Starting Off on the Wrong Foot

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Elite Influences in Multi-Ethnic Democratization Settings

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Abstract

Elite manipulation theories, particularly the idea of diversionary war, have played a substantial role in the analysis of ethnic civil wars. Some, as Gagnon (2004), argue that political elites have shaped the perceptions of their population to create the illusion of a threatening outside world. This, driven to the extreme, would then give rise to an ethnic security dilemma and potentially, civil war. Even if violence does not break out, divisive elite manipulation increases the likelihood of self-perpetuating injustices between members of ethnic groups. Snyder (2000) argues that democratizing multi-ethnic states face an extraordinarily high risk of such conflict.

During and shortly after democratization processes, when political leaders are most in need of popular backing, the temptation to seek the support of a fairly well defined ethnic group rather than that of the multi-ethnic demos that existed so far may be strong. Especially if group identities have been reified through institutionalization – as is frequently the case in multi-ethnic societies – ready-made social cleavages may be available for politicians to exploit. However, Brubaker (1998) convincingly argues that political leaders rarely have both the ability and ideal environment to manipulate identities for their own personal need that the theory of diversionary war suggests.

This paper provides an initial analysis of the first in a series of democratization cases in ethnically heterogeneous settings: the Burundian democratization process of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Based on news agency and local newspaper reports, this paper attempts to assess to what degree elites stimulate ethnic hostilities in their bid for political power and to what extend they react to credible already present in the population.

1 Introduction

Democratization is a time of hope, but it is also a time of social upheaval. The old societal order needs to be deconstructed, exclusive networks of interaction and trust within social groups and patron-client relationships with the former regime need to disintegrate. Therefore, it is not surprising that democratizing countries have been shown to bear a greater risk of inter-state war (Mansfield and Snyder 1995a, b, 2002, 2005) and recent studies show that this influence holds for civil wars, too (Cederman, Hug, and Krebs 2010).

The risk of civil war during democratization weighs particularly on ethnically heterogeneous countries. It is a truism that the move towards democracy requires an answer to the demos question: should the nation be defined in terms of ethnicity, potentially requiring the redrawing of borders or the displacement of people; or can a supra-ethnic identity attract the loyalty of most current citizens? In countries with a deeply-rooted history of conflict between different ethnic groups, the need to settle the demos question can become the cause for conflict.

Leadership is one factor that has often been associated with the question why ethnic civil war breaks out during democratization in some countries—such as Yugoslavia—but not in others. Two prominent and opposing views on the role of leadership in ethnic conflict are the theories of elite manipulation and ethnic security dilemma. The former argues that conflict is created self-servingly by political leaders trying to secure their access to power, while the latter argues that structural forces drive societies to war. The present paper will focus on the role of elites, evaluating the elite manipulation theory in comparison with an alternative that applies particularly to democratization cases and that is situated in the space between the two polar cases of elite manipulation and ethnic security dilemma. The following section presents

the three theories by showing how they interpret the same case: Yugoslavia during the early 1990s.

Based on prior results of a large-N study regarding the role of democratization, ethnic politicization and threats to incumbents (Krebs 2009), this paper focuses on the direction of causality in the behavior of elites: do elites create the antagonization along ethnic lines seen prior to the outbreak of violent conflict in a top-down fashion, or do they react to the existence of credible security worries in the population (bottom-up)? Burundi's democratization process in the later 1980s and early 1990s was chosen because it was a careful election that avoid risky moves such as national elections early in the process. It is also marked by a long and violent history of ethnic hostilities, with the violence just prior to the initiation of the democratization process in 1988 and a genocide in the not-too-recent past. The third section discusses the case selection in more detail and presents the methodology and source data chosen for the analysis.

Section four then presents the result of the analysis of elite behavior for the period between the onset of the democratization process and the outbreak of civil war. Section five concludes with an outlook on future research.

2 Three Paths to the Same Conflict: A Literature Review

An investigation into the role of political elites in the onset of civil war generally involves a judgement on where to place responsibility: with the individual leader, with situational forces, or somewhere in between. The endpoints of the agent-structure scale are defined by two prominent theories.

The theory of elite manipulation[1] (e.g. Gagnon 2004, Snyder 2000) places the blame squarely with elites, which for the purpose of this study are defined as any political figures

that hold or compete for political office. Leaders, particularly incumbents, are argued to use the danger of an inter-ethnic conflict as a tool to secure their grip on power, and negligently or willfully accept the onset of violent conflict as a consequence of their own doing.

At the other extreme of the scale, the theory of the ethnic security dilemma (Posen 1993) argues that political leaders are relatively powerless in the face of structural and situational forces. If they work hard to improve the security of their people, they risk being seen by others as an aggressor preparing for attack, potentially inviting a first strike by others. Yet neglecting the security of their people equally puts them at risk. Conflict may be unavoidable regardless of the choices made by elites.

The following two parts illustrate these theories using the Yugoslavian break-up in the early 1990s. A third, hybrid theory that focusses particularly on cases of democratization is then introduced, and testable predictions are derived for all.

2.1 Manipulation by Elites

Both Snyder (2000) and Gagnon (2004) see the civil wars in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s as the result of incumbent elites seeking to defend their power in the face of mass mobilization and the threat of regime reformation. Their "goal was to bring an end to political mobilization that represented an immediate threat to the existing structure of power" (ibid.: 181) and to control the "impending democratization [that] threatened the position of the communist elite" (Snyder 2000: 206). Gagnon (2004) argues that both parties that emerged victoriously in the 1990 regional elections in Croatia and Serbia[2] did not succeed by virtue of a strong backing by their respective populations but by legal and electoral trickery. At the same time, they were faced with "parts of the population that were actively mobilizing against the

interests of conservative elites and calling for fundamental changes to the structures of economic and political power" (ibid. 180).

