

GV101 Week 21: Politics in Ethnically Divided Societies

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Office Hours (by appointment via the [Student Hub](#)):

Thursdays, 09:30 – 10:30, CBG.4.13

Thursdays, 14:30 – 15:30, CBG.4.13

Country Questions:

- What are the main ethnic groups in your adopted country, and what proportions of the population do they each constitute?
- How would you characterise the level of ethnic harmony or division in your adopted country?
- If there is ethnic division in your adopted country, how would you suggest mitigating or overcoming it?

Class Questions:

1. Posner argues that the political salience of the Chewa and Tumbuka ethnic identities varies between Malawi and Zambia due to the respective size of the groups relative to the general population. How convinced are you by this argument, and do you think it constitutes a full explanation? If not, what other factors do you think might be at play?
 - a) In light of the above argument, Posner dismisses the following explanations for the variation in the salience of ethnicity in different contexts: degree of cultural difference, nature of the difference, the stage of historical development of the country, and the colonial reification of certain differences. Do you think that any of these explanations are still useful? Why, or why not?
2. Posner notes that the origin of the difference between the political salience of Chewa and Tumbuka identity in Malawi and Zambia may be 'a small group of missionary-educated intellectuals [in Malawi] who, in cooperation with their missionary teachers, sought to unify the northern tribes under a common ethnic banner to increase their political leverage with the colonial administration.' This explanation is dismissed on the basis that it may have heightened awareness of group differences but does not necessarily explain why such divides became politically salient. Do you agree that this renders the explanation less relevant? Why?
 - a) Related to the above, Posner suggests that political entrepreneurs are restricted in their choice of ethnic divides to emphasise by the size of various groups. Do you think this observation is more generally applicable, for instance in relation to debates around immigration in Europe and the United States?
3. Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein note that the root of the difficulty of providing public goods in ethnically diverse societies may be differing preferences, 'technologies' (e.g. shared languages, experiences, and understandings), or 'strategic selections' (i.e. norms) between groups. Which of these did you initially find most convincing? Are you, therefore, surprised by the findings of the paper? Why?
 - a) The authors also differentiate between 'egoists' and 'non-egoists', finding that egoists are least likely to co-operate in games unless they are playing with others from the same (perceived) ethnic group, in which case they are more likely than non-egoists to co-operate. What is your normative view of these findings?
 - b) How might the Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein paper be related to the Posner paper in terms of the possible salience of the ethnic groups focused on in Kampala? What implications might this have for the findings of Habyarimana et al.?

4. What are the different games that Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein use to test the competing explanations for whether public goods are provided?
 - a) Do you find those games to be plausible tests of the real-world phenomena that they are considering? How generalizable do you think their findings are?

Further Reading Questions:

5. Chandra suggests a definition of ethnic identity as a sub-set of identity categories with descent-based attributes that are acquired, or believed to be acquired, genetically, through cultural and historical inheritance, or in the form of inherited markers. Such attributes create categories that are impersonal (imagined communities), constitute a section of the population (not the whole), encompass siblings, and require members to possess features transmitted genetically or via the language, religion, place of origin, tribe, region, caste, clan, nationality, or race of one's parents and ancestors. How useful is this definition?
 - a) Chandra dismisses common ancestry, a myth of common ancestry, a myth of a common place of origin, and a descent rule for membership as bases for the role of descent in defining ethnic identity. Further, common culture or language, common history, and conceptual autonomy are also dismissed as components of ethnic identity. On what bases are these dismissals made?
 - b) How does Chandra argue descent-based attributes are related to non-descent-based attributes in terms of 'stickiness' and 'visibility'?
 - c) Finally, Chandra argues that 'if we cannot identify any further properties that are unique to ethnic identity, we would be better off substituting the concept of ethnic identity in our theories with concepts such as descent-based identities or identities based on sticky or visible attributes'. Do you agree? Why?
6. Ferree finds that, in South Africa, strong racial identities are least common amongst African and white survey respondents, ruling out expressive reasons for observed voting differences. Further, notable policy preference differences between racial groups are not observed, indicating that these are not the basis for their differing voting patterns. It is, thus, views of government competence and the inclusivity of parties (taken as a racial heuristic) that are found to account for voting differences. Do these findings surprise you? Why?
 - a) Ferree also argues that the results 'suggest that negative performance evaluations and inclusive opposition credentials loosen African voters from the ruling party yet on their own probably do not push them all the way into the arms of the opposition. They should therefore be viewed as *necessary* conditions to cross-over voting, but not *sufficient* ones.' What do you think might be sufficient conditions?

Essential and Further Readings for Next Week:

- None; next week is will focus on revision, so look out for a survey to identify the topics that you want to consider.