# The (Mis)use of Ethnicity in Current Political Economy Literature: Conceptual and Data Issues

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Paper presented at UNU WIDER conference on Making Peace Work, Helsinki, June 2004

Abstract:

Ethnicity has recently become a popular field of study in political economy literature, especially in investigations of economic growth, civil war, genocide and secession. However, a failure among scholars to attempt to understand ethnicity has led to serious errors in their work. This lack of understanding has been manifested by two problems. First, scholars have neglected to define ethnicity, one of the most notoriously slippery concepts in the social sciences, which has led them into various quagmires. Second, the data sets used by scholars in their analyses, most notably the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization (ELF) index and the Minorities At Risk (MAR) database, have serious faults as well. Far from these problems being the result of scholars not appreciating constructivist theories of ethnicity, as suggested by several critics, I argue that many scholars have actually failed to engage with *any* theory of ethnicity, constructivist or otherwise. I therefore propose ways in which future political economy scholarship into ethnicity as well as data sets of ethnic groups may be improved.

## 1. Introduction

Ethnicity has been a major subject in the social sciences for the past several decades. First appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972, it has become a source of much debate in such fields as anthropology, history, international relations, political science and sociology, among others. However, not until very recently was it seriously discussed in the field of political economy, where many scholars have investigated the relationship between ethnicity and civil war, growth, institutions and violence using econometric tools. Yet these works have been plagued by two problems which have seriously damaged the accuracy of the works' analyses. First, authors have neglected to define ethnicity in their work, thereby leading them into various quagmires. Second, the two most popular data sets used by scholars in their analyses, most notably the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization (ELF) index and the Minorities At Risk (MAR) database, have serious faults as well.

While some scholars have already attacked the ELF and its use (cf. Chandra [2001] and Laitin and Posner [2001]), their criticisms have not included any significant discussion of the MAR database, a much more popular dataset than the ELF index. More importantly, however, whereas these critics claim that scholars have failed to appreciate constructivist theories of ethnicity, I argue that many scholars have actually failed to appreciate *any* theory of ethnicity, constructivist or otherwise. I therefore claim that, in order for future political economy scholarship into ethnicity to be accurate and therefore useful, it must engage with the ongoing theoretical debate into the nature of ethnicity.

This paper will first examine the ongoing diverse and controversial debates about the nature of ethnicity. It shall become clear that scholars who wish to use ethnicity in any

quantitative analyses must therefore be very clear to their readers about its use. In the second section we shall then show how the lack of any definition of ethnicity in various works has led authors into serious errors and mistakes, taking the works of Paul Collier as an example. In the third section we will see how the two most popular datasets of worldwide ethnic groups, namely the aforementioned EFL and MAR, suffer from various deficiencies, most notably, an imprecise method in including and excluding potential ethnic groups. Finally, in concluding, we propose concrete ways in which both future scholarship and data sets of ethnic groups may be improved.

## 2. Defining Ethnicity

Defining ethnicity is a minefield, as many authors have recognized. As we shall see in this section, scholars have proposed a bewildering variety of approaches to ethnicity, all of which are currently in use. Thus it would seem that Chandra (2001, 8)'s claims that the constructivist approach "can be said to have been more or less established across disciplines by the 1980s" and that "it is now virtually impossible to find a social scientist who openly defends a primordialist position" is incorrect. We shall first review the history of ethnicity as a concept before examining each of the three approaches to defining ethnicity, namely the common language, quantoid and interpretivist approaches.

As already mentioned, ethnicity is a new term in the social sciences, even though the word "ethnic" has been used in the English language since the mid-fourteenth century. Its meanings have changed radically throughout history: originally referring to heathens or pagans, it acquired racial characteristics in the nineteenth century and was used in the twentieth-century U.S. as a way to refer to those immigrants of non-northern or western European descent (Eriksen

1993, 4). It first grew in importance in the social sciences as anthropologists tried to make sense of the emergent social and cultural formations within Africa and other parts of the Third World in the 1960s (Eade 1996, 58). Hence ethnic groups took on a new meaning, namely the idea of tribe, formerly used to refer to a socio-political unit whose members were related by kinship ties. This shift in meaning took place as many social scientists attempted to critique the eurocentric discourse in which the peoples of the developing world were referred to as "tribes" while those in the developed world remained "peoples" or even "nations." This latest incarnation of ethnicity meant that, for the first time in the history of the word, it was – and continues to be – applied universally across the globe.

Part of the problem in defining ethnicity is the way in which it has been misused and abused as a term in popular discourse: as Allen and Eade (1999, 36) note, "the term ethnicity has escaped from academic discourse, and it is unlikely that it can be recaptured." Yet even within academia ethnicity has been expanded in its meaning to capture identity groups formerly seen as separate entities: the political scientist Walker Connor cites examples in sociology where ethnic groups are taken to be synonymous with minorities and even all identity groups which are mobilised for political ends. He argues that the indiscriminate application of ethnic group to numerous types of groups obscures vital distinctions between various forms of identity. If nothing else, Connor notes, this use of "ethnicity as a cloak for several different types of identity... presumes that all the identities are of the same order" (Connor 1994, 101-102).