The response by both Croat and Serbian leadership was to utilize "their near monopoly control over the news media" (Snyder 2000: 213) to "shift the focus of political discourse away from issues of change toward grave injustices purportedly being inflicted on innocents […] by evil others defined in ethnic terms" (Gagnon 2004: 180-1). This change of subject served to demobilize any potential opposition: "anyone who questioned these stories or who criticized the president or the ruling party […] was demonized as being in league with the enemy, of not caring about the innocent victims of the evil others" (ibid.: 179). This clearly included not only opposition politicians and their supporters, but also potential challengers from within. Especially given that only a small minority of Yugoslav citizens saw members of other ethnic groups as a threat only a few years before the outbreak of civil war (ibid.), the ethnic discourse is argued to be just a ploy that allowed a restructuring of political (and geographic) space favorable to the incumbents. Since both Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman engaged in such ethnic outbidding to hold on to their jobs, the efforts of each could serve as the best proof of their threatening intentions to the other.

2.2 Ethnic Security Dilemma

In clear opposition to the "elite manipulation" school of thought, the proponents of the "ethnic security dilemma" argue that conflict is not caused by "short-term incentives for new leaders to 'play the nationalist card' to secure their power" (Posen 1993: 29). Instead, structural forces drive society to the brink of conflict, while political leaders have little to no ability to avoid the outbreak of violence.

Posen (1993) argues that the weakening, reform or collapse of the central authority of ethnically heterogeneous states that can happen during periods of democratization (or regime type transitions in general) causes an "emerging anarchy" similar to the lack of hierarchical structure at the international level. With the break-down of the previous order and the resulting transitional absence of a "Leviathan", the country experiences "special conditions that arise when proximate groups of people suddenly find themselves responsible for their own security" (Posen 1993: 27). In the absence of a credible national authority that can guarantee the safety of ethnic groups, uncertainty kindles a rational fear for group survival.

"The process of imperial collapse produces conditions that make offensive and defensive capabilities indistinguishable" (ibid.: 29). The resulting ambiguity makes it difficult or impossible for any group to credibly signal their defensive intent. Posen discusses a number of events illustrating the difficulty of distinguishing offensive and defensive actions, including the confiscation of heavy weapons stored on the territory of the Croat Republic by the predominantly Serbian-controlled Yugoslav Army in October 1990 (ibid.). Given the preceding downgrading of the Serbian population on Croat territory from "constituent nation" to "minority" and the associated condition that Serbs living in Croatia swear their loyalty to the Croatian Republic, the impounding can be interpreted as a defensive act: the attempt to control access to weapons that could potentially be used against the Serbian minority. At the same time, the confiscated weapons provided the Yugoslav Army with "a vast military advantage over the nascent armed forces of the [Croat] republic" (Posen 1993: 37). Even with hindsight, it is difficult to say to what extent this action was driven by a purely offensive or defensive intent.

As long as it is impossible to judge an opponent's intent by his actions, the main mechanism that ethnic groups will use to determine offensive implications of another's sense

of identity is "history: how did other groups behave the last time they were unconstrained" (ibid.: 30)? Posen points out that "Serbs and Croats have a terrifying oral history of each other's behavior" (ibid.: 36) that goes beyond a history of more intense conflict dating back over 100 years. Given such a history of violent inter-ethnic conflict, any efforts to increase group cohesion by touting shared suffering during conflict is likely to be seen as vilification and saber-rattling by others. Even without a history of conflict, "the 'groupness' of the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic collectives that emerge from collapsed empires gives each of them an inherent offensive military power" (ibid.: 30). The combination of group cohesion and a history of confrontation produces a risk-reward structure that makes it attractive for actors to "choose the offensive if they wish to survive" (ibid.: 28).

As a result, the spiral of fear, defensive action and misinterpretation can lead to the outbreak of violence even without political leaders adding fuel to the flames.

2.3 Selection of Elites

So far, the discussion has focussed on the two polar cases in the debate on the influence of political leaders. Elite-manipulation theorists place the blame for ethnic civil wars squarely with the leaders of ethnic groups, arguing that they encourage conflict in an attempt to bolster their waning power. Proponents of the ethnic security dilemma see structural or situational forces at work, leaving political elites little or no room to maneuver.

Both schools of thought make convincing arguments. Political leaders cannot reasonably be expected to be an exception to the principal-agent problem. It is rational for them to look out for their personal interest (Brubaker 1998) and fear of democratization provides a powerful motive (Snyder and Ballentine 1996). At the same time, democratization does force ethnic

groups to consider the intentions of their neighbors, especially if earlier interactions have been fraught with (violent) conflict.

Other parts of both arguments seem less convincing. Gagnon (2004) argues that elites were able to skillfully steer the public discourse away from political change towards ethnic conflict even though ethnicity was initially non-issue for the majority of the population. Admittedly, Slobodan Milošević was clearly a "nationalist of convenience, rather than conviction" (Brubaker 1998: 289). Still, one needs to ask whether the likes of him or Franjo Tuđman could have been successful in framing the debate if ethnicity was not already meaningful to their audience. After all, we need to account for "the large numbers of people who perpetrate the violence [and for] the deeper social structures that allow such processes to be set in motion" (Uvin 2001: 80-81).

Not only were Milošević's claims not disproven by ambiguous Croat actions (De Figueiredo and Weingast 1999), they also seemed realistic due to a substantial history of inter-ethnic conflict. While the majority of people may have preferred to work towards increasing the standard of living and economic security—as polls at the turn of the decade indicate (Gagnon 2004: 33-46; see also Burg and Berbaum 1989)—once the old system with its safe-guards is being dismantled, security considerations would become more urgent and their immediacy would trump longer-term considerations.

