The Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset

Lars-Erik Cederman, Brian Min, and Andreas Wimmer

The Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset identifies all politically relevant ethnic groups and records the level of access to state power by their representatives in all countries of the world from 1946-2005.[1] We recruited a large panel of country and regional experts to help identify which ethnic categories were most salient to the national politics of a country. The codings were collected via an online survey relying on the input of nearly one hundred area specialists and scholars from across the globe.[2]

Typically, an intensive back and forth with country coders was necessary to ensure that coding principles were well understood and that ambiguities were resolved in a consistent way across countries and continents. The process of interacting with country experts took almost two years. Four workshops were held in which every country coding was reviewed and evaluated to ensure inter-coder reliability and consistency. We discussed each coding directly with regional experts and drew upon additional data sources and the accumulating comparative knowledge of the project team itself. In many cases, it proved necessary to return to the initial coders or to invite additional experts to help us synthesize the data and arrive at final codings.

Coders were first asked to identify which ethnic categories were politically relevant in a specific country at a particular point in time based on their own specific knowledge and research (a definition of political relevancy follows below). We did not limit the range of possibilities to any existing group list.[3] We asked coders not to exclude any group from consideration based only on size, since even very small groups can be politically significant in national politics. We required that the list of politically relevant ethnic categories be mutually exclusive without overlap. This was challenging in contexts where multiple, cross-cutting ethnic cleavages may exist, such as along overlapping linguistic, regional, or religious lines. Thus coders were required to identify and focus on the most salient line of ethnic cleavage within a country. As described below, our framework remains flexible by allowing coders to identify how the most significant cleavages may shift from one set of categories to another over time.

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[1] The dataset includes coverage of all 155 sovereign states with a population of at least 1 million and a surface area of at least 500,000 square kilometers as of 2005.

[2] The survey was conducted under the label Expert Survey of Ethnic Groups (ESEG).

[3] As background, coders were able to easily access group lists from the Soviet *ANM*, Fearon (2003), and the MAR project.

In a second step, coders determined the degree of access to central level state power for representatives of each of these categories for each period. Focusing on executive-level state power, we limit the realm of politics to the set of policies under the direct influence of a country's executive branch. Experts were encouraged to focus on the most relevant institutions (e.g. in a military dictatorship, power over the army, and in presidential systems, the senior cabinet, etc.). We consciously disregard the ethnic composition of the legislative and judicial branches, even though these are important in many countries. We were primarily interested in major power shifts reflecting substantial changes in the representation of a country's leadership rather than temporary changes reflecting cabinet reshuffles or the promotion of certain officer groups in the army. In all cases, coders were asked to focus on absolute access to power irrespective of the question of under- or over-representation relative to the demographic size of an ethnic category.

1.1 Politically relevant ethnic groups

Following the Weberian tradition, we defined ethnicity as a subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and shared culture. Different markers may be used to indicate such shared ancestry and culture: common language, similar phenotypical features, adherence to the same faith, and so on. Our definition of ethnicity thus includes ethnolinguistic, ethnosomatic (or "racial"), and ethnoreligious groups, but not tribes and clans that conceive of ancestry in genealogical terms, nor regions that do not define commonality on the basis of shared ancestry. Ethnic categories may be hierarchically nested and comprise several levels of differentiation, not all of which are politically relevant (on the notion of ethnicity underlying this project, see Wimmer 2008).

An ethnic category is politically relevant if at least one significant political actor claims to represent the interests of that group in the national political arena, or if members of an ethnic category are systematically and intentionally discriminated against in the domain of public politics. By "significant" political actor we mean a political organization (not necessarily a party) that is active in the national political arena. We define discrimination as political exclusion directly targeted at an ethnic community—thus disregarding indirect discrimination based, for example, on educational disadvantage or discrimination in the labor or credit markets. The coding scheme allows us to identify countries or specific periods in which political objectives, alliances, or disputes were never framed in ethnic terms, thus avoiding using an ethnic lens for countries not characterized by ethnic politics, such as Tanzania and Korea. The coding rules mirror the Minorities at Risk data set's definition of political relevance but, by coding majority and dominant groups as well, do not restrict the universe of cases to politically excluded minorities.

We do not distinguish between degrees of representativity of political actors who claim to speak for an ethnic group, nor do we code the heterogeneity of political positions voiced by leaders claiming to represent the same community (Bowen 1996; Brubaker 2004; Zartman 2004). Such detail is beyond the scope of this project and would require a coding scheme in which political organizations form the units of observation. We thus assume that ethnic categories become politically relevant as soon as there is a minimal

degree of political mobilization or intentional political discrimination along ethnic lines. This happens regardless of the level of support for an ethnopolitical project and whatever the heterogeneity of positions voiced in the name of a group. Our data set does not code information regarding the process leading to such ethnic mobilization but only records its effect—that a particular ethnic category has become a meaningful reference in the dynamics of national politics.