Connor (1994, 101)'s interest is in the study of nationalism and is therefore concerned that "the researcher, when struggling through thousands of entries in union catalogs, indices to periodicals, and the like cannot be sure whether a so-called ethnic study will prove germane to the study of nationalism." However, defining terminology in the social sciences can be

inherently difficult, while insisting that researchers stick to one definition of a contentious concept is outright quixotic. Aware of these difficulties, Fearon and Laitin (2000b) criticize those like Connor, who attempt to define ethnicity in a way that often differs from the way it is used in public or common discourse, as well as those scholars who use a variety of situational definitions, which they call the quantoid and interpretivist reactions, respectively. They argue that neither reaction is justified, since social scientists should be concerned with using "ordinary language" definitions of terms, which are constructed by finding principles of attribution based on intuition and popular usage. In their attempts to cover the groups intuitively understood to be ethnic while excluding those groups not normally considered as ethnic, the authors eventually come up with a definition of ethnic groups as "groups larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous and has a conventionally recognised 'natural history' as a group" (Fearon and Laitin 2000b, 3-4, 20). This approach can be seen as the social science equivalent of the lowest common denominator, where the definition uses the least amount of description necessary to cover all applicable cases but no more. Fearon and Laitin (2000b, 11-12) thereby attempt to avoid cases like the Roma that are left out in those definitions of ethnicity that include a homeland or territory as an important aspect of ethnicity.[1]

For whatever reasons most scholars remain reluctant to rely upon "ordinary language" definitions and position themselves as either quantoid or interpretivist in their approach to ethnicity. Those in the former camp, i.e., those who do attempt to construct a universal definition for ethnicity, seem to fall into two extreme camps in their approach, namely essentialism/primordialism and instrumentalism/modernism. The first paradigm can best be described as that which is so prevalent in journalism and non-academic discourse today, namely the view that ethnic groups are ancient and immemorial and thus given facets of social life. This

paradigm was first expressed by German romantic philosophers like Herder and Fichte and has continued to be held to one degree or another by such writers as Pierre van den Berghe, Basil Davidson, Clifford Geertz and Steven Van Evera. (For an overview see Eriksen 1993, 55; Mamdani 1996, 187-188; Smith 1998, 147-149).[2] The second paradigm is one used by such authors as Paul Brass, Abner Cohen, Aidan Southall, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who all agree, for one reason or another, that ethnic groups are a product of modernity and, more specifically, the creation of modern elites for their own purposes. (See overview in Allen and Eade 1999, 21-22; Mamdani 1996, 187; Smith 1998, 153-155). Thus for these authors ethnic groups are artificial rather than natural, and, just as they can be created, they can also be destroyed or, in the postmodernist vocabulary, fragmented and deconstructed.

Donald Horowitz and Anthony Smith, two of the most heavily-cited scholars of ethnicity, both fall somewhere in between these two extremes. For instance, Horowitz (1985, 17-18) claims that ethnic groups are defined through ascriptive differences, i.e., those attributes of a group that are consciously used to distinguish themselves from other groups. These differences include colour, appearance, language, religion, some other indicator of common origin, or some combination thereof. Horowitz emphasises the inclusive aspect of his definition, where, as with Smith, there is no one overriding way to measure the existence of an ethnic group. Indeed, he singles out colour, language and religion as indicators that cannot alone measure ethnic groups, writing for instance that linguistic differences may or may not be regarded as demarcating different ethnic groups. As Horowitz (1985, 50) notes, language differences often occur within ethnic groups along class and rural-urban divides, while many ethnic groups share the same language but view themselves as permanently distinctive; one could mention such famous examples of the Tutsi and Hutu of Rwanda and Burundi or Serbs and Croats in former

Yugoslavia (although in the past decade Serbo-Croatian has been officially split into Serbian and Croatian).[3]

Similarly, Smith cites a myth of common ancestry as one of several characteristics of ethnic groups. Interestingly, among Smith (1991)'s ethnic characteristics - which include a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population – their is no mention of language or religion. Indeed, Smith (1986, 27) singles out scholars who "persist in regarding language as the distinguishing mark of ethnicity, a standpoint that leads to gross simplification and misunderstanding… Language is one of the most malleable and dependent cultural categories." Like Horowitz, Smith's definition does not contain any one element that could be said to be essential - except, perhaps, for a proper name - precisely because ethnicity comes in various shapes and sizes across time and space.

Unlike the quantoid scholar, the interpretivist scholar, on the other hand, throws his/her hands up at this multiplicity and complexity and instead chooses to employ a variety of definitions suitable to each case study (Fearon and Laitin 2000b, 4). This approach is used by a variety of scholars. For instance, many anthropologists are cautious in defining ethnicity outright, preferring to let their subjects define the term. One such anthropologist, Jack David Eller, claims that, rather than being "a single unified social phenomenon," ethnicity is actually a family of "related but analytically distinct phenomena" (Eller 1999, 7).[4] An interpretivist approach is also apparent in much postmodernist and post-Marxist work. Such authors as Stuart Hall, Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein claim that "ethnicity must be viewed as a plastic and malleable social construction, deriving its meanings from the particular situations of those

who invoke it… Ethnicity has no essence or centre, no underlying features or common denominator" (Smith 1998, 204).

