The Impact of Political Liberalisation and Democratisation on Ethnic Conflict in Africa: An Empirical Test of Common Assumptions
Author(s): Zeric Kay Smith
Source: *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 21-39
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/161950
Accessed: 21/11/2009 10:22

The Journal of Modern African Studies, 38, 1 (2000), pp. 21–39
Printed in the United Kingdom

The impact of political liberalisation and democratisation on ethnic conflict in Africa: an empirical test of common assumptions

Zeric Kay Smith*

ABSTRACT

This article provides an empirical test of a set of common theoretical assumptions concerning the relationship between political liberalisation, democratisation and ethnic conflict in Africa. The theory in question posits that liberalisation will result in short-term increases in ethnic conflict and that democratisation will be followed by a decrease in ethnic conflict. The article employs a cross-national and time sensitive data set to test this hypothesis in the context of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. A compelling benefit of this methodology is that it allows for an explanation of variation in ethnic conflict both across states and over time.

The results indicate that the relationship between political liberalisation and ethnic conflict is the reverse of what the common assumptions would predict. Liberalisation has had an inverse relationship to ethnic conflict in sub-Saharan Africa between 1988 and 1997. Democratisation does not have the hypothesised effect even when lagged variables are employed. Structural variables as represented by GDP per capita and infant mortality rates are also systematically related to ethnic conflict. The author concludes that policy makers and analysts should continue to pursue both liberalisation and democratisation but should not neglect the central role of an adequate resource base in reducing ethnic conflict in Africa. Political liberalisation and democratic institutions, while providing some measure of relief, are by no means silver bullets for the difficult challenges posed by ethnic conflict in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the two most prominent issues of interest in political studies of Africa in the past decade have been ethnicity and democracy. The

* Senior Research Associate, Walker Institute of International Studies, University of South Carolina. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 27, 1998. This paper has benefited greatly from comments received at that meeting, and particularly from a number of invaluable suggestions from Kimberly Smiddy Butler, Christopher Clapham, Anirud Ruhill, George Krause, and two anonymous reviewers.

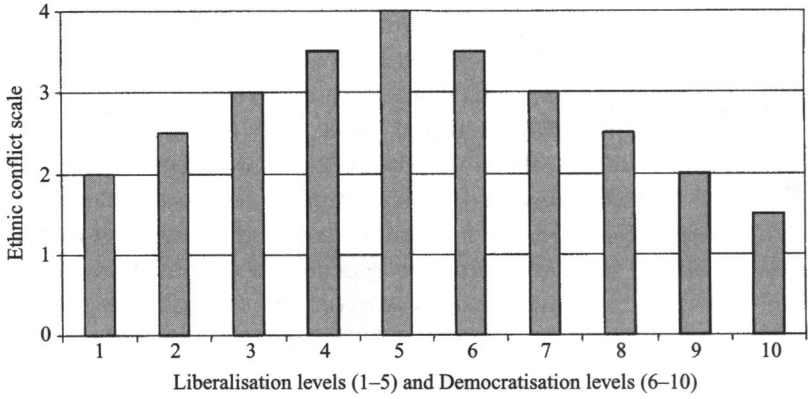
spectre of ethnic conflict so prominent in popular press accounts of Africa has been balanced to some extent by an academic interest in issues of democratisation.[1] While these two topics have been important staples in comparative research, with few exceptions, their nexus has not been considered.[2] This study combines insights of scholars who have focused on ethnicity with those who have looked at democratisation, and in doing so contributes a model for analysing the relationship between ethnic conflict and democracy in Africa. The main purpose of this article is to empirically test the central theoretical claim of scholars who argue that:

> despite the persistence of ethnic conflict in the politics of all African states, significant liberalization and democratization are possible... Certain constitutional and democratic practices permit the expression and demonstration of ethnic differences in relatively constructive ways. Ethnic conflict is not incompatible with institutions of democratic government if it finds expression as a group interest among other interests, and if the means of expression provide openings for rewards and not merely sure defeats. (Glickman 1995: 3)

The claim put forth by Glickman rests on the assumption that ethnicity in Africa is *instrumental* as opposed to *primordial* and as a result, ethnic conflict will likely be responsive to institutional configurations of a democratic nature.[3] This view is echoed by Bowen when he argues that 'states do make choices, particularly about political processes, that ease or exacerbate intergroup tensions... What the myth of ethnic conflict would say are ever-present tensions, are in fact the products of political choices' (1996: 12–13).[4] This instrumental position asserts that ethnic conflict need not be violent and destructive, rather, democratic institutions offer the possibility for ethnicity to be expressed and managed in a politically productive fashion. Yet, the political manipulation of ethnic identities, which has often been associated with increased ethnic conflict in Africa, is also consistent with a general instrumental view. If ethnic identities are malleable, then they may be manipulated towards violent mobilisation as easily as inter-group compromise.

Thus, two opposite results could emerge from liberalisation and democratisation and a question of considerable import emerges. What has been the relationship between ethnic conflict and democratisation over the almost decade-long period of Africa's 'second independence?' If Glickman and Bowen are correct, we might expect to see two related phenomena. First, an increase in ethnic conflict in the immediate wake of political liberalisation. Ndegwa argues this point explicitly: 'In some African countries, democratic openings have intensified ethnic com-

FIGURE 1
Hypothesised effect of liberalisation and democratisation on ethnic conflict



petition...' (1997: 599). Similarly, according to van de Walle, political liberalisation broke the neo-patrimonial patterns when elites defected from the ruling coalition and resulted in 'the rise of ethnic conflict at the popular level' (1994: 139). Ottaway too argues that, just as democratisation rearranged the map of Europe in the nineteenth-century, democratisation in Africa

> will not simply entail a change of regimes. The real danger is not the possibility of the breakup of some African states into new states... but the collapse of an increasing number of states into utter chaos and mass slaughter. The specter haunting Africa is not the possibility of new Eritreas but the likelihood of new Rwandas. (Ottaway 1995: 22)

In all these cases, the relationship between ethnic conflict and democratisation seems to be assumed rather than demonstrated. Many authoritarian leaders in Africa (including Moi in Kenya, Eyadema in Togo, and the late Mobutu in ex-Zaïre) have also voiced the fear that liberalisation would lead to greater ethnic conflict. Most observers concur that for these political leaders, the fear of ethnic conflict has been used as an excuse to avoid sharing power. The second phenomenon that follows from these assumptions is that successful democratisation should lead to a decrease in ethnic conflict.