Just as the expectation of thorough elite control over public discourse seems too extreme, the assumption of anarchy in the "ethnic security dilemma" is overstated. While institutions will be weakened as the political regime is being reformed, a complete break-down of the apparatus of state power seems rare. And in the case of Yugoslavia, there was no non-ethnic superior power that disappeared, leaving the ethnic groups to their own devices. Rather, the

same elites were at work both before and after the onset of reforms, and they had roughly the same power apparatus at their disposal until the conflict started to escalate.[3]

In the following, an alternative theory is proposed; a hybrid of these two schools of thought that focuses on a characteristic unique to democratization processes, the inherent need to define the demos.

Recent empirical studies have clearly shown that periods of democratization are associated with a higher risk of international war (Mansfield and Snyder 2005 and earlier studies) and there is initial empirical evidence that the likelihood of civil war also rises (Cederman, Hug, and Krebs 2010). What can explain this significant deviation in the conflict risk in comparison with other periods in a country's history? Neither temporary weakness of state institutions nor the threat to personal positions of power make likely candidates: both can occur during other regime-type changes and even during regime changes that do not affect the nature of the political system.[4]

The key difference between democratizations and other changes to the regime is that any move towards democracy requires an answer to the demos question: "national self-determination is precisely about setting the initial boundaries of the demos" (Brubaker 1998: 279). The issue of who can partake in the government and influence the future of all inhabitants forces citizens to examine their loyalties. Is their allegiance to an ethnically heterogeneous state stronger than their loyalty to a more narrowly defined group of kin? This question is not contingent on the presence of anarchy, and it does not require that ethnic differences were of great concern immediately prior to the onset of the transition.

When debating the demos question, ethnic identities are one of multiple competing loyalties that inhabitants choose from. Assuming that they choose rationally, they can be expected to assess the utility of each of their identities. A history of ethnicity-based exclusion,

discrimination, persecution or conflict will lead them to prefer the loyalty to a smaller, ethnically homogenous group over the potentially risky cohabitation with members of other ethnicities. This can be an alternative origin for an ethnic security dilemma: even if there is no anarchy yet, the potential of drastic consequences such as an attack by another ethnic group— even when very improbable—may lead risk-averse people to place their faith only in their own group. Such considerations also explain why the population of Yugoslavia shifted their focus from the issues of economic prosperity to ethnic divisions. Physiological needs and safety considerations receive the highest priority (Maslow 1943), but these needs were fulfilled before the onset of reforms, leaving the population free to concern themselves with less basic issues. Yet, any doubt regarding the provision of basic requirements would push any other goals into the background immediately. The desire to avoid the worst-case scenario of a violent attack then leads to a spiral or mistrust and suspicion similar to the one described in the ethnic security dilemma.

In essence, the nature of democratization processes allows us to extend the theory of the ethnic security dilemma in two ways. Firstly, it allows us to relax the assumption that a previous, protective authority has ceased to exist. Instead, it is the necessity to reflect on potential future behavior of others that causes the same dynamic. Moreover, democratization provides the reason why ethnicity suddenly becomes meaningful, even when—as critics of the ethnic security dilemma have pointed out[5]—it did not play a major role in public discourse before. The choice among different identities is at the heart of the democratization process, and this choice will be guided both by lived experience and expectations of future behavior.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that political leaders have no role to play in this dynamic: "it is scarcely controversial to point out the opportunism and cynicism of political

elites, or to underscore the crucial role of elites" (Brubaker 1998: 289). The intuition behind the theory of elite manipulation is reasonable. Yet, here too, the democratization process is at the heart of the matter. The first democratic elections will create winners and losers, and they force political elites—both incumbents and challengers—to compete for votes. The politician that realizes and most effectively addresses the dominant issue for voters has the highest chance of being elected. But this is not a re-framing of public discourse away from topics that the population actually values more, i.e. a process of top-down manipulation in the sense of Kaufman (2001).

Instead, it is an accurate assessment of the subject that will influence voters most, a realistic appraisal of the public's concerns. If fears for group survival resonate with the public at all, they will trump other concerns and they will lead the public to back the leader that most credibly promises to deal with this threat. Unless they have been removed from power at the start of the democratization process, incumbents often still possess preferential access to news media as well as control over the power apparatus of the state. This implies that they have better means to position themselves as a non-diplomatic "defender of the people", and the impending loss of office would motivate them to do so. In turn, this reaffirms the security dynamic made possible by the onset of democratization: now the potential safety threat posed by other ethnic groups becomes bigger with each leader arguing for the need of protection.

In essence, the ongoing, newly democratic process of elite selection provides an ideal means to capture public attention—the "fear" for their safety—and an obvious motivation for using it by any incumbent or challenger. This also shows the synthesis between ethnic security dilemma and elite manipulation theory: leaders are aware of the security problem and they do take advantage of it. However, the origin of safety worries is not a skillful

manipulation by cunning leaders; it is the necessity to answer the demos question that is caused by the movement towards democracy.

2.4 Comparing the Three Causal Paths

The discussion has proposed three different theories explaining the onset of ethnic civil war in settings of democratization (or even in regime-type change in general). This part summarizes the different arguments, leading to the crucial role of elites.

Both elite manipulation and ethnic security dilemma require a weakness of or a change in the apparatus of state power that either threatens leaders or ethnic groups. Transitions to democracy satisfy both conditions since regime-type change often involves regime change and since there is likely a gap between the dismantling of old institutions and the construction of their successors that can be interpreted as a temporary, emerging anarchy.