## 3. Definitional Problems in Political Economy Works

We have now seen how complicated the concept of ethnicity is, leading one scholar to claim that it is "one of the most elastic of social concepts" (Eller 1999, 7). Yet, in their studies of ethnicity many scholars are neither quantoid nor interpretivist, nor do they rely on any "ordinary language" definition: indeed, the political economy scholars examined here fail to place themselves in any camp by failing to define ethnicity at any point in their work, thus leaving it unclear to the reader what meaning he or she should give to the term. Strangely, however, many political economy authors find it pertinent to define other terms and concepts in their works but not ethnicity. This reasoning may make sense in articles such as Collier (2000), Collier et al. (2003), Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001b), Collier, Hoeffler and Söderbom (2001) and Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000), whose focus on civil war demands an explicit definition of civil war. However, when ethnicity is a primary consideration of the work, attempts such as those by Easterly (2000, 2001) to define genocide and Sambanis (1999) to define both partition and civil war but avoid a definition of ethnicity strike the author as quite odd.[5] As a result of these omissions, numerous errors among political economy works on ethnicity have ensued; below we shall examine how ethnicity has been misused and misunderstood by one of the most prominent scholars of the political economy of ethnicity, namely Paul Collier.[6]

In various works Collier and his co-authors attempt to understand how various social and economic phenomena, including ethnic diversity, affect the outbreak and longevity of civil war.

They conclude that ethnic diversity is not a cause of conflict but can easily be manipulated by greedy elites, arguing that ethnic groups can be re-imagined to suit their economic needs. More explicitly, Collier (2001, 147) claim arguing that "the creation of a political community for the control of a region's natural resources may also create a political community for the ethnic group," citing as an example the electoral breakthrough of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1974 shortly after Scottish oil became valuable. Thus,

> In electoral terms Scotland as a political community only dates back to 1974. Something happened between 1970 [when the SNP received 11% of the vote] and 1974 [when it received 30%] as a result of which many people in Scotland switched to imagining themselves as part of a geographic community, as opposed to their previous class-based political identification. There is little doubt as to the cause, i.e., the dramatic rise in the international price of oil as a result of the Yom Kippur war of 1973 (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b, 6-7).

Thus Collier and Hoeffler (2004b) appear to adhere to a strict constructivist line, where ethnic identity is ever shifting and manipulated by elites, thereby seemingly invalidating Chandra (2001, 7)'s claim that Collier and others fail to it appreciate constructivist "findings."

Yet this approach is almost too extreme for even a constructivist, for two reasons. First, as Figure 1 shows, the SNP's fortunes have hardly followed world crude oil prices since 1974: in the early 1980s when oil prices skyrocketed due to the Iran-Iraq war, the SNP only received 12% in the 1983 general election, while when world crude oil prices reached their lowest mark in a quarter-century in the late 1990s, the SNP held on to 22% in the 1997 general elections, more than it had won in general elections in 1992 or 1987. Second, even those writers most inclined towards modernist and instrumentalist theories would not argue that Scottish nationalism dates back only to the early 1970s. Indeed, many scholars look back to the Act of Union in 1707 as a

crucial moment in the history of Scottish nationalism, as it left Scotland with its own church as well as a separate university, legal and banking system, all of which helped to create or maintain a separate national identity.[7] While there was no SNP or general elections allowing the scholar to assess Scottish nationalism electorally in the 18th century, Colley (1992, 8) nonetheless argues that, "for many poorer and less literate Britons [in the 18th century], Scotland, Wales and England remained more potent rallying calls than Great Britain, except in times of danger from abroad."[8]

**Insert Figure 1 here (see page 31)**

In a similar way Collier (2001) and Collier et al. (2003) argue that the real cause of the 2000 coup d'etat in Fiji was greed rather than grievance. They dismiss the claim of the leader of Fiji's 2000 coup d'etat, George Speight, that his motivation was ethnic discontent and instead places emphasis on Speight's anger after losing a contract to a rival company over the rights to manage the country's mahogany plantations. In his analysis Collier (2001, 151) claims that the coup was therefore an example of how "rebellion [is often] *patterned* by ethnicity and religion but not *caused* by ethnic and religious differences" (emphasis in original). In other words, a struggle over resources took an ethnic dimension because Fiji, like most societies, is ethnically and/or religiously diverse.

Yet Collier et al. (2003, 62) mentions only in passing that, at the time of the coup, Fiji's government happened to be drawn from a predominantly Indian party, something Speight used to rally his fellow native Fijians. As scholars of the coup have noted, much of its impetus came from perceived ethnic nepotism at the hands of the then Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudry, who had appointed his own son as private secretary and attempted to transfer more military power

away from ethnic Fijians towards Indo-Fijians (De Vries 2002, 325; Srebrnik 2002, 201). Furthermore, Speight's greed could hardly explain why he would win a parliamentary seat from jail in 2001 (Srebrnik 2002, 188, 199). Indeed, even though the coup might have been started by Speight's discontent over his business failures or his desire to gain control of the mahogany plantations, it gained popularity because Speight drew upon pre-existing ethnic tensions between Fijians and Indians.[9] It is therefore incorrect to claim that the coup took an ethnic character because Fiji is merely ethnically diverse; rather it did so because Fiji had a good deal of ethnic tension at the time of the coup, a quite substantial difference.[10] While Speight's business interests were certainly a strong *personal* motivating factor, Fiji's ethnic problems were a strong *societal* motivating factor to give Speight support. Thus it is also incorrect to claim that Speight's greed was the cause of his coup rather than these underlying ethnic tensions, as they were just as influential in ensuring its (temporary) success.

In a related argument Collier and Hoeffler (2004b) argue that greed triumphs ethnic grievance in rich regions. Aside from their previous claims that the presence of natural resources, especially oil, creates incentives for secessionist movements, Collier and Hoeffler (2004b, 3) use Buchanan and Faith (1987)'s theory of "tax exit" among the rich to claim that "secessionist political communities invent themselves when part of the population perceives secession to be economically advantageous." They use the examples of Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia as well as that of Croatia and Slovenia from Yugoslavia to show that the richest regions of countries often secede when they feel as if the central government is transferring their wealth elsewhere. Indeed, this theory could help to explain why Switzerland (2$^{nd}$ highest per capita income in Europe), Norway (3$^{rd}$) and Iceland (5$^{th}$) refusing to join the EU while member

countries like Denmark (4th), Sweden (6th) and the UK (7th) remain hesitant about their commitment.

