0.16** (2.37) |
| POLRIGHTS90SQ | | | 0.02** (2.34) | 0.02** (2.55) |
| DPOLRIGHTS | | | 0.08 (1.60) | 0.09 (1.61) |
| DISCRIMINATION90 | | | 0.07*** (4.00) | 0.07*** (4.13) |
| ALLFAILURE90 | 0.04 (1.60) | 0.04 (1.57) | 0.03* (1.83) | 0.04* (1.93) |
| DOMCON | 0.15*** (2.58) | 0.18*** (2.88) | 0.08 (1.59) | 0.08 (1.54) |
| POWERFULKIN | | | 0.002 (0.10) | -0.004 (0.26) |
| AUTLOST | 0.13*** (5.78) | 0.13*** (5.78) | 0.06*** (3.00) | 0.06*** (3.02) |
| AUTONREGION | 0.08 (1.26) | 0.09 (1.56) | 0.15*** (2.77) | 0.15*** (2.74) |
| NEWSTATE | | 0.10 (1.10) | | 0.13 (1.43) |
| INPIECES | | -0.007 (0.10) | | 0.10 (1.51) |
| LOGSIZE | | -0.05** (2.51) | | -0.04** (2.38) |
| LOGPOP | | 0.04 (1.60) | | 0.03 (1.47) |
| TERRAIN | | -0.05 (0.69) | | 0.03 (0.53) |

Method/N/R² ————— OLS/321/.39 OLS/320/.40 OLS325/.30 OLS/324/.30

Note: OLS estimations. White-robust t statistics in parentheses. *, **, *** = respectively 10%, 5% and 1% significance levels.