Figure 1 presents this relationship graphically as a bell curve. Although this is a common, though not universal, assumption among scholars of Africa, the relationship has not been empirically tested across a broad number of cases. We must ask, are these phenomena empirically evident?

To answer this question, the relationship between ethnic conflict and democratisation in Africa from 1988 to 1997 is measured. Ethnic conflict is the dependent variable. Two related hypotheses are tested. Hypothesis (1): In situations of transition from authoritarian rule, an increase in civil liberties (*liberalisation*) will often result in an initial increase in ethnic conflict. This would be a result of pent-up, suppressed or otherwise hidden ethnic tensions that come to the surface, or are reported more accurately in a situation of greater civil liberties. Hypothesis (2): If gains in political rights (*democratisation*) become evident, then we should see a gradual decrease in ethnic conflict. A decline of ethnic tensions would be expected because, after an initial period in which pent-up tensions are vented, a healthy set of non-conflictual coping mechanisms should develop. The establishment of democratic institutions should function to mediate ethnic disputes. Using the Freedom House/Gastil democracy scores, an ethnic conflict scale developed by the author, and a set of control variables, this paper employs a set of pooled-time series regressions to test the hypothesised relationships.

DEFINING KEY TERMS – ETHNIC GROUP, ETHNIC CONFLICT, LIBERALISATION, DEMOCRATISATION

For the purposes of this study, ethnic conflict is defined quite broadly. Ethnic groups are sets of individuals who are distinguished from one another by a variety of interests, common cultural practices, linguistic patterns and/or religion. Ethnicity can be either self-defined or imposed from the outside. The key is that group membership often results in either collective benefits or liabilities (Cohen 1997: 608).[5] Ethnic conflict is defined as a range of events from articulation of discontent, protest, mobilisation, confrontation, sporadic or sustained violence, and civil war or insurrection, in which ethnicity plays a significant role. Ethnic conflict may arise between two or more ethnic groups or between ethnic groups and the state. Ethnicity need not play a primary role in order for an event to be considered an example of ethnic conflict, but must be significant enough to be mentioned as a contributing factor in the standard academic references used to construct the ethnic conflict scale. Further, ethnic conflict may occur over access to material goods as well as over intangible goods such as power, respect or social status (Forbes 1997: 14).

The operational definitions of *democratisation*, and its related though not identical term *liberalisation* also require some justification. I adopt

what is by now a fairly standard view of these two concepts. Liberalisation refers to a relaxation of political control on the part of authoritarian rulers. This is usually experienced in the areas or realms associated with human rights and basic civil liberties, such as freedom from arbitrary arrest and torture, as well as press, association, movement and expression freedoms. Democratisation may be viewed as a subset of liberalisation, but it is liberalisation aimed directly at the political system. 'Democratization requires open contestation over the right to win control of the government, and this in turn requires free competitive elections, the results of which determine who governs' (Linz & Stepan 1996: 3).[6] Or as stated by Bratton and van de Walle: 'democratization involves the institutionalization of procedures for popular government...' (1997a: 5).

The definitions employed of these concepts allows them to be operationalised, using a standard set of scores for both political liberties and political democracy. The Freedom House annual rankings have the benefit of consistent availability over many years, up-to-date coverage, and they make convenient distinctions between civil liberties and political rights.[7]

METHODS AND LITERATURE

Why cross-national data in Africa?

A number of scholars have looked at ethnopolitical conflict using cross-national data sets that span the globe (Gurr 1993; Gurr & Moore 1997; Cohen 1997). Bowman (1996, 1997) demonstrates that employing region-specific cross-national samples can result in significantly different results than the use of large-N global cross-national studies. The benefit of region-specific sampling is that the idiosyncrasies of politics in particular regions can be more effectively captured. Some scholars have looked at comparisons across the universe of nation-states to answer important political questions, yet this must be done only with great caution. This is because large-N studies often result in the loss of the subtle and sometimes important nuances that typify a focus on a particular region. Yet there is still a great deal of analytical benefit from cross-national comparison and the statistical methods it allows if the nations and concepts are truly comparable. For this reason, it makes sense to concentrate on the continent of Africa and evaluate our results at the level of middle-range theory and generalisation. Some may argue that even this level of generalisation can be problematic given the terrific diversity of the forty-seven sub-Saharan African states that make up the sample (see Karp 1997 for an evaluation of this

debate). Nevertheless, useful generalisations can be made by abstracting the political experiences of all sub-Saharan African nations over the period of a decade.