However, to test this theory we should examine cases where rich regions do not "invent" a political identity. If, as claimed, these "secessionist political communities invent themselves when part of the population perceives secession to be economically advantageous" (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b), the number of potential secessionist movements would run into the thousands, if not even millions. It would be hard to count the number of separate communities some of whose residents believe that they would be economically better off on their own: one extreme example is Killington, VT, whose citizens voted to secede from Vermont on March 2, 2004 due to high state property taxes (Associated Press 2004), but there are undoubtedly many more such places where many residents harbour dreams of economic autonomy or even independence. We can at least be certain that the number of such non-ethnic attempts at "tax exits" exceeds the mere "hundreds of romantic secessionist groups" whose claims are overtly ethnically based.

Indeed, far from ethnic secessionist groups' claims encompassing "most areas of the earth" (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b, 16), there are large areas of the earth with no such secessionist movements. For example, there is a distinct lack of a secessionist movement among the citizens of the geographically contiguous states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York, which rank #1-4, respectively, in personal income per capita in the US (Bureau of Economic Analysis 2003). Collier and Hoeffler cannot explain this lack of a movement, arguing that, while "shared economic interests coincide with cultural identities" in the cases of Eritrea, Slovenia and Croatia, "cultural identities are usually fluid." They duly note that Eritrea's "population includes three major religious groups, five ethnic groups, nine official languages and three official writing scripts" (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b, 22). In other words, Eritrea is as

culturally diverse as the four aforementioned American states – if not more so, since there is only one writing script among these four states. Why, then, are there no "romantic secessionist groups" in these states?

Other examples outside the US abound: for every example of residents of a rich region like Punjab or Quebec attempting to secede, there are many other rich states and regions like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, Alberta and the Yukon territories where there is no such movement. The reason, of course, is that the population of these states either do not see themselves as members of the same ethnic group or nation or see themselves as part of a greater ethnic group or nation:[11] in other words, the fluidity of cultural identities can only go so far. Thus Collier and Hoeffler (2004b) make the same mistake that Connor (1994, 145, 147) criticized in an essay first published in 1984, namely the "tendency to stress economic forces [as a] manifestation of a broader tendency to mistake the overt characteristics of a nation for its essence." As Connor notes, the problem with such an economic analysis is that "defining ethnonational conflicts in terms of economic inequality is a bit like defining them in terms of oxygen: where you find the one, you can be reasonably certain to find the other." In other words, all countries have richer and poorer regions, only a fraction of which tend to coincide with ethnic groups to produce secessionist movements. Connor also shows definitively that temporal changes in the economic situation of ethnic groups do not promote or suppress secessionist/nationalist movements, as already seen in the case of Scotland.

Thus, as we have seen, the lack of understanding of ethnicity in various works by Paul Collier and his co-authors have led them into faulty conclusions about the role of ethnicity in politics, specifically with regards to secession. These criticisms should not imply, however, that Collier's larger project on understanding civil war is beyond hope;[12] they merely point towards

ways in which his and others' analyses can be improved, as we shall also see forthwith in our examination of data sets of ethnicity used in current political economy literature.

## 4. Data Sets

While many authors do not offer their own definition of ethnicity, they do, however, draw upon data sets of ethnic groups that needed to be based upon some objective criteria. The two most popular data sets for quantitative work in the field of ethnic conflict are the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalisation (ELF) index and the Minorities at Risk (MAR) data set.[13] While both sets have some positive attributes, neither is truly qualified to be used unquestionably as a data source in work on ethnicity. Indeed, as we shall see, while the ELF relies upon a single measure of ethnicity, namely language, the MAR draws upon more than what most of the above authors would refer to as ethnicity.

### 4.1. Ethno-Linguistic Fractionaliation (ELF)

The Ethno-Linguistic Fractionaliation (ELF) index was originally conceived by Soviet researchers in 1960, whose work was originally published in Russian as the *Atlas Narodov Mira* (1964) and in English in Taylor and Hudson (1988). Mauro (1995) was the first economist to use the data; in recent years it has appeared in such works as Alesina et al. (1999), Carment and James (1998), Collier and Collier et al. (various),[14] De Soysa (2002), Doyle and Sambanis (2000), Easterly (2000, 2001, 2002), Easterly and Levine (1997), Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000), Fearon and Laitin (2000a), Mousseau (2001), Olzak and Tsutsui (1998) and Reynal-Querol

(2002). The index is easy to use as it measures the probability that two randomly selected individuals within a given group will be from different ethnolinguistic groups; it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 (or 0 and 100), where the higher number expresses higher diversity.[15]

Laitin and Posner (2001) have already devoted a whole essay to criticizing the ELF's various faults. They claim that, as the ELF is a single index, it misses "multiple dimensions of ethnic identity in all countries," for instance India's various social divisions (especially those based on religion, language and caste). The authors also argue that the index, which has not been updated since it was compiled in the 1960s, does not account for changes over time in the measure of ethnicity, bringing up the obvious examples of Somalia and Yugoslavia where ethnic identity has been very much in flux lately. Furthermore, they argue, the index does not account for political difference, which is especially important when scholars use the index to analyse trends in politics and political economy. Laitin and Posner (2001, 15-16) write that "to capture the contribution that a country's ethnic heterogeneity makes to such a process requires an index of fractionalisation that reflects the groups *that are actually doing the competing*"(emphasis in original). Finally, the authors argue that the index assumes exogeneity incorrectly: in other words, ethnic diversity may just as much be a function of economic and political factors as the other way around. In the end, academics need to create a new ELF "of all the ethnic cleavages understood by members of the population to be meaningful axes of social differentiation. Such a list would vary from country to country but would probably include language, tribe, clan structure, caste, race and religion." Of course, those revising the index would need to highlight those cleavages most politically salient as well as update the index periodically.