In contrast, the theory of elite selection *requires* not just any regime-type change, but a movement towards democracy, since it posits the need to address the demos question as the cause of a spiral of rising suspicion that eventually leads groups to favor taking the offensive. Nonetheless, all three theories predict democratizations to be troublesome times.

Likewise, all three theories require the presence of ethnic identities: to be skillfully manipulated by self-serving leaders (elite manipulation), to serve as one potential level of loyalty competing with others as an answer to the demos question (elite selection), or to act as the primary level of loyalty for inhabitants in the absence of a protective, overarching state authority (ethnic security dilemma).

However, the requirements posed by the theory of elite selection are more stringent: only ethnic identities that have been politicized through exclusion, discrimination or prior conflict should cause any realistic security worries during democratization periods.

So far, all three theories agree that democratization attempts in countries that have seen prior exclusion, discrimination or violence along ethnic lines should be conducive to the outbreak of civil war. It is in the role of the leaders that the three strands diverge.

Most noticeably, the ethnic security dilemma differs from the two other theories in predicting that elite actions do not play a decisive role: not working to defend your group leaves it at the mercy of others, working to defend your group is perceived as preparation for an offensive and invites attack. Once the dilemma has formed, the actions of an individual leader would not matter.

On the other hand, both elite manipulation and elite selection argue that a threat to the power of the incumbent should be associated with a higher risk for conflict. Proponents of the elite manipulation theory go furthest in arguing that conflict is the direct result of an active, top-down reframing of the public discourse. The elite selection theory argues that while competing political leaders add momentum to security worries (e.g. through ethnic outbidding), the initial cause is the democratization process, essentially reducing the link between elites and conflict from causation to correlation or (in the strong version) reversing the direction of causality.

A recent large-N regression study (Krebs 2009) has shown significant positive influences of democratization attempts, ethnic politicization and threats to the power of the incumbent on the likelihood of civil war onset. This seems to indicate that elites do play a role, drawing attention to the distinction between the dynamics described by elite manipulation and elite selection. Still, the inability of country-year regression analysis to distinguish the fine-grained direction of causality between elite behavior and mass reaction necessitates complementary case studies to show whether the logic of escalation flows from the top down or from the bottom up.

The following section discusses the use of process tracing to verify whether the behavioral patterns predicted by the elite manipulation and elite selection theories can be found in the slide from democratization to the onset of wide-spread conflict. Burundi's democratization process in the late 1980s and early 1990s is then presented, providing a reasoning for its choice as a most-likely case. The section then concludes with a discussion of the sources to be used to analyze this case.

3 Methodology, Case Selection, and Source Data

As argued in the previous section, multiple strands of theory consider times of regime-type change, particularly democratization attempts as risky periods in the history of countries. Especially in combination with the presence of ethnic cleavages, violent conflict can result. While the theorized contribution of elites to the onset of civil war varies between different schools of thought, recent large-N empirical results suggest that a threat to the incumbent (and the competition for political power associated with it) also increase the risk of internal conflict significantly. These quantitative results need to be followed up: what precisely is the dynamic in which political elites contribute to the outbreak of conflict?

In order to establish causal relations, "relevant, verifiable causal stories resting in differing chains of cause-effect relations" (Tilly 1997: 48; as quoted in George & Bennett 2004: 205) need to be examined: something that becomes possible through the method of process tracing. The following part discusses how this method will be used to differentiate between the predicted behavior of elites according to the theories of elite manipulation and elite selection. Burundi's democratization attempt that started in 1988 and ended in a bloody coup d'état and horrific violence has been chosen as the first case study. The case is presented in the second part.

Finally, the sources to be used for this case study are outlined in the concluding part of this section.

3.1 Methodology

Unlike especially quantitative methods, process tracing allows not only the perception of starting points and outcomes, but places the focus on the intermediary process that connects them (Checkel 2005). It does so by piecing together a coherent causal chain from original sources and other reports in a process that roots in the "Quellenkritik" (source criticism) of German/Scandinavian historical science of the 19th century. The goal is to figure out "which aspects of the initial conditions observed, in conjunction with which simple principles of the many that may be at work, could have combined to generate the observed sequence of events" (Goldstone 1991: 59).

We have two opposing alternative hypothesized processes that can lead to the outbreak of violence and which are to be tested using information on small-scale interactions: top-down manipulation by elites, and campaign dynamics during the selection of elites. The primary focus of this analysis is therefore the comparison of actual behavior by political leaders with expected types of behavior. In the case of elite manipulation, we would expect political figures to "talk up" a) differences between groups, and b) the threat that results from these differences. In the case of elite selection, we would expect political leaders to react to fears in the population, which includes accepting and addressing such fears.

Since leader behavior may look similar in both situations, it is equally important to find evidence of signaling from their constituents: demonstrations, petitions, signs of concern about the behavior of other groups, bottom-up efforts to deter possible threats, and so forth. In the case of elite manipulation, we would expect a lag between the elites' propaganda and

the reaction by their audience. Moreover, the manipulators would likely coordinate reactions in a way that reflects favorably towards them. According to the elite selection view, the public should be acting first and would initially not be associated with leadership figures.

This study primarily seeks to analyze the interactions between leaders and followers, but the type of causal process the study is aiming for is a "convergence of several conditions, independent variables, or causal chains" (George & Bennett 2004: 212). For this reason, the case to be studied needs to fulfill the requirements for a most-likely case: democratization, politicized ethnicity and political competition threatening to the incumbent. The following part describes the prior history of Burundi's regime-type change of 1988-1993, and assesses its suitability based on these three requirements.