Approaches to democratisation and ethnicity

The immediate task is to place this inquiry into the current body of research on democratisation and ethnicity in Africa. Literature on African democratisation has recently looked at a handful of factors to help explain the unexpected moves toward political liberalisation and democratisation early in this decade. Some scholars have concentrated on neo-institutional factors such as the variations in pre-existent regime types combined with contingent political choices (Bratton and van de Walle 1997a). Others look to structural factors such as global ideological shifts, continuities between colonial and post-colonial states, and the role of class, ethnic and regional cleavages (Young 1994; Conteh-Morgan 1997). Still other scholars see the immediate economic crises and poor economic performance as a key explanatory variable (Widner 1994). Without making a strong claim as to which of these groups is correct (it is likely that all these factors need to be accounted for in any convincing explanation of African democratisation in the early 1990s), it seems clear that the relationships between ethnic conflict and democratisation are dramatically under-examined in most contemporary treatments of African democratisation. Further, in contrast to most of the scholars cited in this paragraph, this paper views democratisation as a causal (independent) variable. Ethnic conflicts are the phenomena that need to be explained (dependent variable).

The literature on ethnic conflict in Africa is broad and multifaceted. In spite of this, explanations of ethnic conflict also follow identifiable intellectual patterns. A large and influential group of scholars use primarily structural/historical factors to explain ethnic conflict (Young 1976; Newbury 1988; Young 1994: 233–6), while others focus on contingent factors. The most common current versions of contingent factors are from those scholars who view the central importance of institutional variables such as the nature of the party system and central/local relationships in government (Scarritt & Mozaffar 1994; Glickman 1995; see also Horowitz 1985). One alternative to this view has been the assertion that broad institutional patterns such as consociationalism, federalism and parliamentary democracy may play an important role in diminishing ethnic conflict in Africa (Lijphart 1977, 1991; Reynolds 1999).[8]

TABLE 1
Ethnic conflict code

0	No appreciable ethnic conflict reported
1	Non-violent protests or mobilisation with a significant ethnic component
2	Occasional confrontations or sporadic violence between ethnic groups or one ethnic group and the state
3	Sustained confrontations and/or violence between groups or between one ethnic group and the state
4	Civil war or insurrection with a significant ethnic component

It seems that a comparison between current levels of democratisation and those of ethnic conflict could help to provide broadly derived empirical evidence to help resolve the debates about the efficacy of certain types of solutions to ethnic conflict in Africa. If the claims of the structurally oriented scholars are correct, then we would not expect institutionally based solutions to ethnic conflict to have a swift or rapid effect. Instead, we would see clear relationships between structural variables and ethnic conflict. Alternatively, if the institutionalists are correct, then certain democratic institutions should lead to lower levels of ethnic conflict. Let us now turn to a description of the data set and the methods of data analysis used to answer this question.

Data set and methodology

The dependent variable, ethnic conflict, is operationalised by constructing a five-point scale that accounts for both frequency and intensity of ethnic conflict. The scale is presented in Table 1.[9]

Ethnic conflict was identified and coded through a systematic reading of the country reports in the annual yearbook *Africa South of the Sahara*, using years 1990, 1994 and 1998. Each nation in the sample was given an annual score on the basis of events reported in the yearbook. The initial coding was done by the author, inter-coder reliability was performed by a second coding. Where differences occurred, the average of the two scores was used.[10]

As discussed above, both liberalisation and democratisation are operationalised as the Freedom House/Gastil annual scores for each nation in the sample from 1988 to 1997. The scores can be obtained directly from Freedom House in New York, or alternatively can be compiled using the Freedom House annual report, *Freedom in the*

World.[11] Because the goal is to test the proposition that ethnic conflict increases in response to liberalisation and then decreases in response to democratisation, the four sub-Saharan African nations that were 'democratic' in 1988 are excluded from the analysis. These were identified as nations that scored a 5 or higher on the Freedom House[12] political rights scale in 1988. The excluded nations are Botswana, The Gambia, Mauritius and Senegal. It is arguable that Senegal was the least democratic of these in 1988 and hardly qualified as 'democratic'. In order to respect the decision rule, Senegal was excluded nevertheless.[13]

A handful of control variables were also included that represent other theoretical contributors to variance in African ethnic conflict. First is a measure of gross domestic product per capita for the years from 1988 to 1997.[14] This measure is a staple in cross-national comparison and though it certainly does not tell the entire story of the quality of life in any given nation, it provides an excellent predictor of a nation's scores on many other development indicators (Dasgupta & Weale in World Bank 1997: 3). GDP/capita corresponds to the structuralist counter-hypothesis that I identify above. If the structuralists are correct, then we would expect to see high degrees of significance and robust negative coefficients on this measure. Corresponding to the arguments of many modernisation scholars, this would indicate that higher levels of economic development result in lower levels of ethnic conflict.

In recognition of the often made point that the well-being of any given society can only be partially captured by a measure as blunt as GDP/capita, I also include another common indicator of socio-economic development – infant mortality rate (IMR). IMR is an appealing measure because is it widely reported across the universe of sub-Saharan African nations that make up the sample. This is not true for a number of other alternative development measures such as 'poverty' (defined by the World Bank as the percentage of people living on less than $1 per day), adult literacy rates, or other composite scales such as the Physical Quality of Life Index. IMR allows us to measure time-sensitive changes and like the GDP measure, IMR may provide a means of examining certain structural characteristics of sub-Saharan African nations in transition. Higher IMRs are related to lower levels of maternal health care, access to hospitalisation, proper nutrition, access to potable drinking water, as well as a host of other education and health measures.[15] We would expect to see a positive relationship between IMR rates and ethnic conflict that would indicate

lower levels of social development result in higher levels of ethnic conflict.

Another set of control variables, which correspond to structural arguments concerning the nature of ethnic conflict in Africa, are those which indicate the colonial power which colonised the nations. 'Dummy' variables were used to examine the variable influence of five colonial powers (Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Other). These variables allow for an initial test of the argument made by some scholars (Young 1976, 1994; Newbury 1988) that the form and policies of colonial states played a key role in shaping ethnic conflict in the post-colonial era. If this is so, then we should be able to detect differences in ethnic conflict levels and intensity that vary with changes in colonial powers. In fact, the regression results indicated that the colonial power variable was significant only in the case of Belgium. Because of the small number of nations that this category represents (three), it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from this finding, except to indicate that it provides mixed support for the importance of these structural factors. As a result, the equations modeled below do not include these variables.

