

# DISCUSSION PAPERS

Discussion Paper 15

**DO INCLUSIVE ELITE BARGAINS MATTER?  
A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING  
THE CAUSES OF CIVIL WAR IN SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA**

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## Do inclusive elite bargains matter? A research framework for understanding the causes of civil war in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Sub-Saharan Africa combines all the major risk factors commonly associated with the onset of civil war. Accordingly, it is the world's most conflict-intensive region, with 24 out of 48 countries having experienced civil war over the past 50 years. Yet at the same time, half of its crisis-ridden states have managed to maintain political stability despite the odds. Trying to resolve this puzzle, I begin by reviewing the five most influential theoretical approaches in the civil war literature and find that they ultimately all fall short of explaining the observed differences in political stability. In the light of these shortcomings, the paper then outlines an alternative approach to the study of civil war focusing on differences in the inclusiveness of elite politics. My main argument is that the post-colonial trajectories of civil war versus political stability in different states across Sub-Saharan Africa are largely determined by the varying ability of ruling political parties to overcome the specific historical legacy of high social fragmentation, by forging and maintaining 'inclusive elite bargains'. While 'inclusive elite bargains' permit the maintenance of political stability, 'exclusionary elite bargains' give rise to trajectories of civil war. The paper concludes with brief methodological remarks on how to explore the plausibility of my argument and argues in favour of a case-study approach of 'structured, focused comparison'.*

### Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is typically perceived as doomed with almost inescapable violent conflict. While this perception is often due to long-standing stereotypes, it is nonetheless a matter of fact that the region indeed accumulates high (and mostly above-average) values for all major risk factors commonly associated with the onset of civil war (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000). These include high ethnic fragmentation, extremely poor economic performance, persistent inequalities, worsening environmental scarcities, high dependence on primary commodity exports and weak democratic institutions riddled with neo-patrimonial rule. Against this background, it may not be surprising that Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's most conflict-intensive region, with 24 out of 48 countries having experienced at least one period of civil war over the past 50 years (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> More surprising – and often overlooked – may be the fact that half of Africa's crisis-ridden states have managed to maintain political stability despite the odds. This raises the following (puzzling) research question: why have some African states experienced civil war, while others have managed to maintain political stability?

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank James Putzel for his helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> There are of course important differences between the 24 'civil war countries'. While some countries have been affected by recurrent large-scale violent conflict across most of their territory (e.g. Chad, DRC, Somalia, Sudan), others have suffered from more locally confined civil wars (e.g. Senegal, Mali).

**Table 1: Civil war onset vs. avoidance in Sub-Sahara Africa (1945-2007)<sup>3</sup>**

Countries having experienced civil war (24)	Countries having avoided civil war (22)
Angola (4 civil wars), Burundi (4), Central African Republic (1), Chad (4), Congo-Brazzaville (2), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Democratic Republic of Congo (5), Djibouti (1), Ethiopia (3), Guinea Bissau (1), Kenya (2), Liberia (3), Mali (1), Mozambique (1), Namibia (1), Nigeria (2), Rwanda (3), Senegal (1), Sierra Leone (2), Somalia (2), South Africa (1), Sudan (3), Uganda (5), Zimbabwe (2).	Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia.

In order to answer this question I will first briefly define what I understand by a ‘civil war’). Then I will go on to review five influential theoretical approaches to the study of civil war in order to establish whether the observed variation in political stability across Sub-Saharan Africa can be related to differences in the above-mentioned commonly cited risk factors. These five schools of thought include arguments focused on: (1) ethnic diversity; (2) economic performance; (3) inequality; (4) natural resource scarcity/ abundance; and (5) political organisation. I come to the conclusion that the abundant civil war literature remains surprisingly inconclusive. While some schools of thought provide important insights that can be built upon, they nonetheless ultimately all fall short of resolving my puzzle.

In the light of these shortcomings, I develop an alternative approach to the study of civil war. My basic argument is that the civil war literature has so far paid insufficient attention to differences in the inclusiveness of elite politics. I hypothesise that the post-colonial trajectories of civil war versus political stability across Sub-Saharan Africa are largely determined by the varying ability of ruling political parties to overcome the specific colonial legacy of high social fragmentation by forging and maintaining ‘inclusive elite bargains’ (Putzel 2007; DiJohn 2008):

- **Trajectories of civil war:** Exclusionary elite politics involve a ruling party that establishes a *narrow coalition of elites* by defining exclusionary access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents). Such ‘*exclusionary elite bargains*’ fail to accommodate existing social cleavages and provide excluded leaders with an incentive to mobilise protest and violent rebellion among their constituencies. Seen from this perspective, the onset of civil war must be understood as resulting from the failure to forge inclusive political coalitions.
- **Trajectories of political stability:** Inclusive elite politics involve a ruling party that integrates a *broad coalition of key elites* by defining inclusive access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents). Such ‘*inclusive elite bargains*’ help to accommodate social fragmentation and thereby provide a disincentive for violent rebellion. Seen from this perspective, the maintenance of political stability must be understood as resulting from the ability to build and preserve inclusive political coalitions.

<sup>3</sup> I rely on a civil war dataset compiled by Sambanis (2004a), for data up to 1999. I have added new cases of civil war for the period between 2000-2007 (Chad, Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan). Note that Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe are not included in the dataset.

The paper concludes with brief methodological remarks on how to explore the plausibility of my argument and argues in favour of a case-study approach of ‘structured, focused comparison’.

## Defining civil war

‘How would we know a civil war if we saw one?’ (Sambanis (2004a: 816)

Most definitions of civil war rely heavily on the influential ‘Correlates of War’ (COW) project that has proposed three distinguishing criteria (Small and Singer 1982: 210). Civil war is defined as ‘any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides.’ The main distinction between a civil and an international war therefore concerns the internality of the war to the territory of a sovereign state and the participation of the government as a combatant. Civil war is further distinguished from other forms of internal armed conflict by the requirement that state violence should be sustained and reciprocated, and that the war exceeds a certain threshold of deaths (typically more than 1,000).

While this definition seems relatively straightforward at first sight, it nonetheless contains a number of serious problems (Sambanis 2004a: 816ff; Cramer 2006: 49ff). To address these problems, scholars subsequently produced (more or less) divergent definitions of civil war – a situation that has led to the proliferation of competing civil war lists. These differences in the coding of civil war have substantive implications because they make accurate and robust predictions of civil war onset extremely difficult (see the review of the quantitative civil war literature in section 3 below).

In order to resolve some of the recurrent debates about rules of entry, Nicholas Sambanis has recently put together a more comprehensive definition of civil war. While this careful effort is especially necessary to avoid confusion in statistical coding rules, it is equally useful in qualitative research to be clear about which kind of ‘violent conflict’ one is trying to explain. I therefore rely on Sambanis’s definition (Sambanis 2004a: 829ff), which defines armed conflict as civil war if:

- (1) The war takes place within the territory of an internationally recognised state with a population of more than 500,000;
- (2) The parties are politically and militarily organised, and they have publicly stated political objectives;<sup>4</sup>
- (3) The government (through its military or militias) must be a principal combatant. If there is no functioning government, then the party representing the government internationally and/or claiming the state domestically must be involved as a combatant;
- (4) The main insurgent organisation(s) must be locally represented and must recruit locally, though there may be additional external involvement and recruitment;
- (5) The start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths.<sup>5</sup> If the conflict has not caused 500 deaths or more in the first year, the war is

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the ‘traditional idea of war as a *contest between two sides*, each of which is trying to defeat the enemy and win’ is not unproblematic as ‘cooperation between armed groups has often been significant’ within civil conflicts (Keen 2007: 12 & 18, original emphasis).

considered as having started in that year only if cumulative deaths in the next 3 years reach 1,000;

- (6) Throughout its duration, the conflict must be characterised by sustained violence, with no three-year period having less than 500 deaths;
- (7) Throughout the war, the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance, measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party;
- (8) The war ends if interrupted by a peace treaty, ceasefire or decisive military victory producing at least two years of peace.

### **Theoretical approaches to explaining civil war – a literature review**

Theories on the causes of civil war are abundant. Why then bother to add another one? In what follows, I will review five influential theoretical schools of thought to the study of civil war and argue that they ultimately all fall short of resolving my puzzle.

#### ***Civil war and ethnic diversity***

Scholars have for a long time sought to establish a relationship between ethnic diversity and the incidence of political violence. This is especially true for Sub-Saharan Africa – a continent that is commonly regarded as ridden by almost inescapable ethnic conflict. The ‘ethnic-diversity-civil war argument’ comes in two main variants – one focusing on ‘ethnic fractionalisation’ and one prioritising the impact of ‘ethnic polarisation’.