3.2 Case Selection: Burundi 1988-1993

Burundi, a former German and Belgian colony in the Great Lakes region of Africa, is a clear case of democratization in an atmosphere of charged inter-ethnic relations. This is true despite the difficulty in determining the exact roots of ethnicity. While the division of roles and power between different groups of inhabitants prior to colonization and the extent to which colonization by Germany and Belgium shaped ethnicity is still being debated (Uvin 1999), the minimum consensus seems to be that the origin of ethnic groups lies in socioeconomic differences.[6] The Hutu, which make up 85% of Burundi's population, were simple farmers, while the Tutsi (14%) were wealthier cattle owners.[7] This economic cleavage became further entrenched when the colonial administration decided to align access to political power with socioeconomic status.

When Burundi gained independence from Belgium in 1962, the first elections were won by the biethnic *Uprona* party. However, at the time the "state was the main source of enrichment

and power in society and conferred great opportunities to those who controlled it" (Uvin 1999: 256). Only four years after independence, a Tutsi faction ("Tutsi-Hima") seized power in a military coup d'état to ensure the continued elevated economic and political status of the Tutsi minority. From then on until the beginning of the present case study in 1988, the Hutu majority was excluded from political power and discriminated by state institutions in many areas including education. Moreover, political competition is eliminated and *Uprona* becomes the only legitimate political party, dedicated completely to Tutsi interests.

A recurring conflict pattern establishes itself from this point forward: since the Tutsi are a small minority, they use a "much higher dose of repression" (Uvin 1999: 258) than e.g. the ruling Hutu in Rwanda. On several occasions, Hutu rise up violently against local Tutsi. The government then sends in the Tutsi-controlled army which kills a larger number of Hutu in retaliation.[8] The most horrific such case, a Hutu rebellion in the South of Burundi during 1972 is considered genocidal in nature due to the estimated 100'000 to 150'000 Hutu killed by the army. Even if differing access to political power and socioeconomic status had not yet solidified the Hutu-Tutsi division, the recurring cycle of violence most certainly did, creating "a climate of permanent mutual fear" (Uvin 1999: 258).

On September 3, 1987, Major Pierre Buyoya came to power by military coup d'état. His reign was strongly influenced by another episode of intertribal violence during his first year in office. During August 1988, Hutu farmers in the North of Burundi rebelled, killing an estimated 3'000 Tutsi. As usual, the army retaliated by killing a disproportionately larger amount of Tutsi, in this case an estimated 20'000 (Uvin 1999, Reyntjens 1993). In the aftermath and under international pressure, President Buyoya initiates the first small steps of a democratization process (Reyntjens 1993, Young 2006). The first stage consisted of an almost immediate opening of the political arena to Hutu representatives and the initiation of projects

on the subject of national unity (1988-1990). They were then followed by the move towards constitutional multi-party democracy (1990-1992) and finally the lead-up to the first democratic elections (1992-1993). While the process was conducted in a slow and careful manner, the threat to President Buyoya's person and to his access to political power were clear from the start: Only four months after the first steps, a coup d'état is attempted against him in February 1989.

At this point, it should be clear that Burundi fulfills all three conditions to be considered a most-likely case for the dynamics described by the theories of elite manipulation and elite selection.

Firstly, prior history has clearly shown that ethnic differences, even though they may have had very flimsy roots initially, have been used as a dividing line along which violent conflict has formed on many occasions, and which in turn has strengthened the perceived ethnic differences. Additionally, ethnic and political divisions also coincide with economic divisions, with the Tutsi being the politically powerful "haves" and the Hutu the politically excluded "have nots".

Secondly, the political changes initiated in 1988 are clearly a democratization process The literature unanimously agrees that it is a clear move towards democracy that is conducted in a very careful and deliberate manner, focusing first on opening access to political power to the previously excluded Hutu majority before moving on to more challenging tasks such as establishing a constitutional multi-party democracy.

Finally, there is clear threat to the incumbent that signals the potential of competition for political power. The careful behavior described by Uvin (1999) and the fact that it is likely caused by both ongoing patterns of violence and concerted external pressure certainly suggest that Buyoya is consciously trying to keep control of the process in a way that also

protects him. If he has not realized the danger to himself from the start, the first attempted coup d'état follows only four months after his initial move to open the political arena to previously excluded Hutu.

3.3 Source Data

The goal of this study is to create a narrative of the developments from the initiation of the move towards democracy in 1988 to the outbreak of large-scale internal violence in 1993. The focus of the narrative must be the behavior of leaders and followers, so that manipulation of the public by leaders and signaling of the public to its leaders can be detected.

News reports are generally a good source for such fine-grained analyses. Especially reports disseminated by news agencies cover events at small time intervals, allowing a more precise tracing of events as they unfold. More importantly, news agency reports undergo fewer levels of processing than e.g. newspaper reports before they are published. At the same time, news agency reports have unique disadvantages. They often portray an outside perspective of events and therefore provide less depth than local reporting. Whereas international news agencies will often focus only on the top echelon of political figures when reporting statements, local sources discuss the reactions of additional politically important figures that are not well-known beyond the country's borders, and general opinions of the population.

Since the study requires a more detailed understanding of local interactions, it needs to be based on both agency reports and local news sources. For reasons of availability, Reuters has been selected as the source for agency reporting, while BBC Monitoring Africa has been chosen as the source for local coverage. BBC Monitoring collects and aggregates a wide array of local sources including the *Agence Burundaise de Presse* (ABP), *La Voix de la Révolution*

(Bujumbura), and Radio Burundi, as well as additional international sources with local knowledge such as Radio France International, Radio Rwanda and Radio Uganda.