Laitin and Posner's criticisms are all valid, although it is not clear how all of them are related to the "constructivist findings" trumpeted by Chandra (2001) in the same symposium.

More importantly, the authors never mention the index's most prominent fault, namely its sole basis on language differences, which is responsible for many authors' confusion of the terms "ethnolinguistic" and "ethnic."[16] While Sambanis (2001, 266) has already acknowledged this problem, writing that "previous studies have focused disproportionately on linguistic differences and this may have biased their findings," few scholars seem to have realized the discongruity between the ELF's reliance on language and the theoretical work on ethnicity examined above. As already noted, scholars like Horowitz (1985) and Smith (1986, 1991, 1998), not to mention Laitin (2000), all strongly argue that ethnicity cannot be based on one characteristic such as language, culture or religion; in particular, those anthropologists, political scientists and sociologists who base ethnicity solely on language are few and far between.[17] However, rather than arguing for a multidimensional index of ethnicity, Laitin and Posner (2001, 14) merely suggest "a separate ELF calculation for each dimension of ethnic difference."

Thus the ELF is severly flawed, both for the reasons advanced by Laitin and Posner as well as the criticism that no index should be based on any one characterstic of ethnicity. That scholars like Collier (2001),[18] Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002) and Sambanis (2001) are aware of some of these faults is indeed positive, as is also a new data set created by Posner (2000) specifically to combat the problems with the ELF. His index distinguishes between politically relevant and irrelevant ethnic groups, accounting for changes over time in the political relevance of ethnic groups and only including independent countries (Posner 2000, 9-10). However, Posner fails to provide what definition of ethnicity he used in compiling his index – or even whether he used one or many definitions – noting merely that he and his research assistants "conducted an exhaustive literature search for books, academic articles and news reports that

described the ethnic politics of each of the countries for which the index was to be calculated." Nonetheless, Posner's measure goes some way towards correcting the ELF's numerous faults.

### 4.2. The Minorities at Risk (MAR) data set

Perhaps the most popular data set used by political economists interested in ethnicity is the Minorities at Risk (MAR) data set, first compiled by Ted Gurr in 1986 and explained in Gurr (1993). The MAR has been referenced by nearly all relevant scholars in the field, including Bates (1999), Blanton et al. (2001), Caprioli and Trumbore (2003), Carment and James (1995, 1998), Caselli and Coleman (2002), Cetinyan (2002), Davis and Moore (1997), De Soysa (2002), Easterly (2000, 2001), Easterly & Levine (1997), Fearon (1999), Fearon and Laitin (1999), Fox (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b), Henderson (1997, 1998, 2000), Henderson and Singer (2000), Khosla (1999), Mousseau (2001), Olzak and Tsutsui (1998), Saideman (2002), Sambanis (1999, 2001), Trumbore (2003) and Woodwell (2004). On its website (http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/home.htm) the MAR lists some 285 "politically active communal groups," all of which are described in detail with information about their size, percentage of relevant countries' populations, history, risk assessment (i.e., the risk of communal violence generally and revolt or rebellion specifically) and general analytical summary along with a bibliography. Each group, which must either comprise more than 500,000 people or be more than 1% of the population in at least one country, is classified as one of six different types of communal groups:

- Ethnonationalist (defined as "regionally concentrated peoples with a history of organised political autonomy with their own state, traditional ruler, or regional government")
- Religious Sect ("communal groups that differ from others principally in their religious beliefs and related cultural practices")
- National Minorities ("segments of a trans-state people with a history of organized political autonomy whose kindred control an adjacent state, but who now constitute a minority in the state in which they reside")
- Communal Contender ("culturally distinct peoples, tribes, or clans in heterogenous societies who hold or seek a share in state power")
- Indigenous Peoples ("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")
- Ethnoclass ("ethnically or culturally distinct peoples, usually descended from slaves or immigrants, most of whom occupy a distinct social and economic stratum or niche")

These different categories allow the MAR to incorporate the various types of cleavages called for by Chandra (2001) and Laitin and Posner (2001) in their critique of the ELF index. The MAR moves beyond the ELF index in another regard as well, since it has been updated three times (in 1996, 1999 and 2001) since its first publication, incorporating new data in each new edition. Thus it is no accident that the MAR has so far largely escaped criticism among constructivists.[19]

Yet few if any political economists have carefully noted exactly what type of groups are included in the MAR data set. Indeed, the data set's title is misleading, since the MAR homepage explicitly claims that its focus is "politically-active communal groups" rather than "minorities" per se. Even more confusing is the authors' claim on another webpage that the MAR's focus is "ethnopolitical groups" – rather than "minorities" or "politically-active communal groups" – which are defined as "non-state communal groups that have 'political significance' in the contemporary world… The possible bases of communal identity include

shared language, religion, national or racial origin, common cultural practices, and attachment to a particular territory." While some scholars would be happy to accept this definition of "ethnopolitical groups" as synonymous with "ethnic groups," others would reject the implication that "communal identity" is necessarily the same as "ethnic identity."