*Ethnic fractionalisation:* A first hypothesis proposes a linear relationship between ethnic fractionalisation and violent conflict whereby high degrees of fractionalisation make a country more prone to civil war. Here we can broadly distinguish between perennialist and modernist lines of argument. While perennialist scholars like Huntington or Moynihan stress the primordial nature of ethnic differences and suggest that these make political stability difficult to achieve (Huntington 1996; Moynihan 1993), modernist theories argue that it is the advent of the modern state that leads to the politicisation of cultural difference and the rise of destabilising ethnic nationalism(s) (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). This (old) idea of ethnic fragmentation as a source of large-scale violent conflict has recently been taken up in the quantitative civil war literature, predominantly by testing for the effects of ‘ethno-linguistic fractionalisation’ (ELF).<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, most quantitative studies find that there is no positive linear relationship between ethnic fractionalisation and civil war onset – a finding that has been accompanied by strong statements against the significance of ethnic heterogeneity as a factor leading to civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005). Nevertheless, this apparent consensus is less robust than it appears. Sambanis, for instance, tests the robustness of the relationship for twelve different measures of civil war onset (that is, twelve different civil war lists) (Sambanis 2004a: 831 ff). While ethnic fractionalisation remains mostly insignificant, it nonetheless reaches significance in a few civil war lists – not least in Sambanis’s own comprehensive civil war list as cited above. Also, ethnic fractionalisation is clearly important in explaining a broad category of armed conflict that includes minor-scale insurgency – a result that is underscored in a more recent ‘sensitivity analysis’ (Hegre and Sambanis 2006). With specific reference to Sub-Saharan Africa, two quantitative studies find ethnic fractionalisation to be *negatively* associated with

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<sup>5</sup> Note that even this relatively flexible ‘causality threshold’ fails to capture the intensity of a given civil war. A conflict of similar intensity will lead to more casualties in a larger country (e.g. India) than it will in a small country.

<sup>6</sup> The ELF-index measures the probability that two randomly selected individuals belong to different ethnolinguistic groups.

civil war onset (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000); Collier and Hoeffler 2002). Paradoxically, Africa's high degree of ethnic fractionalisation, which is often blamed for causing violent conflict, seems to be a source of safety for the most heterogeneous countries.

*Ethnic polarisation:* A second hypothesis holds that the relationship between ethnic diversity and conflict is non-monotonic, with less violence for highly homogeneous and highly heterogeneous countries. This argument is most clearly developed by Donald Horowitz in his seminal book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985). According to Horowitz, the most severe ethnic conflicts will arise in countries where a significant ethnic minority faces the dominance of an ethnic majority. This hypothesis has again been integrated into quantitative civil war models by testing for the effects of various polarisation indexes – albeit with largely inconclusive findings. Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), for instance, have developed an 'index of polarisation' that seeks to capture the extent to which the distribution of ethnic groups in a country diverges from a bipolar distribution (which represents the highest level of polarisation). In line with their hypothesis, they find that ethnic polarisation does indeed significantly increase the likelihood of civil war. However, this finding has been called into question by Schneider and Wiesehomeier (2006) who show that the risk of civil war is not substantially higher in ethnically polarised countries. Similar contradictions exist with regard to the measure of 'ethnic dominance', which Collier and Hoeffler (2004) define as occurring if the largest ethnic group in a country constitutes 45 to 90 percent of the population. While Collier and Hoeffler and Hegre and Sambanis (2006) find this measure to be positively related with civil war onset, other scholars come to the opposite conclusion (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005). With specific reference to Sub-Saharan Africa, Collier and Hoeffler (2002) find 'ethnic dominance' to be a relatively rare phenomenon that is unrelated to civil war onset.

Altogether, the literature on the relationship between ethnic diversity and civil war remains highly inconclusive and can therefore hardly resolve my puzzle. This indeterminacy is hardly surprising. While it is generally intuitive and plausible to assume that the given degree of ethnic fragmentation may play a role in violent conflict, there is nothing mechanistic about it. Instead, ethnic cleavages are always subject to political bargaining and can be accommodated by a great variety of political strategies (e.g. informal cooptation or formal consociational arrangements).<sup>7</sup> As single fractionalisation or polarisation indexes cannot meaningfully capture this complexity, it is almost self-evident that large statistical comparisons have so far failed to discover event regularities. Also, it is important to keep in mind that ethnicity is only one source of fragmentation along with religious, regional or class cleavages. What is therefore needed to understand the causes of civil war versus political stability in Sub-Saharan Africa is a more qualitative research approach (with small samples of comparison) that traces how *social* fragmentation was forged under pre-colonial and colonial rule and then – with varying degrees of success – accommodated or overcome in post-colonial African polities.

### ***Civil war and economic performance***

A second school of thought in the literature hypothesises that there is a relationship between a country's economic performance and its vulnerability to civil war onset (Sambanis 2004b). The two most commonly discussed factors to assess the impact of economic performance are *income levels* and *economic growth*.

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<sup>7</sup> This is confirmed by a series of case studies (including eight for Sub-Saharan Africa) meant to refine the 'Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war': domestic political institutions are identified as an important variable to consider in interaction with ethnic fractionalisation or ethnic dominance (Sambanis 2005: 313).

*Income levels:* A first hypothesis holds that the onset of large-scale violent conflict is related to the existence of economic poverty. ‘Poverty’ here refers to low levels of economic development or income, typically measured by GDP per capita. There is unusually strong empirical support for this hypothesis. A large number of quantitative studies – both cross-regional ones (Hauge and Ellingsen 1998; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and those that focus on Africa (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2002) – find that lower income levels are significantly associated with higher civil war risks. This finding is extremely robust to different sets of countries and time periods, as well as to different measures of civil war onset (Sambanis 2004a; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). Also, case study evidence suggests that many countries had low and declining per capita income in the years preceding the start of their civil wars (e.g. Sierra Leone and Mozambique) (Sambanis 2004b: 186).

*Economic growth:* A second hypothesis assumes a link between a country’s economic growth rate and the onset of large-scale violent conflict. Here most scholars expect a negative linear relationship whereby low economic growth makes a country more prone to civil war. However, this hypothesis receives only limited empirical support. On the positive side, some scholars do indeed find a negative and significant association (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Smith 2004; Hegre and Sambanis 2006) – a relationship that also holds for Sub-Saharan Africa (Collier and Hoeffler 2002). On the downside, however, other studies find economic growth to be insignificant in explaining civil war onset (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Most importantly, Sambanis comes to the conclusion that economic growth is not robust to different civil war models (with its coefficient changing sign in about half of the models) (Sambanis 2004a).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, case-study evidence is subject to similar contradictions. While many countries experienced negative economic growth in the years preceding the start of their civil wars (e.g. Senegal, Mali and Sierra Leone), there is also evidence that rapid growth may actually increase the risk of large-scale violent conflict (Sambanis 2004b & 2005).

Altogether, the available empirical evidence remains ambiguous. While evidence on the role of economic growth is largely inconclusive, there is strong support for a robust negative association between income-per-capita levels and civil war onset. Nonetheless, even the GDP-per-capita measure remains an unlikely (and unconvincing) candidate to resolve my puzzle. First, there is strong reason to believe that income per capita (just as economic growth) is endogenous to civil war onset:

Something that all quantitative studies miss is that low-level violence precedes civil war and this should reduce both income and growing by reducing investment and encouraging capital flight. (Sambanis 2005: 307)

Therefore it may well be that the observed correlation between income and civil war onset runs in the opposite direction (Stewart and Fitzgerald 2001). Second, the causal mechanisms between income and civil war onset remain entirely unclear. The observed correlation could in principal support the two predominant models in the literature, namely the ‘state-weakness hypothesis’ (Fearon and Laitin 2003), where low income encourages violent conflict by increasing state weakness, and the ‘opportunity cost hypothesis’ (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), where low income encourages civil war by lowering the opportunity cost of rebellion. However, case-study evidence offers little, if any support that such causal relationships are

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Sambanis’s finding that economic growth is ‘consistently nonsignificant’ contradicts the above-cited results in Hegre and Sambanis (2006).

really at work (Collier and Sambanis 2005). Third, if low income (or economic growth) is really a key driver behind civil war onset, why and how have some of the worst economic performers across Africa managed to remain remarkably stable over time (e.g. Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Niger and Burkina Faso)? The latter point draws attention to a so far neglected aspect in the literature, namely the possibility to accommodate poor economic performance by means of inclusive approaches to political organisation and crisis management.