Using the Factiva database service yielded 721 reports from both Reuters and BBC Monitoring with direct relation to Burundian politics. These reports were then analyzed for any statements made by public figures that addressed ethnicity either directly by referring to to the Hutu and Tutsi groups or indirectly by speaking of "tribal" feelings, loyalties, divisions and so forth. These are contrasted with any statements that explicitly refer to supra-ethnic levels of identity, such as statements regarding "national unity". Moreover, each statement is categorized as a) supporting, b) neutral/descriptive, or c) opposing. E.g. the following line (Reuters 1988h) contains a statement in support of national unity and opposing tribal divisions: "Transport Minister Simon Rusuku told Reuters the government reshuffle announced in Bujumbura on Wednesday was an important step towards national unity and ending tribal violence which killed thousands in August."

While actions and reactions by the public will generally not be reported in such detail in the source reports, all reports were assessed to identify popular sentiments. This was done along a similar scheme, but generally required more interpretative work. E.g. the statement (Reuters 1993b) "The students, supporters of Buyoya's *Uprona* party, were stunned by the extent of his defeat and have charged the Hutu with voting along ethnic lines" is clearly an opposition to tribal identities, but the fact that the students identify themselves as supporters of the previously Tutsi-dominated *Uprona* party and are verbally attacking members of the Hutu majority also indicates that they themselves are supporting ethnic divisions.

In order to augment the fragmented nature of individual news reports, additional analytical sources in academic literature are used to provide a more structured narrative (in

chronological order of publication: Reyntjens 1993, Lemarchand 1994, Gahama 1995, Uvin 1999, Young 2006).

The following section presents the patterns of leader actions for four distinct periods of the political development in Burundi starting with the initiation of the move towards democracy in 1988.

4 Burundi: From the Onset of Democratization to the Onset of Large-Scale Violence

With the benefit of hindsight, the political developments in Burundi following the outbreak of violence in August 1988 and eventually leading to the murder of the Burundi's first democratically elected president in October 1993 can be organized into four distinct phases:

1. *1988–1990.* The opening of the political arena to Hutu representatives and the initiation of projects on the subject of national unity, starting in October 1988.

2. *1990–1992.* The move towards constitutional multi-party democracy, starting with the publication of a first draft of the Charter of National Unity in April 1990 and continuing with the installation of a constitutional committee in April 1991.

3. *1992–1993.* The lead-up to the first democratic elections, starting with the successful referendum on the constitution in March 1992 and the official acceptance of multiple opposition parties.

4. *June–October 1993.* The aftermath of the first democratic elections for president (June 1) and parliament (June 29), leading up to the bloody coup d'état against President Ndadaye on October 21 that marks the beginning of wide-spread violence.

Each of these periods will now be briefly discussed.

4.1 Opening Access to Political Power (1988–1990)

After the violence of August 1988, "vigorous international reaction compelled Buyoya to abandon the exclusionary policies pursued since 1965" (Young 2006: 313). While President Buyoya stressed national unity already in his first reactions to the outbreak of violence (Reuters 1988a, cf. also Reuters 1988b,c), the first concrete actions followed in October, once the violence had abated.

The first steps were the appointment of a committee on national unity consisting of 24 members evenly divided between Hutu and Tutsi (Reuters 1988d), and a government of national unity, also with 12 Hutu and 12 Tutsi members and led by a Hutu prime minister (Reuters 1988g). These changes are accompanied by continued speeches on the need to combat divisiveness (Reuters 1988e) and personal visits by President Buyoya to all 114 administrative districts (Reuters 1988f).

This new approach indicated "profound dynamics of change" (Reyntjens 1993: 564) and the start of "a noticeable increase in the representation of Hutu in the formal economy and public sector" (Uvin 1999: 257). However, it also attracts strong criticism: "From the very beginning, […] Buyoya's move to liberalization faced a double-barreled challenge: extremists at both ends of the spectrum made their reservations abundantly clear, and violently. What for some Hutu is a clear-cut case of 'too little too late' is viewed by Tutsi hard-liners as a sellout to the Hutu" (Lemarchand 1994:132).

This translated almost directly into a personal threat against Buyoya, who faced a coup attempt only four months after the introduction of the first political changes. While both President Buyoya and his (Hutu) Prime Minister Adrien Sibomana continued to make public

arguments for bridging past divides (cf. Reuters 1988i, 1989), it already became clear at this point that the opposition did not intend to make a political argument to support its views.

4.2 Moving towards a Democratic Constitution (1990—1992)

After the first forays into a more pluralist society, President Buyoya began in earnest to move the country towards democracy. The pace of this process is described by observers as careful: "Buyoya may be compared to Gorbachev, reforming the worst aspects of the system that produced him, while seeking to keep its functioning intact" (Uvin 1999: 261).

The process was kicked off with the unveiling of a Charter of National Unity (Reuters 1990a), which stipulates the sanctity of life and equal rights for all ethnic groups. This was accompanied by "intense propaganda on the concept of national (ethnic) unity" (Uvin 1999: 261) leading up to a national referendum on the revised charter in February 1991. Once accepted, the charter became the foundation for the work of the constitutional commission instated in April 1991 (Reuters 1990a).

Reyntjens (1993: 564) argues that "the progress made between late 1988 and early 1991 was obvious": equal representation had been achieved for Hutu in many state bodies, Hutu held important offices within the previously Tutsi-only *Uprona* party (including the position of secretary general), and access to civil service and secondary education had increased substantially for Hutu.