Indeed, a short glance at two of the six types of minorities shows the contentious nature of this definition. The first group, religious sects, includes such minorities as Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Baha'i and Christians in Iran, Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan and Muslims in India. It is hard to argue that these groups, especially the last, can uncontroversially be considered ethnic groups as they are groups wholly defined in terms of religion and little if anything else. Indeed, these groups are largely dispersed territorially, with little sense of an historic homeland, unique language or common descent, while intermarriage with other religious communities is often relatively high.

The same problems apply to another type of "minority" included in the MAR data set, namely "ethnoclasses." Such minorities grouped under this category include Blacks in Latin American, the United Kingdom and the US; Europeans in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe; Hispanics in the US; "Foreign Workers" in Switzerland; and "Non-Citizen Muslims" in France. Excluding the last two examples leaves us with a category consisting of what many observers would call racial groups, even though the MAR definition for "ethnoclass" never once mentions race as a defining characteristic. Indeed, many scholars see racial and ethnic groups as distinct: see for instance Smith (1991, 21), who writes that ethnic communities "must be sharply differentiated from a race." Furthermore, Malik (1996, 174-177) notes, "among sociologists and anthropologists… there is a general sense that if race describes differences created by imputed biological distinction, ethnicity refers to differences with regards to cultural distinctions."

However, some scholars are quite happy to view religious and racial minorities as ethnic groups. For instance, Varshney (2001) and Chandra and Metz (2002) use Horowitz's aforementioned definition of ethnicity as "groups differentiated by color, language, and religion" (Horowitz 1985, 53) to code white – black conflict in the US as well as Hindu – Muslim conflict in India as ethnic conflict. Yet, as Varshney (2001, 364) readily admits, ethnicity is "widely understood in popular discourse" not to include religious or sectarian groups. Indeed, an application of Fearon and Laitin (2000b)'s "ordinary language" analysis yields the same results, since a small sample of South Asians with whom the author spoke all agreed that religious minorities in South Asia should not be considered "ethnic groups," while a search of relevant articles in Indian newspapers yielded similar results.[20]

Nonetheless, Varshney (2001, 365) argues, by classifying religious, racial and sectarian conflicts as ethnic conflicts the scholar can thereby compare disputes which are often similar in their "intensity, duration or relative intractability." It remains questionable, however, whether conflicts between non-indigenous racial groups (as with whites and blacks in the US), indigenous ethnic groups or tribes (as with Acholis and Langis in northern Uganda) and religious groups (as with Hindus and Muslims in India) are really all that comparable.[21] In any case, Varshney (2001) is to be praised for examining the controversial nature of ethnicity and explaining to the reader how he understands both "ethnicity" and "ethnic conflict."

Thus we can see how at least two of the MAR's six sub-groups are controversial among scholars. While some scholars may explicitly agree with the groupings of the MAR, many might not, especially with the inclusion of the religious sects and ethnoclass sub-groups. It is therefore important for scholars to note whether they agree or disagree with the MAR's definitions and groupings before using its data.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined two types of problems in recent political economy work on ethnicity, namely a lack of understanding of the concept of ethnicity and the reliance on data sets that may not capture ethnic groups as they are normally conceived. In both cases the authors fail to recognize the differences between ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious groups or even acknowledge that the two may be different. Thus the authors draw upon definitions of ethnic diversity that do not always correspond to the real world. Second of all, even if the authors were to recognize the multiple ways of measuring ethnicity, there would still exist the problem of doing econometric analyses based on the number or proportion of ethnic groups in a given area or among a given population. Ethnicity is inherently a slippery concept and one that is extremely difficult to measure with a large degree of accuracy. Thus the valiant attempts by Ted Gurr and others to quantify the number of ethnic groups is inherently flawed, as the authors of the Minorities at Risk (MAR) website recognize somewhat by acknowledging the arbitrary and imprecise nature of estimating the group size of communal/ethnic groups. Yet the papers examined here give no notice of the fierce debates that exist in the study of ethnicity, especially in regards to the number of ethnic groups and their populations. Therefore these attempts to show correlations between ethnic diversity and economic growth, war and other phenomena are at best controversial.

Further research thus must take into account, as Easterly (2001, 706) suggests, differing definitions of ethnicity. Since the majority of authors examined here rely upon the MAR project for their data, perhaps the MAR data set could be expanded or amended by listing ethnic groups

as defined by a variety of criteria and sources, therefore allowing researchers to approach ethnicity from whatever perspective they see best. Indeed, as it stands now the MAR website gives no definition of ethnicity, let alone any indication that there are many ways of defining ethnicity.

Another alternative is to come up with completely new indices of ethnicity, which has been recently attempted by three researchers. The first, the aforementioned data set compiled by Posner (2000), we have already examined. The second comes from Fearon (2002), who criticises both the Soviet data and the MAR index, claiming that both are flawed in the way they select ethnic groups based on either language and race or whether the ethnic groups were at risk, respectively (Fearon 2002, 2-3). He argues that any index must take into account the "multiple ways [one can] specify the set of ethnic groups in a country," but, in cases where "there are multiple plausible ways of listing a country's 'ethnic groups,' we must be careful that we do not, in effect, choose the coding that best supports our theory, after the fact" (Fearon 2002, 5). To define ethnicity, Fearon (2002, 10) uses the aforementioned "ordinary language analysis" method of Fearon and Laitin (2000b), which, however, leads him astray when claiming that "Jews are often described as an ethnic group despite lacking a common language, universally shared customs or even common religious practice," despite much evidence that he is wrong on all three points in regards to Ashkenzi Jews.[22]