### *Civil war and inequality*<sup>9</sup>

One of the oldest and most intuitive ideas about violent conflict is that it stems from the existence of inequalities. This ‘inequality-civil war hypothesis’ comes in two variants. The dominant variant focuses on the impact of inter-personal, or ‘vertical’, inequalities, while the minority variant points to the significance of inter-group, or ‘horizontal’, inequalities (Stewart 2000).

*Inter-personal inequalities:* Inter-personal inequalities relate to the distribution of income or land across the whole population of individuals from richest to poorest, typically measured through (income or land) Gini coefficients. It is assumed that the existence of such ‘vertical inequalities’ constitutes an important source of grievance and thereby encourages the onset of large-scale violent conflict. However, this hypothesis receives only limited empirical support. First, there is no robust statistical relationship between *income* inequality and civil war onset. Whereas Nafziger and Auvinen (2002) find that ‘objectives grievances’ of income inequality contribute to civil war and humanitarian emergencies,<sup>10</sup> Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004) come to the opposite conclusion. Similarly, Cramer (2006) maintains that neither bivariate nor multivariate analysis produces generally accepted patterns between income distribution and civil war onset. Second, there is also no robust statistical relationship between *land* inequality and civil war onset. While some quantitative studies present evidence for a significant positive relationship (Russett 1964; Binswanger et al. 1995), Collier and Hoeffler (2004) find no association.

Overall, the ‘vertical inequality-civil war hypothesis’ remains inconclusive and can therefore hardly resolve my puzzle. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily dismiss inequality as an explanatory factor in understanding civil war. Instead, the lack of a statistically significant association may be due to the extremely poor quality of the inequality data (Cramer 2005: 11ff). Gini coefficients are often either very poorly measured or entirely missing, not least in Sub-Saharan Africa. This makes claims based on large samples of countries extremely unreliable – a problem that has led some scholars to exclude inequality from their civil war models (Goldstone et al. 2005). One way to further explore the role of inequalities in large-scale violent conflict could therefore be to improve the data quality (Milanovic 2005). But there is a second, more promising option. Significantly, the main problem may not be data quality as such but rather that Gini coefficients simply do not measure the kind of inequality that is relevant to civil war onset. From a theoretical point of view, this is a highly plausible possibility since it is by no means clear why and how inter-personal inequality – that involves important collective action problems – would encourage the ability to organise a civil war. As a consequence, one should consider the impact of a different kind of inequality, namely

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<sup>9</sup> This section partly draws on Cramer (2005).

<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence for a linear positive relationship between income inequality and minor scale violent conflict (Muller and Seligson 1987; Alesina and Perotti 1996).



inequality between social groups – an approach that has recently gained prominence in the civil war literature.

*Inter-group inequalities:* A second hypothesis relates the onset of large-scale violence to the existence of severe inter-group inequalities. Most importantly, Frances Stewart has argued that violent conflict is not ‘exclusively a matter of individuals randomly committing violence against others’ (Stewart 2000: 246). Instead, civil wars normally occur when ‘culturally defined groups’ mobilise against each other (e.g. ethnic, religious, regional or class groupings). It is suggested that ‘horizontal inequalities’ – inter-group inequalities in relation to political participation, economic assets and social services – provide the material basis for such violent group conflicts. Stewart’s hypothesis was initially supported by (albeit relatively superficial) empirical evidence from nine case studies, including Uganda and South Africa (Stewart 2002). Subsequent research at the ‘Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity’ (CRISE) has produced more comprehensive supporting case-study evidence, including noteworthy studies on Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria (Langer 2004; Langer et al. 2007). Also, Gudrun Østby (2006) has made a first effort to explore the concept of ‘horizontal inequalities’ in the context of a large-N study. She finds that all horizontal inequality measures are positively associated with violent conflict, but the effects seem to be most robust when using a regional group identifier.

Altogether, Stewart and her colleagues have made an extremely valuable contribution to the civil war literature. Most significantly, their focus on ‘horizontal inequalities’ shifts attention to discriminatory social relationships (Cramer 2005: 17) – a key aspect that has been entirely neglected in the quantitative literature on ‘vertical inequalities’. Nonetheless, Stewart’s matrix of horizontal inequality remains insufficient for at least two reasons. First, the categories of differentiation among groups (political participation, economic assets and social services) seem overly broad in that they include a large number of disparate (and sometimes vague) elements (Stewart 2000: 249). This makes parsimonious comparison with small samples extremely difficult – a problem that becomes apparent in several of the above-cited case studies. One promising alternative in this context may be to prioritise sources of group differentiation that relate to political power, not least since the latter is typically an important means of securing both economic assets and social services. Second, and more importantly, Stewart’s approach seems overly focused on horizontal inequalities at the ‘mass level’ and thereby neglects inequalities at the ‘elite level’.<sup>11</sup> This is not to deny that Stewart recognises the key role that leaders play in the construction and mobilisation of culturally defined groups (Stewart 2000: 247ff). But both her theoretical and empirical work focuses mostly on inequalities at the ‘mass level’, whereas evidence on the impact of inter-elite inequalities remains rather superficial. This is problematic because horizontal inequalities at the ‘mass level’ may well be endogenous to horizontal inequalities at the ‘elite level’.<sup>12</sup> What is therefore warranted is a more systematic consideration of inclusive versus exclusionary elite politics.

### ***Civil war and natural resource scarcity/ abundance***

*Resource scarcity:* Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing body of ‘Neo-Malthusian’ thought that assumes a causal link between natural resource scarcity (e.g. land degradation,

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<sup>11</sup> Langer’s study on Côte d’Ivoire (2004) is a notable exception in this regard.

<sup>12</sup> Elite representatives who enjoy access to political and economic resources will arguably ‘redistribute’ to their ‘own’ social constituencies. It seems therefore plausible to assume that horizontal inequality at the ‘elite level’ will typically be associated with horizontal inequalities at the ‘mass level’ (and vice-versa).

deforestation, degradation of water resources or depletion of fish stocks) and the onset of violent conflict. Robert Kaplan (1994) has defended the crudest version of this argument by considering the West African wars of the early 1990s as clear evidence of Africa's gathering environmental crisis.<sup>13</sup> More serious arguments were made by two groups of researchers, namely the 'Toronto group' around Homer-Dixon (1994; 1999) and the 'Zurich group' around Baechler and Spillmann (Baechler et al. 1996). Both groups conducted a considerable number of qualitative case studies and found no evidence for a direct connection between environmental scarcity and violent conflict. Environmentally induced scarcity can contribute to a dynamic of violent conflict, albeit only indirectly in combination with political, economic, social and cultural factors. Case studies confirming these results for Sub-Saharan Africa include, among others, Rwanda, Sudan and Mali.

The Toronto and Zurich groups' qualitative work has rightly been criticised for important methodological shortcomings, most notably the 'selection bias' by which they study only countries with acute conflicts over resources (Gleditsch 1998). Against this background, the 'Oslo group' around Gleditsch initiated a series of quantitative studies that found evidence for a (weak) link between environmental problems (deforestation, soil degradation or water scarcity) and armed conflict (Hauge and Ellingsen 1998). Other quantitative studies, by contrast, do not find any association (De Soysa 2002a).

Altogether, environmental scarcities can hardly be regarded as a decisive driver behind differences in political stability across Sub-Saharan Africa. Both qualitative and quantitative 'Neo-Malthusian' research concedes that even though environmental problems may play a role in violent conflict, they are not the direct cause of civil war.<sup>14</sup> Instead, their ultimate effect depends heavily on a wide range of socioeconomic and especially political factors.<sup>15</sup> While this does not necessarily discredit the relevance of the 'Neo-Malthusian' approach (as violent conflict will always involve multiple causes), it does nonetheless underline that politics is decisive to the trajectory of natural-resource scarce countries. But then why not invert the argument and take differences in political organisation as a starting point?

*Resource abundance:* Since the late 1990s, there has been a flood of research on the relationship between natural resource wealth and violent conflict. While the highly influential 'resource curse argument' comes in many different variants, the following three can be identified as predominant (Ross 2004 a, b & 2006).

(1) *The 'honey pot' variant:* Collier and Hoeffler (2002 & 2004) argue that natural resources constitute a 'honey pot' that generates violent forms of rent seeking. More specifically, it is suggested that the existence of natural resources increases the likelihood of civil war by providing insurgent groups with the opportunity to use the 'looting' of natural resources as a means to finance the 'start-up costs' of rebellion. Natural resources are perceived as particularly easy targets for rebel predation, since unlike industry, they produce rents that are location-specific and can be looted on a sustained basis. This 'looting mechanism' is expected to work either through the direct extraction of the commodities or the (indirect) extortion of money from resource firms.