Despite (or because of, respectively) these substantial changes, elements of unrest persisted on both the Hutu and Tutsi sides. Smaller acts of Hutu resistance were reported occasionally (BBC Monitoring 1991a). In November 1991, the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (*Palipehutu*) initiated an insurgency in the capital Bujumbura (Reuters 1991b). State organs with enforcement and arrest powers had generally stayed outside the reach of the Hutu

majority despite the opening of other areas of public life, and the army and police retaliated against Hutu civilians as they had done many times prior to the initiation of democratization (Reyntjens 1993: 565), undermining the ongoing arguments for national unity by the political leadership (cf. Reuters 1990b, 1991a,c; BBC Monitoring 1991b).

On the Tutsi side, another coup attempt was directed at President Buyoya (Reuters 1992a). The goal of the attackers was clearly to disrupt the ongoing opening and democratization of the political system: "the arrested soldiers said they wanted to prevent a referendum due on March 9 on whether to introduce a multi-party system" (ibid.: line 6).

Again, it was clear that substantial resistance to the project of national unity existed, yet elements on both sides of the ethnic divide purposefully did not chose to engage in political competition.

4.3 *Preparing for the First Democratic Elections (1992—1993)*

Despite resistance at both extreme ends of the political spectrum, the new constitution was accepted by a vast majority in a constitutional referendum in March 1992 (90.2% votes in favor with a 97% turnout; Reuters 1992b). The "'spirit of national unity' [was] formulated as a principle in as many as 12 articles" (Reyntjens 1993: 565), and the government continued to move the democratization process forward by installing a multi-party system in April, enabling the foundation of opposition parties. While seven opposition parties are operating by the end of 1992, the National Front of Burundi (*Frodebu*) is the only significant opponent of the governing *Uprona* (ibid.).

While President Buyoya and Prime Minister Sibomana continue to make the case against ethnic divisions and for national unity (Reuters 1992c), another rebellion breaks out in April 1992, killing hundreds (Uvin 1999). And as the country continues to move towards its first

democratic elections, there is "no doubt that political propaganda increasingly manipulated ethnicity as the elections approached" (Reyntjens 1993: 574). "Starting at the end of 1992, the salience of ethnicity as a major electoral element emerged increasingly clearly" (ibid. 567), however, the division was intended to be along the lines of multi-ethnic vs. mono-ethnic parties. An example of such campaigning is captured in Reuters (1993a): Prime Minister Sibomana (*Uprona*, Hutu) accuses *Frodebu* of associating with the Hutu rebel organization *Palipehutu*, recruiting *Palipehutu* members, and refusing to distance themselves from the rebel organization's methods. In essence, *Uprona* was trying to make up for a perceived disadvantage as the symbol of military dictatorship and Hutu suppression by painting its opposition as mono-ethnic and divisive, while portraying itself as multi-ethnic and therefore a guarantor of national unity.

Even though the electoral campaign is described as relatively open by observers (cf. Reyntjens 1993), these campaign tactics, the fact that "government-owned media were far from impartial" (ibid.: 567), small acts of resistance and small-scale heavy-handedness of the authorities foreshadowed the coming events: not only had there been continuous attempts to resist President Buyoya's democratization, by then, the people implementing the democratization themselves were starting to scratch the veneer of national unity.

It should be noted that *Uprona*'s campaign tactics did constitute an attempt at manipulation. However, the message differed from those foreseen by supporters of the elite manipulation theory, since it did not attempt to split the population along ethnic lines, but along the lines of unity vs. division. As such, it was not only directed at the core constituents of *Uprona*, but also at the core constituents of its opposition. While the stereotypical manipulating leader is argued to play to the "home crowd", *Uprona*'s leadership did the opposite. Additionally, their reaction followed persistent signaling of safety worries by their

constituents, which despite multiple violent episodes had not been addressed by the heads of government. For these reasons, it seems unlikely that this was elite manipulation as presented by Gagnon (2004) or Snyder (2000).

4.4 Election Aftermath (June–October 1993)

The presidential elections on June 1, 1993 "took place in considerable calm and dignity" and was "conducted in a fair manner" (Reyntjens 1999: 568), as was confirmed by other observers: "Les élections de juin 1993 […] s'étaient déroulées dans le calme, le calendrier électoral avait été scrupuleusement respecté, tous les partis politiques avaient été associés à ces consultations populaires, les résultats avaient publiés rapidement" (Gahama 1995:77).

Despite the respective histories of *Uprona* and *Frodebu*, and despite the manipulative tactics late in the election campaign, voting did not follow ethnic lines. While President Buyoya achieved only 32% of the vote, the number of votes itself was more than double the amount of votes he could have gotten if voted for by Tutsi alone.[9] Likewise, "the support of at least some Tutsi for Frodebu's Hutu candidate, Ndadaye, was well know" (Reyntjens 1993:574). Both outgoing President Buyoya and the army chief of staff, head of an important source of Tutsi power, both accepted the verdict and proclaimed their loyalty to the president-elect (ibid.).

Unfortunately, despite voting patterns that did not follow ethnic lines and calls for calm by political leaders (Reuters 1993c, BBC Monitoring 1993a), parts of the population started to indicate worries for their safety. Right after the presidential elections and weeks before the parliamentary elections, the first protests started to appear (e.g. Reuters 1993c), initially formed by students and later joined by school children and civil servants. They were first indications that the worst fears "of many Tutsi that they would be victimized as the outcome

of voting that would be essentially on an ethnic basis" had been confirmed (Reyntjens 1993:577).

These fears were reinforced by the outcome of the parliamentary elections on June 29, 1993, which saw a substantially lower share for Uprona than outgoing President Buyoya had been able to achieve: 21.43% of the vote. Due to the system of distributing parliament seats, this resulted in less than 20% of the votes in parliament for *Uprona*, meaning that it would not be able to block changes to the constitution, even though they required an 80% majority (Reyntjens 1993).