The final control variable included in the estimation equations is a measure of ethnic heterogeneity. This measure is taken from Bratton and van de Walle (1997b) who derived the measurement using data from Morrison *et al.* (1989).[16] Ethnic heterogeneity indicates the effective number of ethnic groups in a country. By Morrison's method, the number of ethnic groups is often lower than the common perceptions of observers of many African societies. This is due to the considerable overlap in key areas such as language, cultural practice, religious belief and other concepts that Morrison uses to operationalise ethnic group identity. The measure accounts for both ethnic diversity and the relative sizes of ethnic groups in comparison to the national population. This measure is of interest because it provides an opportunity to evaluate the degree to which ethnic heterogeneity contributes to ethnic conflict. This, in and of itself, has been a subject of much academic debate (Forbes 1997) and a non-linear relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and ethnic conflict is posited here. Scholars have argued that ethnic conflict is most likely when there are two groups (or two dominant groups) (Osaghae 1994: 17). To test this, ethnic heterogeneity is modelled using both the Bratton and van de Walle measure and a parabolic variable (ethnic heterogeneity squared) which provides for a test of the non-linear relationship. As a control variable, the level of ethnic heterogeneity can be viewed as fixed over

the time covered by the study.[17] Thus a single score for each country is used for each of the ten years.

The methodology chosen for this study reflects both the strengths and limitations of the data. Pooled time series provides us with the ability to explain variations in ethnic conflict levels both across nations and over time. This is accomplished by using yearly observations of variables and accounting for changes from year to year. Each variable included in the model (with the exception of ethnic heterogeneity and ethnic heterogeneity squared) has a unique value for each year. The time series is 'pooled' because it not only tracks change over time but simultaneously allows comparison across all of the nations included in the sample.[18] Thus, each nation is represented by ten data points (one for each year between 1988 and 1997) with the total number of observations equalling 440.[19] This method provides a means for statistically testing a causal model by using the logic of temporal causality – namely, that any event can only be caused by an event which precedes it. Thus by the theoretically informed manipulation of variables, a causal assertion about the relationships between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable can be confidently made.

The four models estimated in a series of four equations below employ lagged variables for democratic institutions (the political rights measurement) and for political liberalisation. A lagged variable shifts the score on the variable a predetermined number of time units. In this model, the democratisation variable is lagged one, two, and three years because we would expect the influence of democratic institutionalisation to be manifest in the years following its implementation rather than having an instantaneous effect. The civil liberties variable is lagged only one year because if an increase in civil liberties results in increasing ethnic conflict, it should probably be evident in that same year or shortly thereafter.

Regression equations and findings

All equations are variations on the following:

$$\text{Ethnic Conflict}_{it} = a + (\text{Ethnic Heterogeneity})_{i} + (\text{GDP/Capita}/100)_{it} + (\text{GDP/Capita annual growth})_{it} + (\text{IMR per 1,000 live births}/100)_{it} + (\text{Civil Liberties})_{it} + (\text{Political Rights})_{it} + e$$

When e is equal to the error term.

There are a number of interesting substantive findings that can be seen in the results as presented in Table 2.[20] First, the adjusted R

TABLE 2

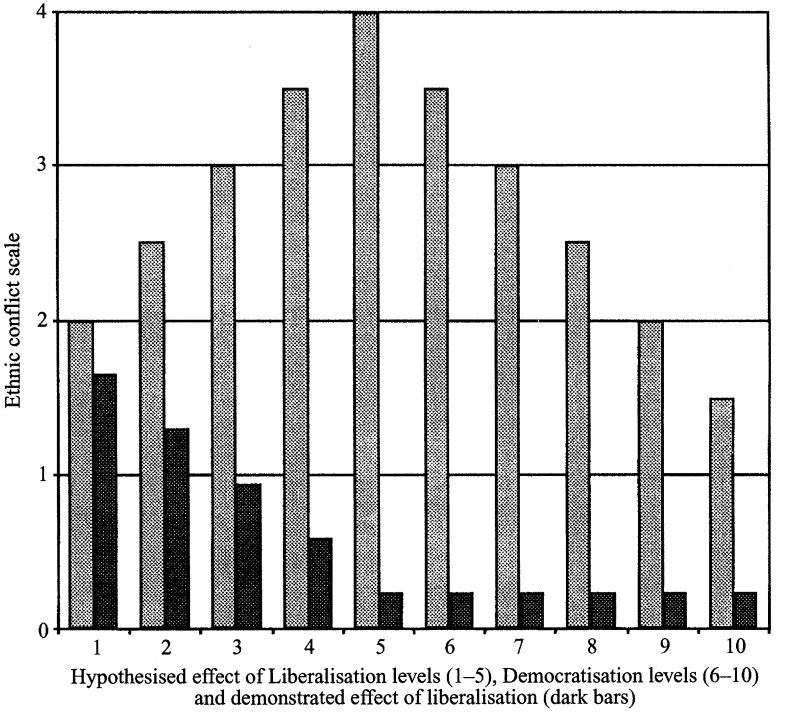
Ethnic conflict score regressed against liberalisation, democratisation and control variables[22] (pooled time series 44 countries × 10 years)