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent critique see Richards (1996).

<sup>14</sup> This does not of course not exclude that global climate change may present an increasing security threat, not least in Sub-Saharan Africa (IPPC 2007; WBGU 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Homer-Dixon's vague notion of 'ingenuity' (Homer-Dixon 2000)

Collier and Hoeffler's argument implies that the natural resources to which rebel groups can gain access – in particular the more easily 'lootable' ones<sup>16</sup> – should be robustly associated with civil war. However, this is largely not the case. First, there is no robust association between primary commodities – a broad category that includes both mineral wealth and agricultural goods – and the onset of civil war. While Collier and Hoeffler find that a country's dependence on primary commodities – measured as the ratio of primary commodity exports to GDP – is strongly correlated with the risk of civil war (the risk peaking when primary commodity exports are 33 percent of GDP and then declining), other scholars find no evidence for such association (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2002; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Fearon 2005; De Soysa and Neumayer 2007). Second, there is no evidence for a robust relationship between oil exports and large-scale violent conflict (see below). Third, and this is a particularly severe blow to the 'Collier-Hoeffler argument', there is also no robust association between civil war and (more easily) lootable commodities (e.g. gemstones, drugs or timber) (Ross 2004a). This becomes especially apparent when looking at the much-discussed relationship between secondary (that is, lootable) diamonds and violent conflict. Significantly, both Lujala et al. (2005) and Ross (2006) find little evidence for the often-assumed link between secondary diamonds and civil war onset.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, case-study research provides no support for the 'Collier-Hoeffler hypothesis'. Sambanis (2005), for instance, summarises a series of case studies (including eight for Sub-Saharan Africa) meant to refine the 'Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war' and finds no evidence for the 'looting mechanism'. Similarly, Ross examines thirteen cases of civil war (including Angola, Congo, DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan) and concludes that 'nascent rebel groups never gained funding before the war broke out from the extraction or sale of natural resources, or from the extortion of others who extract, transport, or market resources' (Ross 2004b: 50).

(2) *The 'political Dutch disease' variant*: Other scholars link the 'resource-civil war nexus' to the phenomenon of the 'rentier state' (Beblawi 1990; Karl 1997; Moore 2004). Rentier states are late-developers that live largely off unearned income (e.g. natural resource rents or foreign aid), which relieves governments from the need to raise revenue through domestic taxation.<sup>18</sup> This favours the emergence of certain 'political pathologies' (a 'political Dutch disease'), which include, among others: (1) autonomy from citizens and absence of developmental ambitions; (2) weak bureaucratic structures; and (3) vulnerability to political instability and violent conflict (Moore 2004). Fearon and Laitin (2003) adopt this line of reasoning and suggest that resource wealth – in particular oil – causes weak and non-responsive state structures, which in turn increases the probability of civil war.

If 'rentier-state theorists' are right, oil and other resources that generate large and secure government revenue (that is, non-lootable resources) should be robustly associated with the onset of civil war. At first sight, this seems to be the case as many quantitative studies find that oil wealth increases the risk of civil war (De Soysa 2002b; Fearon and Laitin 2003;

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<sup>16</sup> Collier and Hoeffler do not themselves distinguish between lootable and non-lootable resources. Nonetheless, the overall logic of their argument implies that more easily lootable resources are especially welcome objects of rebel predation.

<sup>17</sup> Lujala et al. (2005) find that secondary diamonds are only associated with lower-scale ethnic conflict, while Ross (2006) shows that secondary diamonds are only linked with separatist conflict.

<sup>18</sup> The post-1945 international system has created opportunities for elites in developing countries to 'garner very large economic surpluses (rents) from controlling or managing economic and political relations with the core' (Moore 2004: 305). This contrasts sharply with state formation processes in Europe where a hostile external environment forced state-builders into alliances and bargains with interest groups (cf. Tilly 1990; Moore 1966).

Humphreys 2005; Fearon 2005). Also, Ross (2006) comes to the conclusion that ‘rents from fuel minerals’ (oil, gas, hard coal, lignite) are robustly associated with the onset of civil war, especially when located onshore. On the downside, however, the supporting evidence remains highly fragile. Most importantly, Sambanis (2004a) finds that oil exports are not robust to different civil war models, while Hegre and Sambanis (2006) conclude that oil exports are robustly associated with minor-scale conflict rather than civil war. Smith (2004) even finds that oil wealth is robustly linked with *lower* likelihoods of civil war. Also, there is no robust association between primary diamonds and civil war onset. Whereas Ross (2006) discovers such association, Lujala et al. (2005) come to the opposite conclusion. Finally, the causal mechanisms that may link natural resource rents to state weakness and, even more problematically, state weakness to subsequent conflict remain diffuse and subtle. Accordingly, there is no case study evidence that would support the ‘rentier state-civil war nexus’.

(3) *The ‘separatist incentive’ variant*: A third variant focuses on the relationship between resource wealth and a particular type of civil war, namely secessionist war. Here, Collier and Hoeffler (2005) suggest that natural resource wealth increases the danger of civil war by providing populations in mineral-rich regions with an incentive to form a separate state. Le Billon (2001) refines this argument by suggesting that such separatist incentives exist only when mineral wealth is physically concentrated and requires foreign investment – the reason being that local rebels can attract foreign investment only if recognised as a sovereign state.

There is relatively good empirical support for the ‘resource wealth-separatist conflict nexus’. While Collier and Hoeffler find that oil is significantly linked to secessionist civil wars, Ross (2006) concludes that both ‘fuel onshore rents’ and ‘nonfuel rents’ are correlated with the onset of separatist conflicts. Furthermore, there is case-study evidence linking oil and other minerals to secessionist wars (Ross 2004a & b; Sambanis 2005). For Sub-Saharan Africa, this includes separatist conflicts in the DRC (Katanga), Nigeria (Biafra) and Angola (Cabinda). On the downside, Ross’s (2006) finding that secondary (rather than primary) diamonds are associated with separatist conflict contradicts the above-cited arguments by Le Billon. Also, it is important to recognise that the ‘separatist incentive mechanism’ is of limited relevance in the Sub-Saharan context since there are surprisingly few incidences of separatist conflicts on the continent. The above-cited three cases of secessionist war are therefore the exception rather than the norm in post-colonial Africa.

Altogether, the highly influential ‘resource curse literature’ remains remarkably inconclusive and can therefore hardly resolve my puzzle.<sup>19</sup> This striking inconclusiveness suggests that there is something fundamentally wrong with deterministic models of violent rent seeking. Significantly, almost all contributions fail to answer why natural resource rents are associated with war and collapse in some countries and stability and development in others. Interestingly, the few contributions that try to resolve this puzzle can only do so by taking account of the political processes that govern the extraction and distribution of natural resources rents (Snyder and Bhavnani 2005; Snyder 2006). This draws attention to a fundamental point. Natural resource rents are not damaging *per se* (Khan 2000a), and instability and violent conflict are by no means inevitable (e.g. Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon and Zambia). Instead, it is equally plausible to assume that natural resource rents are used by state leaders to co-opt political opposition through patronage-based networks. What matters most in explaining trajectories of political stability versus civil war is therefore the *political*

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<sup>19</sup> The ‘resource curse hypothesis’ can therefore be considered a ‘paradigm in distress’ (cf. Ron 2005).

use and distribution of natural resource rents. Altogether, the ‘resource curse’ theorists fail to understand that politics is decisive to the trajectory of natural-resource rich countries – ‘the nature of conflicts in mineral-dominant economies does not exist prior to politics’ (DiJohn 2002: 13).

### ***Civil war and political organisation***

*Regime type:* Many scholars assume a link between a country’s regime type and its vulnerability to large-scale violent conflict. In this context, the most common distinction is between ‘democracies’ and ‘autocracies’, typically measured by relying on the well-known Polity data series. Polity IV characterises political regimes along three dimensions: (1) the degree of openness and electoral competitiveness in the recruitment of the chief executive (Executive Recruitment); (2) the degree of institutional constraints on the authority of that chief executive (Executive Constraints); and (3) the degree to which political competition is unrestricted, institutionalised, and cooperative rather than repressed or factionalised (Political Competition) (Marshall et al. 2003; cited by Goldstone et al. 2005: 16). The variables used to measure these dimensions and their components are frequently summarised in a 21-point scale ranging from fully autocratic (-10) to fully democratic (+10).