In any case, Fearon admits that, as opposed to the Soviet assumption that "native language marks ethnicity," he allows for "other cultural criteria distinguishing groups, provided that the groups are locally understood as (primarily) descent groups and are locally viewed as socially or politically most consequential" (Fearon 2002, 23). However, in measuring ethnic fractionalisation Fearon admits in a new measure, namely cultural diversity, in order to measure

the depth of cultural division in a given country. To measure this depth he adopts the method used by Fearon and Laitin (2000a, 2000b), which uses the structural difference between the languages spoken by a given country's set of ethnic groups as a proxy for its cultural diversity. The inherent inaccuracies involved, not to mention the problem of reverting back to using language as a measure for ethnicity even after criticizing the Soviet data for precisely that reason, is not lost on Fearon, who notes that his index is very much a work in progress (Fearon 2002, 31). Among other things he suggests an investigation into religion as another type of proxy for cultural diversity (Fearon 2002, 31).

Finally, Vanhanen (1999, 59) has created an index of Ethnic Heterogeneity (EH) which combines measures of ethnic groups based on "racial differences, … linguistic, national or tribal differences, … and stabilized old religious communities." By combining various dimensions of ethnicity the EH index is more accurate in encompassing ethnicity's complex nature than the ELF while also avoiding the minorities defined by religious and racial difference included in the MAR dataset. However, Vanhanen (1999, 57) conceives of ethnicity in a very primordial fashion, understanding ethnic groups as "extended kin groups" whose "members are genetically more closely related to each other than to the members of other groups." In other words, as with Van den Berghe (1979), Vanhanen (1999) emphasizes *actual* kinship over *perceived* kinship, therefore leading him to neglect the dynamic and often constructed nature of ethnic groups while also overemphasizing the role of race as a source of ethnic identity. [23] Indeed, in the EH index Vanhanen (1999) uses outdated and questionable racial terminology such as Negroid, Mulatto and Mongoloid, where Arabs, Europeans and South Asians are classified as Caucasoids while those of East Asian and Amerindian descent are Mongoloid.

None of these three new indices has yet to catch on in political economy literature, owing perhaps to their recent appearance: while Vanhanen (1999) has been used by Doyle and Sambanis (2000), Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002), Sambanis (2001) and Woodwell (2004), Fearon (2002) and Posner (2000) have yet to be cited. Certainly it will take time for academics to incorporate these new indices into their research. Yet even if these indices do not make a mark, it is perhaps most important that researchers merely take the time to acknowledge that ethnicity is a controversial subject matter and one that cannot be used rigorously without a clear definition. Future papers on ethnicity and economics that at least acknowledge a diversity of opinion would go a long way towards elevating the level of debate. Certainly any discussion of such an important topic is worthy of such treatment.

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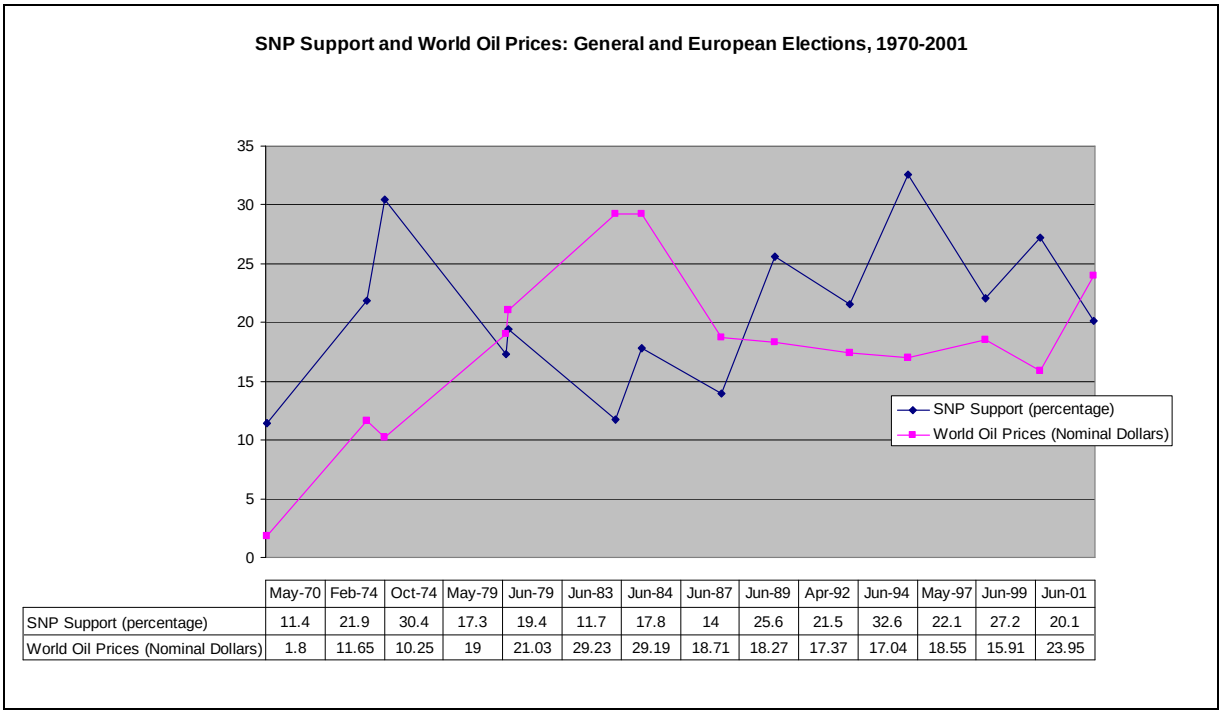