Equations → Independent Variables ↓	1 Instantaneous effect		2 One-year lag effect Pol. Rights & One-year lag effect Civ. Lib.		3 Two-year lag effect Pol. Rights & One-year lag effect Civ. Lib.		4 Three-year lag effect Pol. Rights & One-year lag effect Civ. Lib.	
Intercept	1·667	***	1·426	***	1·474	***	1·464	***
(1) Ethnic Heterogeneity	·312, (·114)	·369**	·303, (·119)	·359**	·297, (·038)	·352**	·293, (·120)	·347**
(2) Ethnic Heterogeneity^2	−·032, (·012)	−·346**	−·031, (·013)	−·337*	−·030, (·013)	−·328*	−·029 (·013)	−·321*
(3) GDP/capita 88–97	−1·805, (6·624)	−·140**	−1·692, (6·893)	−·132**	−1·723, (6·908)	−·134**	−1·723, (6·928)	−·133**
(4) IMR/1000 88–97/100	·705, (·249)	·151**	·937, (·260)	·200***	·937, (·261)	·200***	·956, (·263)	·204***
(5) Civil Liberties 88–97	−·280, (·094)	−·235**	−·261, (·098)	−·217**	−·312, (·084)	−·259***	−·353, (·074)	−·292***
(6) Pol. Rights 88–97	−·084, (·072)	−·090	−·089, (·077)	−·091	−·051, (·070)	−·051	−·006, (·067)	−·005
R^2	·2190		·2367		·2369		·2352	
adj. R^2	·2074		·2240		·2242		·2224	
standard error	1·320		1·305		1·307		1·309	
F-ratio	18·789***		18·656***		18·626***		18·400***	
No. of observations	408		367		366		365	

***$p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$; coefficients, and standardised beta coefficients in first cell rows (standard errors in parentheses)

Variables: (1) Ethnic Heterogeneity — Effective number of ethnic groups (Bratton and van de Walle 1997b)
(2) Ethnic Heterogeneity^2 — Effective number of ethnic groups^2 (adapted from Bratton and van de Walle 1997b)
(3) GDP/capita 88–97 — GDP/capita 1988–97 (World Bank)
(4) IMR/1000 88–97/100 — Infant Mortality per 1,000 live births 88–97/100 (World Bank)
(5) Civil Lib. 88–97 — Civil Liberties 88–97 (Freedom House)
(6) Political Rights 88–97 — Political Rights 88–97 (Freedom House)

FIGURE 2
Hypothesised effect of liberalisation and democratisation on ethnic conflict and demonstrated effect of liberalisation



Square value for all equations falls between a respectable ·21 and ·22, indicating that the model explains 21–22 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable.[21] We also note that civil liberties is highly significant with the coefficient indicating an inverse relationship between ethnic conflict and civil liberties. This is in direct contradiction to the hypothesis that increased civil liberties will lead to an initial upsurge in ethnic conflict. Instead, there is a systematic pattern of decreasing ethnic conflict when civil liberties increase. Not only is the finding highly significant, it is also one of the most robust variables in the equation. Contrary to the assertions of many authoritarian leaders, as well as some scholars of Africa, these results give a clear indication that liberalisation is associated with decreases in ethnic conflict when the influences of all other variables are held constant. This result is shown graphically in Figure 2.

We also note that political democracy does not have an instantaneous influence on ethnic conflict. This is as predicted because the hypothesis

assumes a time-lag effect in which democratisation's influence on ethnic conflict will be felt in the years following the establishment of democratic institutions. GDP per capita has a significant and robust inverse relationship with ethnic conflict scores. Lower levels of economic development are associated with higher levels of ethnic conflict in this model. We find a similarly strong but positive relationship between IMR and ethnic conflict. Higher IMR indicates greater social deprivation in general and under such circumstances ethnic conflict is more likely. The hypothesis of a non-linear relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and ethnic conflict is also affirmed by the results of equation 1. A positive coefficient on the linear measure (Ethnic Heterogeneity) indicates that greater heterogeneity does lead to higher levels of ethnic conflict. Yet the rate of increase is not linear but rather it slows until the effects of the linear and squared variables cancel each other out when the effective number of ethnic groups reaches 9·75.[23] Thus the hypothesis that ethnic conflict will be most severe when there are two major groups (Osaghae 1994) does not find support here.

In equation 2, the only changes are the replacement of the civil liberties variable with a one-year lagged variable of the same score and the replacement of political rights with a one-year lagged variable. The results are quite similar to those in the first model but the explanatory power of the model increases with 22 per cent of the variance being explained. This shows that the use of lagged variables gives a more compelling explanation than the first model where an 'instantaneous' effect is posited. We do not see any evidence that political rights (the proxy for democratic institutions) have the hypothesised effect. At the same time, the negative impact of civil liberties on ethnic conflict inches downward and the influence of GDP per capita on ethnic conflict remains stable – significant and strong. In equation 3, with a two-year lagged political rights variable replacing the one-year lag, the same story repeats itself with only minor changes. Political democracy still does not demonstrate any significant influence on ethnic conflict while one important difference to note is that civil liberties has regained and surpassed the coefficient values of regression 1. In the final equation, with the sole difference being the extension of the two-year lag to a three-year lag, we see another increase in the influence of political liberalisation on lowering ethnic conflict while all other findings remain consistent with previous trends.[24]

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The substantive findings lead us to reject hypothesis 1, namely that a gain in civil liberties will lead to an increase in ethnic tensions in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, this paper has provided some compelling evidence that just the opposite is the case. In all specified equations, civil liberties had a significant and robust negative influence on ethnic conflict scores, and this effect grew as the time-lag of the political rights variables increased. Because logic demands that a causal factor must pre-date the event that it causes, the time lag helps to establish that liberalisation has had the effect of reducing ethnic conflict over the time period of the sample. Thus there is strong evidence against the common assumption that liberalisation leads to greater ethnic conflict in Africa. The findings allow us neither to accept nor reject hypothesis 2, that democratisation leads to lower ethnic conflict. Even after a two-year and a three-year lag, democratised political institutions seem to have no statistically demonstrable influence on lowering (or raising) ethnic conflict scores.