A first hypothesis suggests a negative linear relationship between the given ‘level of democracy’ and civil war onset, whereby the more democratic a country, the less likely it is to experience large-scale violent conflict. The underlying rationale is that consistent democracies permit the expression of oppositional opinion and thereby facilitate non-violent forms of conflict resolution. However, this hypothesis receives only limited empirical support as most quantitative studies find the ‘level of democracy’ measure to be insignificant (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). With specific respect to Sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, Elbadawi and Sambanis conclude that ‘Africa’s pronounced failure to develop strong democratic institutions has (...) significantly increased the risk of political violence on the continent’ (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000: 253). A second hypothesis holds that civil war risks are highest not among democracies or autocracies, but in the intermediate regions of the Polity scale, among regimes that are labelled as ‘anocracies’, ‘partial democracies’ or ‘semi-democracies’. The underlying rationale is that full democracies avoid internal conflict by permitting political opposition, while harshly authoritarian regimes are able to suppress violent uprisings. Anocracies, by contrast, neither permit the expression of oppositional opinion nor are they in a position to suppress dissidents effectively – a situation that makes them especially prone to civil war. This hypothesis receives relatively strong empirical support in the civil war literature as many studies do indeed find a significant association between ‘anocracies’ and ‘civil war onset’ (Hegre et al. 2001; Elbadawi and Sambanis 2002; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). However, evidence on the robustness of this association is contradictory. While the anocracy measure is not robust to different civil war models for the period between 1960 and 1993, it becomes more robust for the period from 1945 to 1999 (Sambanis 2004a).

An interesting variant of this argument has recently been presented by the ‘Political Instability Task Force’ (formerly know as the ‘State Failure Task Force’) (Goldstone et al. 2005).<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> It has to be emphasised that Goldstone et al’s results suffer from limited comparability with other findings in the civil war literature since they focus on a broad range of ‘political instability events’. The latter include four types of severe political crises, namely Revolutionary Wars, Ethnic Wars, Adverse Regime Changes, and Genocides and Politicides. While ‘Revolutionary Wars’ and ‘Ethnic Wars’ are defined by (civil war-like) large-scale violent conflict (1,000 battle-related deaths), the other two categories (in particular ‘Adverse Regime Changes’) involve different kinds of political crisis.

Task Force relies on two component variables of the Polity scale – ‘executive recruitment’ and ‘competitiveness of political participation’<sup>21</sup> – that are used to distinguish between; (1) full autocracies; (2) full democracies; (3) partial democracies; and (4) partial autocracies. The statistical analysis shows that the risk of instability is lowest in full autocracies and full democracies, while hybrid regimes – partial autocracies and partial democracies – are substantially more prone to crisis. Beyond this now-familiar result, the predictive power can be significantly increased by further distinguishing among partial democracies according to the presence or absence of ‘factionalism’.<sup>22</sup> The worst situation in terms of risks of instability is a political landscape that combines factionalism with a relatively high level of open competition for office (that is, a partial democracy with factionalism). These results also hold true for Sub-Saharan Africa. Significantly, ‘every African country that mixed partial democracy with factionalism suffered instability’ (Goldstone et al 2005: 27).

Altogether, there seems to be relatively strong empirical support for the hypothesised link between a country’s regime type and its vulnerability to large-scale violent conflict. Nevertheless, I argue that the argument remains insufficient for at least two reasons. First, there is reason to believe that the ‘anocracy measure’ may be (at least partially) endogenous to civil war. According to Sambanis, ‘Polity IV coders sometimes code the democracy and autocracy variables, the difference of which is *polity2*, as missing when a war is ongoing, and missing values of *polity2* are then either interpolated or coded as ‘0’. This makes it likely for a country at war to be coded as an anocracy’ (Sambanis 2004b: 178). Serious endogeneity concerns exist also with respect to the measure for the ‘competitiveness of political participation’ (*parcomp*) as used by Goldstone et al (Hegre and Sambanis 2006: 527). Second, and more importantly, the ‘regime type-civil war argument’ rests on rather superficial measures. A country may be coded as democratic on the basis of the ‘Polity criteria’, while majorities actively discriminate against minorities. Democracy is therefore not always equivalent to inclusiveness. Conversely, countries coded as autocratic or anocratic are not necessarily entirely exclusionary. All this does not mean that differences in political organisation are irrelevant. But it underlines the need to ‘look beyond the blanket measures of democracy currently used in quantitative studies’ (Sambanis 2005: 313). One option in this context would be to study how different electoral systems and constitutional arrangements influence the risk of civil war. A second, arguably more promising option would be look entirely beyond formal regime type and study the *actual* inclusiveness of political organisation.

*Neo-patrimonial rule:* A final influential argument relates the onset of violent conflict to the ‘neo-patrimonial character of the African state’. This concept is derived from one of Max Weber’s historical types of rule – patrimonial domination. While ‘the patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the ‘private’ and ‘official’ sphere (...) and political administration, too, is treated as a purely personal affair’ (Weber 1978: 1028f.), neo-patrimonialism involves the co-existence of patrimonial and legal-rational domination. Neo-patrimonial rule is therefore:

a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on

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<sup>21</sup> As measured by Polity, the competitiveness of participation refers to the extent to which alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena.

<sup>22</sup> As measured by Polity, factionalism occurs when political competition is dominated by ethnic or other parochial groups that regularly compete for political influence in order to promote particularist agendas and favour group members to the detriment of common, secular or cross-cutting agendas.

rational-legal lines. Officials hold positions in bureaucratic organisations with powers which are formally defined, but exercise those powers, so far as they can, as a form not of public service but of private property. (Clapham 1985: 48)

Such forms of political rule are regularly identified as a quasi-universal feature of African politics making neo-patrimonialism the principal concept in Africanist political science.<sup>23</sup>

It is often suggested that neo-patrimonial rule favours economic mismanagement and is therefore generally prone to crisis, in particular if combined with a deteriorating external environment (e.g. structural adjustment or decline in foreign aid after the Cold War). Most prominently, Chabal and Daloz portray African states as both ‘vacuous and ineffectual’ shells that were never properly institutionalised and function through a ‘political instrumentalisation of disorder’. As internal and external resources to lubricate the neo-patrimonial system decline, ‘there is inevitably a tendency to link politics to realms of increased disorder, be it war or crime’ (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 162). In a similar vein, Bayart et al. (1999) suggest the emergence of a ‘new form of la politique du ventre’ whereby the combined effects of economic crisis, neo-liberal structural adjustment and globalisation favour the implosion and ‘criminalisation of the state in Africa’.

More nuanced versions of the neo-patrimonial argument have been advanced by William Reno and Chris Allen. Reno (1998) seeks to explain the ‘distinct political logic of weak states’ (case studies include Sierra Leone, Liberia, DRC and Nigeria) that he distinguishes from ‘stronger bureaucratic states’ (he mentions Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire and Kenya). He claims that the end of the Cold War and the imposition of economic and political liberalisation policies led to the disruption of state-based patronage politics and made conventional state-building strategies highly dangerous for ‘weak states’ rulers’. The latter were accommodated by setting up a violent ‘shadow state’, whereby they intentionally weakened or even destroyed state institutions in order to retain control over markets and discipline rivals.

Allen (1995), on the other hand, distinguishes between two types of neo-patrimonial politics in Africa. Faced with the instability of clientelism after decolonisation, some countries reformed the political system and installed ‘centralised-bureaucratic politics’ whereby clientelist resources were distributed through a bureaucracy directly answerable to the president (e.g. Senegal, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi). Others failed to resolve the incipient ‘clientelist crisis’ and continued to rely on ‘spoils politics’, characterised by ‘winner-takes all’ clientelism, pervasive corruption, economic crisis, lack of political mediation and violent repression (e.g. Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia, Uganda and Ghana). Allen considers these differences in ‘neo-patrimonial politics’ as the key driving forces behind differences in political stability across the continent.

‘Neo-patrimonialists’ are right to focus on the informal political organisation of the African state. Unfortunately, however, most of them remain highly unspecific about why some neo-patrimonial states experience war and collapse, while others manage to maintain stability. If neo-patrimonial rule is a quasi-universal feature of African politics, why have some neo-patrimonial states managed to hold together? Also, ‘neo-patrimonialists’ fail to recognise that rent seeking along patron-client ties is common to all developing countries and can have both positive and negative effects depending on the ‘configuration of political forces’ (Khan

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<sup>23</sup> Influential ‘neo-patrimonialists’ include Médard (1982); Clapham (1985), Bayart (1989); Van de Walle (2001). Cf. Erdmann and Engel (2006) for a literature review.