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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SNP Support (percentage) | 11.4 | 21.9 | 30.4 | 17.3 | 19.4 | 11.7 | 17.8 | 14 | 25.6 | 21.5 | 32.6 | 22.1 | 27.2 | 20.1 |
| World Oil Prices (Nominal Dollars) | 1.8 | 11.65 | 10.25 | 19 | 21.03 | 29.23 | 29.19 | 18.71 | 18.27 | 17.37 | 17.04 | 18.55 | 15.91 | 23.95 |

**Figure 1 (Sources: Energy Information Administration, US Department of Energy)**

[1] Yet, the fact that almost all ethnic groups do have an association with a homeland is enough to include it in a definition; it is possible that the Roma are thus the exception that prove the rule. Of course, one could argue that Fearon and Laitin have implicitly included a homeland in their definition, since the "natural history" of an ethnic group they include must take place in some territory.

[2] In an interesting twist, Gil-White (2001) argues that humans are actually genetically wired to be primordialist.

[3] Defining ethnicity on the basis of other singular factors is just as faulty. For example, one could use intermarriage rates, i.e., ethnic groups are those social groups that had a high intermarriage rate among its members but a low intermarriage rate with outsiders. However, this would cause problems with ethnic groups who had an aristocracy or caste system, not to mention ethnic groups whose members practised different religions that discouraged high intermarriage rates. Furthermore, as Adrian Hastings notes, intermarriage between ethnic groups has been constant throughout history, if due to nothing more than the constant raiding of women from one's neighbours (Hastings 1997, 175).

[4] See Gutkind (1970) for similar arguments, albeit in reference to "tribalism" rather than "ethnicity."

[5] Sambanis (1999, 444-445) gives definitions of partition ("partition is defined as…") and civil war ("a civil war is defined as…") but not ethnicity, which could explain why he does not see a difference between ethnic and religious identities in his paper.

[6] The attention here on Collier's work is by no means supposed to be an *ad hominem*attack; rather, since his work has been so influential in political economy literature over the past few years, I believe his work should come under special scrutiny.

[7] See for instance the avid modernist Breuilly (1993, 320-326), who argues that contemporary Scottish nationalism is partially a result of regional aid programmes in the 1960s as well as the lingering effects of the Act of Union of 1707. He argues that "SNP success began in the early 1960s… Only because of a fairly good showing before 1971 was the party in a position to exploit the discovery of oil."

[8] Others look even farther back than 1707, for instance Hastings (1997, 61-62), who claims that Scottish nationalism was a potent force by the time of the Act of Union.

[9] De Vries (2002, 313) writes that, "although for the most part of the 20th century interethnic violence in Fiji has been sparse, ethnic tension has always been present."

[10] Collier (2001)'s sole source for his discussion of the Fijian coup is an September 13, 2000, article in the *Wall Street Journal*, which could explain why he fails to mention Fiji's long standing ethnic tensions. Collier et al. (2003) do not reference anything in their discussion.

[11] In the US the richest four states hardly see themselves as constituting a separate ethnic group or nation – let alone a separate region, as Connecticut and Massachusetts are considered part of New England while New York and New Jersey are not. The same rule applies to the Canadian states as well as to Maharashtra, whose largest city, Mumbai, is ethnically very diverse. According to Harriss (2003), contemporary Tamil Nadu voters are more likely to consider themselves Hindus and Indians than Tamils in elections. A Tamil secessionist/nationalist movement did enjoy support in the 1950s, when Tamil Nadu was much poorer than it is now, partly due to attempts by the central government to impose Hindi as the sole national language (Kohli 1997).

[12] For more on Collier's larger project see Cramer (2002), De Soysa (2002) and Keen (2002).

[13] A popular data set for ethnic groups in Africa is Morrison et al. (1989), used by Bates (1999), Londregan et al. (1995) and others. However, it is not nearly as popular as the ELF index or the MAR data set.

[14] All works authored or co-authored by Paul Collier listed in the bibliography employ the ELF index.

[15] Some authors have criticised the ELF on econometric grounds; see Patrick Honohan and Karl Moene's discussion points at the end of Collier (2001).

[16] See for instance Collier (1998), Collier and Hoeffler (2002), and Easterly and Levine (1997).

[17] Adams (1993, 92) is the only such example this author came across in his readings.

[18] Collier's later work does not, however, mention the ELF's drawbacks.

[19] The only sustained criticism of the MAR is that it fails to include minorities not "at risk" as well as some which should be considered "at risk;" cf. Fearon (2002) and Fearon and Laitin (1999).

[20] See for instance the following editorial in *The Hindu*: "if every religious minority or ethnic group forms its own party, there will be nothing but atomisation of the political system and confusion" (*The Hindu* 10/11/2000). Woodwell (2004, 206) reluctantly agrees, noting that "groups such as Hindus and Moslems in India and Pakistan, while not literally 'ethnic' groups, share a common communal identity in many areas, and are united by common political bonds.' Also see Dutt (1998, 419), who writes that "ethnically, neither the Hindus nor the Muslims are a homogenous group."

[21] This, however, is a topic for another paper.

[22] Fearon is correct in his analysis if one includes all the Jews in the world; however, the sense in which the word "Jew" is used in the U.S. and Europe is quite specific to the Jews who inhabit those areas, who are almost all of Ashkenzi (East European) descent.

[23] See Smith (1998, 147-151) for a critique of Van den Berghe (1979) along these lines.