A theoretical explanation of these unexpected findings seems in order. These circumstances are explicable if ethnic differences have been systematically employed by African leaders in order to strengthen and buttress the power of illiberal regimes. Under such a circumstance, ethnic conflict would likely diminish when illiberal leaders either leave power or are forced to embrace more liberal policies and institutions. This explanation is consistent with instrumental assumptions about the essentially political nature of ethnic conflict in contemporary Africa, yet many scholars anticipated the opposite result, namely that liberalisation would lead to greater manipulation of ethnic sentiments that would in turn result in increased ethnic conflicts. That the opposite has occurred may provide some evidence to contradict the pessimistic views articulated by Berman (1998). Instead of a mechanistic return to ethnic conflict and the neo-patrimonial political patterns with which it is often associated in Africa, we have identified patterns of institutional change at the level of political liberalisation. These are by no means irreversible but they do indicate that African political institutions can be both responsive to pressures for change, and can have an influence on a highly salient and pressing political issue – ethnic conflict. In spite of many set backs and some democratic reversals, the moves toward greater political liberalisation in Africa during the early 1990s have made some difference in a wide range of cases. It seems that, in a

number of countries, 'business as usual' has begun to give way to a more productive means of solving potentially explosive ethnic conflicts.

The other compelling finding here is the strength and durability of the two main structural variables, GDP per capita, and Infant Mortality Rate. While it is possible for institutionalists to take heart in the findings that indicate the importance of civil liberties, those who favour structural explanations as the driving force behind social and political interactions also have considerable support in these results. It seems reasonable to conclude from the results above that rising levels of economic and social well-being are systematically related to lower levels of ethnic conflict. Although this seems intuitive, it is still important because there have been so few empirical tests of this question across the sample of African nations. At least, this indicates that any full explanation of ethnic conflict will have to include the possible contributions of institutional, political economic and political historic factors. The implications of this set of results for current and future research seems clear. The analytical divisions between structuralism and institutionalism in comparative politics could well result in scholarly inattention to vital explanatory factors. Institutionalists would do well to regard the influence and impact of structural constraints on the institutions they study. Structuralists in turn must not ignore how institutions sometimes can and do overcome the constraints imposed on them by structural determinants.

Bratton and van de Walle have argued lately that the study of contemporary African politics is marginalised because it is typified by 'thick descriptions of individual country cases' (1997: xiv). These authors advocate instead 'systematic, theoretically driven, empirically based accounts ... of political change ...' (*ibid.*). While this article is an attempt to compare African nations in a systematic and empirical fashion, it should not be taken as a rejection of descriptive research on Africa. There is much analytical value to be gained from the theoretically informed descriptive studies that are common in the study of Africa. It is only the rich historical work of authors like Young, Newbury, Berman and a host of others, that make meaningful empirical work possible. Without the in-depth knowledge of particular cases gained from thick descriptions, we could not make important judgements about the usefulness of quantitative measures in capturing relationships between concepts. We would also be at a loss in interpreting the results of quantitative studies such as this one. It is hoped that by testing a particular set of hypotheses about democratisation and ethnic conflict, this work can contribute to a growing

dialogue in which both qualitative and quantitative work builds on and enriches the state of knowledge concerning these issues.

The central finding of this paper indicates that both institutional and structural variables are of vital importance in understanding and explaining complex political events in sub-Saharan Africa. The particular relationships between these two forces need to be further explored in the context of specific cases as well as with the benefit of richer empirical data.[25] The central importance of both structure and institutions is surely a widely generalisable claim and demonstrates that middle-range theory can provide a means for higher level generalisations. In fact, generalisations that emerge from case specific knowledge and region specific patterns can often provide a more compelling generalisability than more highly abstracted views of comparative politics.

NOTES

1 Fearon and Laitin (1996) have recently argued that the focus on ethnic conflict more broadly is misplaced and that the phenomenon of greatest interest for scholars should be explaining inter-ethnic cooperation. Given the ongoing conflicts in a number of African nations, the focus on cooperation as a norm, though perhaps empirically evident, seems to beg some key questions about how to arrive at cooperation.

2 Recent exceptions include Glickman (1995), Ottaway (1995), Ndegwa (1997), and Berman (1998).

3 The primordial view of ethnicity stresses the idea of ethnic identification as a result of inherent, long-standing, and usually unchanging sets of allegiances which often defy rational explanation. Instrumental arguments see ethnic conflict as the result of a variety of political, economic and institutional factors which mobilise, alter and even create ethnic identity in the service of political goals. Because there seems to be broad consensus among Africanist scholars of political science that instrumental views of ethnicity are indicative of most African ethnic conflicts, this view is accepted for the purposes of this study.

4 A rival hypothesis has been suggested by Bruce Berman (1998). He expects that reform efforts of the early to mid-1990s in Africa will be overwhelmed by 'business as usual'. This would be typified by neo-patrimonial patterns of clientelism. Ethnicity has typically been a main mobilisation tool in this pattern, and Berman expects it to continue to be so.

5 There are certainly ethnic identities that do not result in significant benefits or liabilities for members of the group, but in these cases ethnic conflict would seem to be a rarity. In fact this is precisely the type of non-conflict which Fearon and Laitin attempt to explain in the article mentioned above (1996).

6 Bratton and van de Walle (1997a: 159), Stepan (1989: ix), Linz and Stepan (1996), O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), and Huntington (1991) all point out a similar distinction.