2000a: 39). Seen from this perspective, general concepts of ‘disorder as a political instrument’ or ‘the criminalisation of the state in Africa’ explain little, if anything. In this simplistic version, neo-patrimonialism remains little more than an undifferentiated ‘catch-all variable’: ‘[I]n seeking to explain everything, the concept explains nothing except perhaps that capitalist relations in their idealised form are not pervasive in Africa’ (Mkandawire 2001: 299).

But even the more differentiated versions of the neo-patrimonial argument ultimately fall short of resolving the puzzle. Reno traces why some African states have civil war and collapse, but largely avoids the question of why others have not. While he briefly distinguishes between ‘weak’ and ‘stronger bureaucratic’ states, he remains vague about what exactly makes a state ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ and how the allegedly stronger states manage to accommodate the external shocks imposed by economic and political liberalisation policies. Similarly, Allen’s argument is only partially convincing. Even if one abstracts from the fact that his hypothesis lacks grounding in systematic case-study evidence and that some of the ‘centralised-bureaucratic’ countries he mentions have indeed experienced violent conflict (e.g. Senegal or Côte d’Ivoire), it does not become clear why and how more centralised clientelist systems are able to avoid violent disintegration. This is not to deny that hierarchical and firmly rooted organisational structures may be important for maintaining political unity. But it seems equally, if not more plausible to focus on the inclusiveness of the clientelist system. What matters most in the end is not *how* patronage is distributed but to *whom*.<sup>24</sup>

### **An alternative approach: Inclusive elite bargains matter**

The above literature review shows that all five influential ‘schools of thought’ fall short of resolving my puzzle. The reason for this remarkable inconclusiveness may well be that:

‘any explanation of war must acknowledge the diversity of violent conflict: the diversity of its causes and motivations and the diversity of its conduct and organisation. *Perhaps there can be no theory of war*’. (Cramer 2006: 135, emphasis added)

While Christopher Cramer’s scepticism *vis-à-vis* the existence of ‘clear event regularities’ is certainly justified, I still consider further theory development to be both worthwhile and possible. In this respect, I find it especially striking that the five influential theoretical ‘schools of thought’ in the civil war literature have so far paid highly insufficient attention to differences in the inclusiveness of political organisation:

- (1) Arguments focused on ethnic diversity have largely ignored the fact that the salience of ethnic cleavages are always contingent on inclusive versus exclusionary political organisation;
- (2) Arguments focused on economic performance have neglected the possibility that poor economic performance can be accommodated by means of inclusive approaches to political organisation and crisis management;
- (3) Arguments focused on ‘vertical’ inequality have failed to pay attention to the discriminatory relationships between social groups. While arguments focused on ‘horizontal inequality’ remedy this shortcoming, they have so far neglected inequalities at the ‘elite level’ that are arguably more important;
- (4) Arguments focused on natural resource scarcity /abundance have largely failed to understand that the political distribution of natural resources (rather than their

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<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, Allen (1995: 307) briefly touches upon this point when he states that, as part of ‘spoils politics’, the dominant political faction tends to deny access to resources to all other factions.



existence *per se*) is decisive to the trajectory of natural-resource scarce or rich countries;

- (5) Arguments focused on regime type have so far privileged relatively superficial measures of democracy, thereby neglecting the actual inclusiveness of political organisation. Neo-patrimonial arguments, by contrast, rightly focus on the informal forms of political organisation, but remain largely unspecific about differences in the inclusiveness of clientelist systems.

In light of these shortcomings, I develop an alternative approach to the study of civil war. My basic argument is that the civil war literature has so far paid insufficient attention to differences in the *inclusiveness of elite politics*. I hypothesise that the post-colonial trajectories of civil war versus political stability across Sub-Saharan Africa are largely determined by the varying ability of ruling political parties to overcome the specific historical legacy of high social fragmentation by forging and maintaining ‘inclusive elite bargains’.

In order to develop my argument, I will first establish that colonial rule left Sub-Saharan Africa with a legacy of high social fragmentation. Then I will go on to argue that African leaders responded to this challenge in distinct ways, namely by forging ‘inclusive’ versus ‘exclusionary’ elite bargains. In a third step, I will hypothesise that ‘exclusionary’ elite bargains give rise to trajectories of civil war, whereas ‘inclusive’ elite bargains permit the maintenance of political stability.

### ***Colonial rule and the legacy of high social fragmentation***

Pre-colonial Africa evolved a large variety of traditional political structures (Sandbrook 1985: 42ff; Clapham 1996: 29ff). Most of the continent was dominated by stateless societies, usually composed of small, autonomous communities of cultivators or pastoralists organised at the village or kin-group level. Where state-like political systems existed, they usually consisted in a core whose control over the peripheries fluctuated depending on internal stability and military strength. Politics was more about the control of people than of territory and functioned through the personalised hierarchies of chiefly power. In this context, the advent of colonial rule represented an important, albeit partial, break with the past.

The break with the pre-colonial past was important in that:

previously fuzzy borderlands between indigenous centres of government, together with the large areas which possessed no formalised government structures at all, were replaced (...) by precisely demarcated frontiers of the sort that European concepts of statehood deemed to be necessary. (Clapham 1996: 31)

As these frontiers were rarely guided by any concern for the identity of the indigenous societies, African colonies usually came to contain ‘several traditional societies, each of which valued its own political traditions, myths and symbols’ (Sandbrook 1985: 45). Beyond this ‘lumping together’ of heterogeneous groups in common territories, colonially imposed modernisation also involved the diversification of the pre-existing social identities whereby ethnic and regional cleavages were supplemented by occupational or class groupings.

However, the break with the pre-colonial past was only partial in that political and economic transformation in colonial Africa remained incomplete. Colonial rule destroyed the pre-colonial modes of production but established a new pre-capitalist mode based on independent peasant production (Phillips 1989: 3). This ‘anti-capitalist bias’ arose out of a fundamental

contradiction between the quest for colonial exploitation and the need for political stability (Berman 1984; Phillips 1989; Boone 1994). As early attempts for transformation had met local resistance, colonialism refrained from imposing full-scale capitalist development for fear of revolt and disorder. Instead, the colonial powers spent little energy and few resources on the creation of modern state infrastructure and ruled 'indirectly' through alliances with local chiefs.<sup>25</sup> While 'indirect rule' helped to contain destabilising class formation, it also allowed traditional authorities to consolidate their power and further sharpened ethno-regional cleavages. As 'native' authorities were preserved, strengthened or even entirely 'invented' (Ranger 1983), the colonialists' assumption that Africans lived in tribes became a self-fulfilling perception. The result was a 'bifurcated' colonial state inhabited by 'citizens and subjects' and deeply anchored in the 'decentralised despotism' of the local state (Mamdani 1996).

This 'indirect rule state' produced very high degrees of social fragmentation across African colonies, not least when compared to their counterparts in Asia or Latin America (Kohli 2004). This is not to deny that a few territories were less fragmented in that they were largely congruent with pre-existing political systems and identities (e.g. Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland).<sup>26</sup> Also, territories varied considerably in the level of urbanisation, the extent of labour migration or the size of the educated elite. These differences notwithstanding, the great majority of African colonies displayed similarly high degrees of fragmentation. The main source of social fragmentation was ethnic or regional cleavages. Accordingly, African territories were typically characterised by the existence of a large number of competing ethno-regional constituencies. Even though 'functional' cleavages around economic (class) interests played a rather minor role, the situation was nonetheless further complicated by the progressive development of occupational groupings (e.g. businessmen, clerks, teachers or students) and local producer classes (e.g. labour migrants). Altogether, colonialism gave rise to what Bayart has termed a 'hegemonic crisis', that is, an intensified struggle for hegemony by manifold social constituencies (Bayart 1989).

High social fragmentation had far-reaching implications for the process of state formation across Sub-Saharan Africa. Fragmentation involves a 'system of multiple veto players' and 'institutionalised suspicion' – a situation that makes the across-group production of collective goods rather unlikely (Bardhan 2001: 258). Rulers that manage to establish political control may be unable or unwilling to share access to state structures and state resources as this could help potential opponents to gain leverage or create competing power centres. This dilemma has led Joel Migdal (1988) to conclude that fragmented 'social control' inevitably gives rise to weak post-colonial states and the destabilising 'politics of survival'. Similarly, Khan and Gray (2006) argue that the high fragmentation tends to favour unproductive and destabilising forms of rent deployment and makes the emergence of developmental states unlikely.<sup>27</sup> While fragmentation certainly represents an important problem, I argue – against Migdal who treats state-society relations as a 'zero-sum game' – that it is highly contingent on subsequent political organisation. The real question is therefore whether or not high social fragmentation

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<sup>25</sup> 'Indirect rule' is arguably the dominant pattern of African colonialism. While forms of colonial rule ranged from French 'direct rule' to British 'indirect rule' and Belgium 'quasi-indirect rule' (Coleman 1975), these typologies tend to be overdrawn. French 'direct rule', for instance, often had little alternative than to govern through local chiefs. Also, there is evidence that patterns of colonial (and post-colonial) rule across and even within countries reflected local power structures rather than consistent colonial ideology (Boone 2004).