Starting only days after the parliamentary elections, radical Tutsi within the army and police start to separate themselves from the political process. The first indication comes when a group of soldiers attempts to seize the residence of the president-elect in the night of July 2-3, 1993 (Reuters 1993d). Initially, the coup plotters appeared to be fringe elements, who failed to get support for their goal from other elements of the Burundian military. President Ndadaye continued to communicate a message of national unity, substantiated by concrete measures, such as the presentation of a government of national unity with a Tutsi prime minister, prominent posts for *Uprona* members and the ministries of defense and internal security under control of independent, but Uprona-leaning army officers (BBC Monitoring 1993b,d,f). Other concrete actions, such as an amnesty for political prisoners (BBC Monitoring 1993b,d), followed and President Ndadaye as well as his predecessor continued to speak on the need for national unity (BBC Monitoring 1993c,f).

Unfortunately, extremist elements among the police and military did not heed the message and started killing Hutu indiscriminately in September 1993 (Uvin 1999). The situation deteriorated until a second coup attempt against President Ndadaye was able to succeed on October 21, 1993, killing both the president and his two constitutional successors (Reuters

1993e). The resulting Hutu unrest and army intervention left 50'000 – 100'000 dead and over a million people displaced. Ethnicity had "re-emerged as the single most important factor of political life. […] Years of efforts at national reconciliation may well have been lost overnight." (Reyntjens 1993:582)

5 Conclusion

The present paper has presented first results of a case study on the role of political leaders in leading their country towards or away from civil war during democratization attempts in ethnically heterogeneous countries. The Burundian democratization attempt of 1988-1993 is highly instructive in the relations between leaders and followers.

First and foremost, former President Buyoya does not conform to the expectations of supporters of the elite manipulation theory. "The successful conclusion of the policy initiated by the president in 1988 carried with it the logic of the displacement of the old order, including that of the architect of the transition" (Reyntjens 1993: 580). It is clear that Buyoya is aware of this. And even though he is undermining his own power base, inviting coup attempts from disgruntled Tutsi and facing an uphill battle in gaining the trust of the Hutu, he does not succumb to the temptation to use the obvious dividing line running through Burundi to secure his own power.[10]

The same goes for all other political leadership figures that were mentioned in the source material. At no point was there any attempt by elites defending or running for office to mobilize the masses using one-sided ethnic rhetoric. The only well documented attempts to manipulate ethnic identities for political gain—*Uprona*'s accusations that *Frodebu* is catering only to Hutu—actually tries to attract voters of both ethnic groups.

At the same time, elite behavior also does not conform to the expectations of the elite selection theory. Even though there are constant and clear indications of fear and opposition in the population, political leaders campaigning for office do not seem to address them. Regardless of what goals elites could have pursued, it is surprising that this subject is not discussed by any leader in any report, especially since "violence has tended to occur at key points of political change", and since "the most prevalent motive [in Burundi] is fear" (Uvin 1999: 263).

In the end, the democratization attempt was not halted by the people, but by decision makers outside of the political realm. And it seems clear that popular support for peaceful democratic development was substantial, as highlighted by the vast majority of people voting in favor of the Charter of National Unity and constitution, as well as by the large amount of voters that did not cast their vote along ethnic lines in the first elections.

The failure to get additional support by the coup plotters in early July 1993 indicates that such popular support can serve to isolate extremists and possibly foil their plans. By not addressing very realistic safety worries in the population and by not taking precautions against radical elements within the police and the army, the incumbents may have left the country vulnerable to the disaster that followed. Yet, publicly addressing inter-ethnic threats could also have undermined the arduously cultivated argument for national unity, leading to a mass mobilization process along ethnic lines that could also have plunged the country into war.

In conclusion, this case study shows a clear absence of selfish manipulation of the public using ethnic divisions even though prior conditions make Burundi a likely case for elite manipulation — if not by the incumbent bent on change, then by challengers from within his own party. At the same time, the case also shows an obvious refusal by leaders from all sides

to address safety worries in the population even though this could also have helped a leader's bid for power.

Naturally, a single case study cannot serve as an adequate test of a probabilistic hypothesis. For this reason, additional studies of most-likely cases are currently under preparation to show whether elite manipulation or elite selection patterns can be identified.

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1. This school of thought is also referred to by the milder, but less common term "elite persuasion".

2. Respectively, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).

3. Regime-type indicators such as Polity and SIP show no change for Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and early 1990s for this very reason: there were virtually no reforms at the federal level.

4. N.B. The threat to political leaders is substantially stronger in a non-democratizing context. E.g. Archigos (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009, version 2.9) lists the majority of irregular removals from power and punishments at the end of a leader's reign (incl. imprisonment, exile and death) as occurring in autocracies, independent of whether these regimes are moving towards democracy or not.

5. See for example Gagnon (2004), who reports that less than 20% of the population of the Croatian part of Yugoslavia perceived other ethnic groups as threatening prior to initiation of democratization at the sub-federal level.

6. N.B. Both Gurr (1993) and Uvin (1999) argue that precise knowledge of the origin of ethnic divisions is not absolutely necessary as long as there is the current, shared perception that a certain set of traits sets groups apart from each other.

7. The remaining 1% is made up by the Twa, who play a negligible role in the conflict.

8. These episodes of violence are generally accompanied by waves of refugees seeking shelter either elsewhere within Burundi or in neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda.

9. Given that Tutsi only make up 14% of the Burundian population.

10. Watt's (2008: 44) argues that Buyoya may have been manipulating behind the curtains: "Buyoya is always very careful not to say anything in public that would compromise him and he claims that he was loyal to Ndadaye, but could he not have stopped the powerful elements in the army […]?" This argument can of course not be disproven. Nonetheless, the question itself shows that this was not a case of top-down mass mobilization.