7 I follow Bratton and van de Walle (1997a) in using the political rights score as a proxy for democracy, as it measures the general ideas and concepts of polyarchy as described above.

8 An analytical difficulty that faces these scholars is the lack of variance on the parliamentary/presidential dimension – the number of parliamentary systems in Africa is very limited. As a result comparisons between institutional configurations on this dimension are generally limited to country specific comparisons. In theory, a broad range of democratic institutions could demonstrate variable influences on ethnic conflict, but because this project is interested primarily in broad patterns that are evident continent-wide, and because of the lack of variance, testing a more detailed hypothesis must be done using other methods.

9 The ethnic conflict scale is, strictly speaking, an ordinal variable. Nevertheless, I follow common practice in comparative politics in employing similar scales and assuming that they

represent interval data, which makes the use of regression models appropriate (Bollen 1990, 1993; Gastil 1990; Gurr 1974, 1997).

10 Here I have followed both the coding methods and a central source employed by Bratton and van de Walle in their recent book (1997). The second coding was done by my research assistant Pascal Treber.

11 The Freedom House scores were originally developed by Raymond D. Gastil and have been reported by Freedom House annually since 1972. They have at times been criticised by various analysts for being biased toward capitalist as opposed to communist nations. Others have reported to this author that the *ad hoc* judgements now made by Freedom House staff in determining the annual rankings are not systematic nor empirically based (reported to author by anonymous former Freedom House consultant at the Mid West Political Science Association annual meeting, Chicago, IL, 1998). In spite of these criticisms, the Freedom House rankings have proved to have good reliability when compared to other measures (see Vanhanen 1997: 38; Bowman 1996: 292, 303; Muller & Seligson 1994: 637; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck 1994: 904; Poe & Tate 1994: 857; Bollen 1993).

12 Recall that I have inverted the Freedom House scale so that higher numbers represent higher levels of both liberalisation and democratisation. Thus in the scale as obtained from Freedom House, this would correspond to all nations with a 3 or lower.

13 I also ran the regressions with Senegal included in the sample and the results were virtually identical, with a minor change toward significance on the political rights variable in regression 3 with Senegal excluded.

14 The 1988–94 GDP/Capita scores are from *UN Statistical Yearbook* 1994, 41st issue 1995. GDP/Capita score is from *World Development Report* (1997). 1996 and 1997 GDP/Capita scores are extrapolated from the 1995 score multiplied by average per capita growth rate and added to 1995 score. The same process was used for 1996 with the extrapolated 1995 score as a baseline. The growth rate was calculated as the average growth rate of 1986–94, from UN (1994). The UN does not report GDP/Capita data for Tanzania because it has judged the available figures unreliable. The World Bank does report these data and so, for the purposes of this study, I have adopted the World Bank reported data.

15 It might make sense to employ Gini coefficients rather than IMR. I feel that given the less than universal availability of Gini coefficients both across the sample of cases and across the temporal period covered, IMR is a preferable measure. This is particularly the case because IMR seems to be so closely correlated with the precise types of social indicators that Gini coefficients are designed to measure.

16 The formula first calculates the Herfindahl-Hirschman (HH) concentration index. $HH = \Sigma p_i^2$ where p is the proportion of each group in the total population and where HH ranges in values from 0 to 1. If one group is 100 per cent, then its HH score equals 1. After finding the HH concentration scores, the Effective Number of Components (in this case ethnic groups) is then calculated by taking the inverse of HH. Therefore, $N = 1/HH = 1/\Sigma p_i^2$. This follows the method used by Taagepera and Shugart (1989).

17 Of course, ethnic identity is not a historically fixed or immutable category. Instead ethnicity in Africa has evolved and responded to historical circumstances. For the purposes of the ten years covered in this study, it seems reasonable to assume that ethnic identity has remained relatively stable in most nations. Changes in ethnic identity usually emerge slowly and over longer periods.

18 This method is not without some challenges however. Beck and Katz have shown recently that pooled-time series estimations often radically overestimate the confidence levels that should be expected from the model (1995). This results from the use of a version of the generalised least squares method (GLS) known as the Parks method. Researchers have turned to the Parks method to reduce the problems of heteroskedasticity which often plague time-series models. Instead, Beck and Katz point out that this method creates more problems than it solves. They recommend the use of OLS estimators, lagged variables and panel corrected standard errors.

I do not include panel corrected standard errors (PCSE) in the estimations in this paper. There are two reasons for this. First, the use of PCSEs is recommended when the number of time observations is between 20–50 (*ibid.*: 634). This data set contains only ten years worth of observations, 1988–97. Second, because I ran the equations in Logit and came up with nearly identical results, we can be confident that the OLS standard errors are generally accurate.

19 Observant readers will note that the number of observations in the OLS models is lower

than 440. This incongruity is a result of random missing values and a function of the reduction of observations when time lagged variables are employed.

20 It was originally thought that there might be an interaction effect evident between the civil liberties and political rights scores, such that they each influenced ethnic conflict directly as well as civil liberties influencing ethnic conflict through political rights. Thus, an interaction variable was created and the regressions reported in Table 2 were run with the interaction variable. It was not significant in any of the models and so the results are reported without the interactive variable.

21 While the models leave three-fourths of the variance unexplained, it is important to recall that the central goal of this paper is not to explain ethnic conflict in Africa. Rather, the purpose is to test the broad relationships between African liberalisation, democratisation and ethnic conflict.

22 Diagnostic tests were run to assure the integrity of the data. These included VIF measures and Eigen values of centered correlations to detect multicollinearity. The results indicate that there is not a serious multicollinearity problem. This was particularly gratifying as one might expect two measures that are as conceptually close as civil liberties and political rights to be highly collinear – in fact, they are not. The White test indicated that heteroskedasticity was not a problem.