<sup>26</sup> For differences in social fragmentation and 'state legitimacy' across Africa, see Englebert (2000).

<sup>27</sup> Most African states are very different from some of the East Asian countries (e.g. South Korea) and represent extreme versions of India's 'fragmented clientelism' (cf. Khan 2000b).

was successfully accommodated by forging and maintaining stable forms of political organisation.

***The challenge of political organisation: Inclusive vs. exclusionary elite bargains***

Overcoming the historical legacy of social fragmentation in Africa was (and often still is) a formidable challenge. From a political science perspective, *political organisation* is the key to overcoming fragmentation. Political organisation can be defined as ‘an arrangement for maintaining order, resolving disputes, selecting authoritative leaders, and thus promoting two or more social forces’ (Huntington 1968: 8f.). While political organisation is crucial in every society, it is even more important in particularly fragmented societies:

The more complex and heterogeneous the society, the more the achievement and maintenance of political stability becomes dependent upon the working of political organisation. (Huntington 1968: 9)

As a consequence, African leaders had to find ways to create political organisations capable of integrating the multitude of social constituencies, consolidating the state structures and fostering economic development.

The challenge of building political organisation was first seriously taken up by the African nationalist movements from the mid-1940s onwards. However, this happened under rather unfavourable political circumstances. Within many of the nationalist movements there developed a division between a ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’ wing (Allen 1995: 303). While the conservative elites were prepared to cooperate with the colonial authorities in exchange for a gradual transfer of power, the radical elites argued in favour of a more rapid decolonisation and were prepared to follow more militant nationalist strategies. Significantly, the colonial powers responded by suppressing the radicals and offering a more rapid transfer of power to conservative groups. As a result, decolonisation was now to occur within years (not decades) and to be achieved through a series of elections that would allow African governments to be endowed with increasingly extensive powers. This required competing national movements to mobilise huge electorates in a very short time.

This national mobilisation was mostly (but not always) undertaken through the creation of political parties. Political parties are – at a general level – key structures of political organisation in that they structure participation, aggregate interests and serve as a link between social forces and the government. In the context of the newly emerging African states, their creation was of particular importance. Whereas European parties had developed within well-established state frameworks, in Africa they constituted ‘a premise for the formation of national structures, they are to a great extent originators of these structures’ (Chodak 1964, cited by Randall 2001: 254):

[I]nstead of the party reflecting the state, the state becomes the creation of the party and the instrument of the party’ – the party becomes the veritable ‘institutional embodiment of national sovereignty. (Huntington 1968: 91)

This means that the formation and consolidation of the African state came to depend directly on the working of the dominant political party in the pre- and post-independence period.

In order to recruit and maintain support, all political parties that first managed to gain control of state structures started to rely heavily on the use of patronage politics. This means that they

sought to build political coalitions by providing existing social constituencies – and in particular their elite representatives – with access to public resources along neo-patrimonial channels.<sup>28</sup> But they did so, and here I depart from the conventional ‘neo-patrimonial argument’, in significantly different ways. These differences can be summarised in two ideal types of neo-patrimonial organisation that describe the extent to which political parties manage to accommodate the fundamental cleavages in society.<sup>29</sup> In a first group of countries, the dominant political party managed to build and maintain a broad coalition of key elites by providing inclusive access to state patronage. Such broad political coalitions are henceforth labelled ‘inclusive elite bargains’. The latter successfully accommodate social fragmentation and correspond to what many Africanist political scientists have called the ‘fusion of elites’ (Bayart 1981; Lonsdale 1981; Boone 1994).<sup>30</sup> But this ‘fusion of elites’ is by no means a quasi-universal feature of African politics as suggested by the above-cited scholars. Instead, I argue that there is a second group of countries where political parties established only narrow coalitions of elites by providing exclusionary access to state patronage. Such narrow political coalitions are henceforth termed ‘exclusionary elite bargains’. They privilege certain social constituencies at the expense of others and therefore fail to accommodate the legacy of social fragmentation.

The forging of inclusive versus exclusionary elite bargains via the distribution of state patronage took (and still takes) many different forms, not least depending on local circumstances. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify surprisingly similar patterns across African states. In what follows, I will broadly distinguish between the distribution of access to: (1) state structures (jobs); and (2) state resources (rents). Access to jobs and rents does, of course, overlap as material accumulation is closely entwined with the holding of political office.

### *Access to state structures (jobs)*

The allocation of public office determines the means that different elites have to influence what happens at the level of the state (including rent deployment) and is therefore an important instrument for the building of political coalitions. The inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of public office typically happens along the following lines:

- a) **Distribution of government jobs:** Representation in a country’s main political institutions is of utmost importance for elites and their constituencies as it provides them with political recognition, a ‘say’ in political decision-making and immediate access to economic resources. A first key indicator for the inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of government jobs is the *social composition of the cabinet*, measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of cabinet posts. A second, more refined indicator in this respect can be *social composition of the ‘inner circle of political power’* (Langer 2004: 23), measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of key political positions (e.g. president, prime minister, president of

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<sup>28</sup> Political coalitions can be defined ‘as alliances among social actors and groups. They provide the organisational framework for delineating who sides with whom, against whom, and over what’ (Yashar 1997, cited by CSRC 2006).

<sup>29</sup> In Europe, party systems helped to express and ‘freeze’ social cleavages – e.g. centre-periphery, church-state, land-industry or capitalists-workers – and thereby contributed to the formation of stable states (cf. Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In Africa, by contrast, party systems must express and accommodate different social cleavages that are mainly (but not only) of ethnic and regional nature.

<sup>30</sup> Note that elites are not really ‘fused’ but rather co-opted. I therefore prefer the notion of elite ‘bargain’ (cf. Putzel 2007; DiJohn 2008).

parliament, key ministers). A third possible indicator can be the *social composition of parliament*, measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of parliamentary seats. A final indicator can be the *social composition of the ruling party*, measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of posts in the top party organ.

- b) **Distribution of jobs in the parastatal sector:** Control over (parts of) the parastatal sector is of strategic interest to competing elites and their constituencies as state-owned enterprises are among the most lucrative public institutions in the patronage-based political systems of Sub-Saharan Africa (Tangri 1999). A useful indicator for the inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of jobs in the parastatal sector is the *manning of key state-owned enterprises* (with specific focus on agricultural and mineral parastatals), measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of employment at the top management level. Furthermore, one has to take into account that the parastatal sector has come under pressure since the early 1980s with international donors calling on African governments to privatise their state-owned enterprises. While privatisation programmes have made progress since the 1990s, they have opened new opportunities for the inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of employment. A possible indicator in this respect can be the *manning of key privatised enterprises*, measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of jobs at the top management level.
- c) **Distribution of jobs in the national army:** Representation in a country's armed forces is of great importance to social groups and their elite representatives as it deeply affects their feeling of security and opens many avenues for economic accumulation. A key indicator for the inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of jobs in the national army is the *social composition of the military leadership*, measured by the ethnic and/or regional distribution of jobs at the higher command level.

#### *Access to state resources (rents)*

The distribution of rents determines which elites enjoy access to the existing sources of wealth in a country and therefore constitutes a key tool in forging political coalitions. The inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of rents typically proceeds along the following lines:

- a) **Distribution of commercial rents:** African countries are typically characterised by 'politicised accumulation' that takes the form of manifold rentier activities in the commercial sector. By regulating and monopolising major trading circuits, governments create different 'commercial rents' that are used as 'renewable reservoirs of potential patronage resources' (Boone 1990: 27). A first key indicator for the inclusive versus exclusionary distribution of these commercial rents is the *allocation of natural resource rents* that are derived from state control over agricultural and/or mineral commodities exports. While rent allocation is generally difficult to establish,<sup>31</sup> a possible (albeit imperfect) measure could be 'per-capita budget allocations between regions' as resource rents tend to make up the bulk of national budgets. A second indicator can be the *allocation of import licenses*, measured by the ethnic distribution of import licences in the wholesale/ semi-wholesale trade.

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<sup>31</sup> Rent allocation is difficult to trace because resource rents are either incorporated into the national budget (which makes their ultimate allocation hard to establish) or are redistributed along informal, largely indiscernible channels ('off-budget transfers').