Because politically relevant categories and access to political power may change over time, coders divided the 1946 to 2005 period and provided separate codings for each subperiod. This was also necessary when the list of politically relevant categories changed from one year to the next. Next, we coded the degree of access to power enjoyed by political leaders who claimed to represent various groups.

1.2 Coding access to power

We categorized all politically relevant ethnic groups according to the degree of access to central state power by those who claimed to represent them. Some held full control of the executive branch with no meaningful participation by members of any other group, some shared power with members of other groups, and some were excluded altogether from decision-making authority. Within each of these three categories, coders differentiated between further subtypes, including absolute power, power sharing regimes, and exclusion from central power.

ABSOLUTE POWER. In this case, the political elites who claim to represent an ethnic group do not significantly share power with other political leaders. There are two possibilities, monopoly and dominant.

> *Monopoly*: Elite members hold monopoly power in the executive-level at the exclusion of members of other ethnic groups. The Ladino community in Guatemala is a good example. They ruled without any significant participation from the indigenous population until the end of the civil war.
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> *Dominant*: Elite members of the group hold dominant power in the executive-level but there is some limited inclusion of members of other groups. This includes token members of the cabinet coming from other ethnic groups, such as Saddam Hussein's minister of foreign affairs, who was Christian rather than Sunni Arab. Token members do not effectively act as representatives of the nondominant group, nor do they advocate for policies that would correspond to demands voiced by other leaders of the nondominant group.

POWER SHARING REGIMES. By power sharing, we mean any arrangement that divides executive power among leaders who claim to represent particular ethnic groups. Such an arrangement can be either formal, as in Lebanon, or informal, as in Switzerland. Although consociationalism illustrates this type of governance, we do not limit it to this category. The representatives of an ethnic category can play one of two roles in a coalition, either senior or junior partner.

Senior partner: Representatives participate as senior partners in a formal or informal power sharing arrangement

Junior partner: Representatives participate as junior partners in government.[4]

EXCLUSION FROM CENTRAL POWER. Finally, when political leaders who claim to represent a particular ethnic category are excluded from participation in central government, we distinguish between those with local autonomy and those who are powerless or discriminated against.

Regional autonomy: Elite members of the group have no central power but have some influence at the subnational level (i.e., the provincial or district level, depending on the vertical organization of the state).[5] Georgians under Soviet rule are an example. Local governments controlled by representatives of an ethnic category who have declared their territory independent from central government, such as Abkhazians in independent Georgia, are a special case. We mark such situations with an additional coding, "secessionist autonomy."[6]

Powerless: Elite representatives hold no political power at the national or regional levels without being explicitly discriminated against.

Discriminated: Group members are subjected to active, intentional, and targeted discrimination with the intent of excluding them from both regional and national power. Examples include African Americans until the civil rights movement and Guatemaltecan Indians until the end of the civil war. Such active discrimination can be either formal or informal. Formal discrimination legally limits access to government positions to citizens who speak a certain mother tongue, display certain phenotypical features, or are members of certain religious groups. Informal discrimination actively and intentionally inhibits individuals with certain ethnic backgrounds from rising within the ranks of government.[7]

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[4] The choice between senior and junior depends on the number and relative importance of the positions controlled by group members. For example, in ethnic party systems such as that of Malaysia, the Malay governing party is the senior partner, while the Chinese party is a junior partner. Even in countries without ethnic party systems, such as Switzerland, it is possible to identify the Swiss Germans as the senior partner and the French and Italian speakers as the junior ones, based on the informally fixed distribution of cabinet seats along ethnolinguistic lines.

[5] We do not consider local power below this level. By influence, we mean that group members have a leading position or are coalition partners in a regional government (where such governments exist); or that they participate significantly in the executive branch on the regional level (e.g., where regional governors are appointed by the central government); or there are ethnic quotas in the regional or local administration (such as in India or the FSU).

[6] We code local autonomy exclusively for politically relevant groups. We therefore do not consider ethnic communities whose representatives control municipal governments because of a high local population share but never appear in a regional or national political arena (e.g., Albanian speakers in Italy). We exclude such groups from the data and consider them politically irrelevant.

[7] We do not include in this category (1) groups suffering from *indirect* discrimination because they are disadvantaged in the economic sphere or the educational sector and thus are unlikely to successfully compete in the political arena; (2) general social discrimination (e.g., on the labor and marriage markets); and (3) the exclusion of noncitizens from power, as long as they hold passports of other states and can effectively return to their country of origin. This notion of discrimination does not rely on representation compared with population size. A large group may be underrepresented in government without being actively and intentionally discriminated against.

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