23 This is calculated by dividing the Ethnic Heterogeneity parameter estimate by the Ethnic Heterogeneity squared estimate $(.312)/(-.032) = 9.75$ (see Krause 1996: fn 26).

24 It could be argued that due to the limited dependent variable, the equations should be estimated with a panel ordered Logit or Probit design. I ran the same set of equations with an ordered Logit estimation technique but the substantive results were virtually unchanged and so I report the easier to interpret OLS results here.

25 The author and Kimberly Smiddy Butler have recently administered an expert survey to provide for greater reliability on a number of the measures used in this paper as well as many others which are conceptually related to issues of democratisation, ethnicity, political institutions, and civil society across the universe of sub-Saharan Africa.

REFERENCES

Africa South of the Sahara. 1990, 1994, 1998. 19th, 23rd and 27th editions. London: Europa Publications Limited.

Beck, N. & J. N. Katz. 1995. 'What to do (and not to do) with time series cross-section data', *American Political Science Review* 89, 3: 634–47.

Berman, B. J. 1998. 'Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism', *African Affairs* 97, 388: 305–41.

Bollen, K. A. 1990. 'Political democracy: conceptual measurement traps', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25, 1: 7–27.

Bollen, K. A. 1993. 'Liberal democracy: validity and source biases in cross-national measures', *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 1207–30.

Bowen, J. R. 1996. 'The myth of global ethnic conflict', *Journal of Democracy* 7, 4: 3–14.

Bowman, K. S. 1996. 'Taming the tiger: militarization and democracy in Latin America', *Journal of Peace Research* 33, 3: 289–308.

Bowman, K. S. 1997. 'Guns and/or butter?: The relationship between militarization, military institutions, and social development in the Third World', paper presented at the Southern Political Science Association annual meeting, Norfolk, VA.

Bratton, M. & N. van de Walle. 1997a. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: regime transitions in comparative perspective.* Cambridge University Press.

Bratton, M. & N. van de Walle. 1997b. 'Political regimes and regime transitions in Africa 1910–1994' [Computer File 6996]. ICPSR version. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University [producer], 1996. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Burkhart, R. E. & M. S. Lewis-Beck. 1994. 'Comparative democracy: the economic development thesis', *American Political Science Review* 88, 4: 903–10.

Cohen, F. S. 1997. 'Proportional versus majoritarian ethnic conflict management in democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 30, 5: 607–30.

Conteh-Morgan, E. 1997. *Democratization in Africa: the theory and dynamics of political transitions.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Fearon, J. D. & D. D. Laitin. 1996. 'Explaining interethnic cooperation', *American Political Science Review* 90, 4: 715–36.
Forbes, H. D. 1997. *Ethnic Conflict: commerce, culture, and the contact hypothesis*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Gastil, R. D. 1990. 'The comparative survey of freedom: experiences and suggestions', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25, 1: 25–50.
Glickman, H. ed. 1995 *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*. Atlanta, GA: African Studies Association Press.
Gurr, T. R. 1993. *Minorities at Risk: a global view of ethnopolitical conflicts*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
Gurr, T. R. & W. H. Moore. 1997. 'Ethnopolitical rebellion: a cross-sectional analysis of the 1980s with risk assessments for the 1990s', *American Journal of Political Science* 41, 4: 1079–103.
Horowitz, D. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Huntington, S. P. 1991. *The Third Wave: democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
Karp, I. 1997. 'Does theory travel? Area studies and cultural studies', *Africa Today* 44, 3: 281–96.
Krause, G. 1996. 'Agent heterogeneity and consensual decision making on the Federal Open Market Committee', *Public Choice* 88: 83–101.
Lijphart, A. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: a comparative exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Lijphart, A. 1991. 'Constitutional choices for new democracies', *Journal of Democracy* 2,1: 72–84.
Linz, J. J. & A. Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and post-communist Europe*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Morrison, D. *et al.* 1989. *Black Africa: a comparative handbook*, 2nd edn. New York: Paragon House, Ivington Publishing.
Muller, E. N. & M. A. Seligson. 1994. 'Civic culture and democracy: the questions of causal relationships', *American Political Science Review* 88, 3: 635–52.
Ndegwa, S. 1997. 'Citizenship and ethnicity: an examination of two transition moments in Kenyan politics', *American Political Science Review* 91, 3: 599–617.
Newbury, C. 1988. *The Cohesion of Oppression: clientship and ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860–1960*. New York: Columbia University Press.
O'Donnell, G. & P. C. Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Ottaway, M. 1994. *Democratization and Ethnic Nationalism: African and Eastern European experiences*. Washington, DC: Overseas Development Council.
Poe, S. C. & C. N. Tate. 1994. 'Repression of human rights to personal integrity in the 1980s: a global analysis', *American Political Science Review* 88, 4: 853–72.
Reynolds, A. 1999. *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa*. Oxford University Press.
Scarrit, J. R. & S. Mozaffar. 1994. 'Toward sustainable democracy in Africa: can U. S. policy help?' in W. Crotty, ed., *Post-Cold War Policy: foreign and military*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
Stepan, A., ed. 1989. *Democratizing Brazil: problems of transition and consolidation*. Oxford University Press.
Taagepera, R. & M. S. Shugart. 1989. *Seats and Votes: the effects and determinants of electoral systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Vanhanen, T. 1997. *Prospects of Democracy: a study of 172 countries*. London: Routledge.
Widner, J. A. ed. 1994. *Economic Change and Political Liberalization in sub-Saharan Africa*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
World Bank. 1996. *Social Indicators of Development*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
World Bank. 1997. *World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
Young, C. 1976. *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
Young, C. 1994. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.