- b) **Distribution of land rights:** Contrary to the often-heard assumption that African land-tenure relations are ‘traditional’ not involving the modern state (Herbst 2000: 186ff), land rights have always been a key patronage asset at the core of the relationship between the post-colonial state and rural elites. More recently, the salience of land as a source of patronage has even increased as it remains – not least in sharp contrast to other patronage assets – relatively unencumbered by international conditionalities (Klopp 2000; Boone 2007). A key measure for the inclusive versus exclusionary handling of land-tenure relations can be the *allocation of land rights between ethnic and/ or regional groups*. Inclusive political coalitions are generally more likely where the state chooses to uphold communal land-tenure relations, whereas the challenging of communal rights offers opportunities for more selective, potentially exclusionary forms of rent deployment.

Altogether, I argue that there are two distinct ideal types of neo-patrimonial organisation across Sub-Saharan Africa, namely *inclusive* versus *exclusionary* elite bargains:

- **Inclusive elite bargains** involve a ruling party that integrates a *broad coalition of key elites* by defining inclusive access to state structures (jobs in government, parastatals and the army) and state resources (commercial rents, land).
- **Exclusionary elite bargains** involves a ruling party that establishes a *narrow coalition of elites* by defining exclusionary access to state structures (jobs in government, parastatals and the army) and state resources (commercial rents, land).

### *Civil war or political stability?*

#### *The consequences of inclusive vs. exclusionary elite bargains*

How do inclusive versus exclusionary elite bargains relate to the onset versus avoidance of civil war? In what follows, I hypothesise that differences in the inclusiveness of elite bargains give rise to distinct trajectories of civil war versus political stability.

#### *Trajectories of civil war: The negative consequences of exclusionary elite bargains*

Exclusionary elite bargains will foster antagonism and violent conflict. As the ruling party establishes a narrow political coalition where certain ethno-regional elites enjoy disproportionate or even exclusive access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents), this will alienate the excluded leaders who have an incentive to mobilise protest against the state. This is especially the case as the excluded elite representatives become unable to redistribute among their ethno-regional constituencies – a situation that will eventually endanger their own legitimacy. Under certain conditions, exclusionary elite bargains are likely to escalate into violent rebellion and civil war. First, the exclusion of certain ethno-regional elites needs to be maintained over time. Second, the exclusion of certain leaders has to be consistent across categories, that is, the affected groups and their elite representatives must be systematically denied access to most (or even all) state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents). Third, it is obvious that the importance of the alienated elites matters. Where excluded leaders represent numerically small constituencies, their potential to cause large-scale rebellion remains limited, even when they suffer enduring discrimination. Altogether, I hypothesise that the persistent and systematic exclusion of key elites from ‘rent-sharing’ arrangements will produce large-scale violent conflict. Seen from this perspective,

the onset of civil war must be understood as resulting from the failure to build inclusive political coalitions.

One may further object that strong states may be able to bolster their narrow and exclusionary power base by means of military repression and thereby prevent, reduce or eliminate violent rebellion. While state repression may indeed ensure short-term stability, the medium- and long-term ability to enforce security by military force is, however, seriously constrained by the fact that exclusionary political organisation favours the emergence of severe economic and fiscal crisis. Since the narrow political coalition has only a limited stake in society, it lacks an ‘encompassing interest’ and resembles Olson’s roving bandit who prefers predation and consumption over public good provision and productive investment (Olson 1993). As the ruling elites continue to extract increasingly large shares of a shrinking resource pie, their already narrow power base is further undermined by progressive fiscal breakdown. Under these circumstances, it will eventually become very difficult to finance military repression and the looming ethno-regional antagonism – that is due to the maintenance of exclusionary elite bargains and not to economic crisis *per se* – will escalate into violence and civil war.

### ***Trajectories of political stability: The positive consequences of inclusive elite bargains***

Inclusive elite bargains, by contrast, will foster ethno-regional cohesion and political stability. As all key elites are co-opted into the ruling party by providing inclusive access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents), there are only limited inter-elite inequalities and hence no immediate incentive to mobilise opposition or even rebellion against the state. While ‘inclusive’ rent-sharing policies will ‘buy off’ the support of key elites, the latter will (at least to a certain extent) in turn redistribute among their respective groups and secure the allegiance of the wider population. As a consequence, African states with inclusive elite bargains will enjoy relatively secure and stable hegemony as a collective system. Seen from this perspective, the maintenance of political stability over time must be understood as resulting from the ability to build and maintain inclusive political coalitions.

Admittedly, the maintenance of broad political coalitions is a difficult undertaking as even inclusive elite bargains are prone to economic crisis. On the one hand, as the broad-based ruling party has a large stake in society, one may expect that it develops an ‘encompassing interest’ and assumes the role of Olson’s stationary bandit who engages in public good provision and the promotion of (at least more) productive economic activities. On the other hand, however, the party will remain ‘constrained’ by the unproductive imperatives of building and maintaining political organisation and stability (Khan and Gray 2006). Inclusive rent-sharing policies follow a logic of politics, not of economic efficiency – redistributive consumption dominates productive investment. As a consequence, economic development will be slow and volatile and is likely to involve recurrent phases of economic stagnation and fiscal crisis. While economic crisis may put severe pressure on the viability of broad-based coalitions (as there is less to share), it is – contrary to the simplistic ‘neo-patrimonial argument’ – by no means sufficient to trigger violent conflict. Instead, political stability will be maintained as long as the ruling party follows an inclusive approach to crisis management and manages to prevent the emergence of exclusionary elite bargains.

### **Conclusion**

Sub-Saharan Africa combines all major risk factors commonly associated with the onset of civil war. Accordingly, it is the world’s most conflict-intensive region, with 24 out of 48 countries having experienced civil war over the past 50 years. Yet at the same time, half of its

crisis-ridden states have managed to maintain political stability despite the odds. Trying to resolve this puzzle, I have first reviewed the five most influential theoretical approaches in the civil war literature and found that they ultimately all fall short of explaining the observed differences in political stability. In the light of these shortcomings, I have then developed an alternative approach to the study of civil war. My basic argument is that the literature has so far paid insufficient attention to differences in the *inclusiveness of elite politics*. I hypothesise that the post-colonial trajectories of civil war versus political stability across Sub-Saharan Africa are largely determined by the varying ability of ruling political parties to overcome the specific historical legacy of high social fragmentation by forging and maintaining ‘inclusive elite bargains’. While ‘inclusive elite bargains’ permit the maintenance of political stability, ‘exclusionary elite bargains’ give rise to trajectories of civil war.

In order to explore the plausibility of my argument, I suggest engaging in the ‘structured, focused comparison’ of a small number of case studies (George and Bennett 2005). Why small-n comparison rather than large-N analysis? I argue that large-N comparison is neither possible nor desirable at this stage. It is not possible because there is simply no suitable large-N data on the inclusiveness of elite politics across Sub-Saharan Africa. Such data needs to be carefully collected on a case-by-case basis for each of the different dimensions spelled out in my research framework and will therefore not be available for large-N samples in the short- and medium term. But further large-N analysis is arguably also not desirable. As shown above, the quantitative civil war literature remains remarkably inconclusive due to both competing definitions of civil war and superficial explanatory models that cannot meaningfully capture the complexity of violent conflict. It may therefore be time to shift the research agenda towards a ‘more pared down but detailed sets of comparisons and contrasts’ (Cramer 2006: 136). Such ‘pared down but detailed sets of comparisons’ would also add to the preexisting qualitative civil war literature, which has so far been dominated by edited volumes lacking a common research framework (e.g. Ali and Matthews 2000).

With respect to case selection, I suggest to select cases to ensure maximum variation in the dependent variable; that is, to compare and contrast cases of civil war onset with cases of civil war avoidance. Selecting cases on the dependent variable is now regarded as a legitimate alternative to case selection on the independent variable as long as sufficient variation in the values of the dependent variable is ensured (Ragin 2004; George and Bennett 2005). The case for selection on the dependent variable is reinforced by the fact that one cannot legitimately pretend to ignore the values of the dependent variable (Collier et al. 2005).



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The Crisis States Research Centre aims to examine and provide an understanding of processes of war, state collapse and reconstruction in fragile states and to assess the long-term impact of international interventions in these processes. Through rigorous comparative analysis of a carefully selected set of states and of cities, and sustained analysis of global and regional axes of conflict, we aim to understand why some fragile states collapse while others do not, and the ways in which war affects future possibilities of state building. The lessons learned from past experiences of state reconstruction will be distilled to inform current policy thinking and planning.

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