

Re-Thinking Geography and Civil War:
Geography and Rebel Identity

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Scholarship on ethnic conflict and civil war has often examined the role of geographic factors, such as rough terrain and exploitable natural resources, in either prolonging or even initiating the conflict. However, many of these studies focus upon the material/tactical advantages that geography provides to the rebels. I argue that analysis of geography and civil war must account for the effects of geography upon the insurgency's identity (ethnic, religious, ideological), which is the most decisive factor in the rebels' ability to galvanize popular support. Using regression analysis and case studies, I demonstrate that while the geographic distance between rebel territory and the capital city in a war-afflicted country is of great importance, the presence of identity can compensate for the lack of favorable geography.

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1

Introduction

“The origin of [the Arab peoples] was an academic question; but for the understanding of their revolt their present social and political differences were important, and could only be grasped by looking at their geography. This continent of theirs fell into certain great regions, whose gross physical diversities imposed varying habits on the dwellers in them.” - T.E. Lawrence¹

“At the beginning the relative weakness of the guerrilla is such that they should work only toward becoming acquainted with the terrain and its surroundings while establishing connections with the population and fortifying the places that will eventually be converted into bases.” - Ernesto “Che” Guevara²

¹ See Lawrence (1991), Ch. 2

² See Guevara (2006)

Political science and international relations literature has often studied the importance of place; the geography of countries is believed to influence their national character, including government type, economic potential, and strategic goals. Some in the social sciences might balk at the idea of “geographic determinism”, which suggests that place is the decisive factor in explaining why civilizations turn out as they do. After all, geography is mostly immutable - if we claim that peoples and nations are a product of their geographic environment, then how can we hope to bring democracy, wealth, and peace to poor, autocratic, and war-torn states? Nonetheless, it is difficult to argue against the intuition that geography has some effect upon the affairs of states, and intrastate conflict (civil war) is one of the most pertinent topics of discussion for geopolitical theorists and ethnographers. As the quotes from T.E. Lawrence and Che Guevara remind us, considerations of geography play an important role in where and how civil wars are fought - and who fights them. Today, we are once again reminded of the importance of geography by American soldiers serving in Afghanistan, who sometimes regard the geography of their areas of operation as an enemy unto itself³.

For years, political science scholars who specialize in civil war and ethnic conflict have listened to the anecdotes that have emerged from American counter-insurgency efforts (such as Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq) and U.N. peacekeeping missions in Africa and the Middle East. In response, these scholars have sought to understand the effects of geographic factors upon civil wars, often using regression analysis. The earliest studies used simple measures of geographic variables - such as presence of mountainous terrain or natural resources - and then ran statistical models to find an

³ See for instance Brown (2009)

association between incidence and duration of conflicts. More advanced scholarship has sought to improve measurement and analysis of these variables, while other studies have downplayed their importance in favor of the “human” geography of civil wars - such as the dispersion of ethnic minorities and the strategic/symbolic importance of particular territories to both sides. The results have been inconsistent, and often contradictory.

Instead of treating geography as a decisive factor in conflict onset or duration (and hence, giving in to pessimistic determinism), I instead approach geography as a facet of a conflict-prone population’s identity. I hypothesize that certain geographic factors - particularly the distance between a particular region of a country and its capital city - prolong conflicts not by providing tactical advantages to rebels, but rather by isolating populations that are targeted by the rebels as a base of support. What is important is not simply that these regions are poor or economically under-developed, but that they develop a sense of identity that is culturally and economically distinct from other ethnic/tribal/religious groups within the same state borders. They may respond by fighting for either the autonomy of their territory, or control of the capital city. These conflict-prone groups are more easily galvanized and more difficult to defeat when their sense of identity is strong. The question I wish to answer can be summarized as thus: Do certain populations in certain geographic environments fight more often and/or much longer civil wars than those living in different environments?

My analysis begins by using an existing model and dataset, while accounting for rebel identity - a factor ignored by the authors of the original study. I begin with a discussion of the literature on geography and civil war, as well as a discussion of my methods and hypotheses. I then conduct my regression analysis, in which

I first examine geographic differences between identity and non-identity conflicts, and then examine how the addition of the identity variable affects the geography covariates. Finally, I use two case studies - the Angolan and Mozambican civil wars - to demonstrate how rebel identity is, in part, a product of geographic conditions.

Existing Literature on Geography and Civil War

Geopolitics, or the study of the relationship between geography and politics, has existed since the late-19th/early-20th centuries, when scholars such as Halford MacKinder (who developed the “Heartland Theory”) and Nicholas Spykman (a successor to MacKinder who developed the theory of the “Rimland”) sought to explain international relations through geographic analysis of both states’ territories and contested external territories¹. Since the end of the Cold War, international relations scholarship has sought to apply geopolitical theory to civil wars, focusing on either physical aspects of the conflict environment or political geography. Some studies examine the effects of geography upon risk/incidence of civil war, while others use conflict duration (in years) as the dependent variable. In the next two sections, I discuss the different types of geographic factors, as well as the results of previous work, in order to provide an overview of approaches to geography in the civil war literature.

¹ See Diehl (1992) for an excellent overview of the history of geopolitics

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the overlooked connection between rebel identity and geography, and why the former might be the missing link between the latter and civil war.

Physical Geography

Many studies on civil war - even those not specifically focused upon geography - provide analysis on various aspects of the states' physical geography. The underlying hypothesis is that civil wars are more likely to take place in regions that are populated by a certain ethnic minority, rural and isolated, and covered in mountainous and/or forested terrain. States characterized by rough or barely-hospitable terrain might be prone to greater conflict incidence/duration for two reasons: (A.) State governing capacity and power projection capabilities are weakened by rough terrain because it impedes development of civilian infrastructure (roads, power plants, schools, hospitals, etc.) and coercive infrastructure (such as military barracks or police stations), and (B.) Rough terrain provides a natural cover and easily-defended environment that is ideal for the establishment of rebel bases. However, the results from empirical analysis in most studies have often failed to confirm these hypotheses. Fearon and Laitin (2003), who argue that opportunity (conditions favoring civil war) rather than grievance is often the better explanation for war onset, find only a weak association between factors like rough terrain and conflict. Their measure of terrain-related independent variables is usually the percentage of the country characterized by such terrain (i.e. the percentage of mountainous land area). While Collier and Hoeffler (2004) find that minorities with a rural base are more inclined towards violence than those in urban areas, Collier et al. (2004) also find little association between rough

terrain and conflict, though their study uses conflict duration rather than onset as the dependent variable. A later, updated study on conflict “feasibility” from Collier et al. (2009) matched the conclusion of their earlier work². Some later work has postulated that the negative findings on rough terrain in earlier studies might be due to a failure to account for variation across states - for instance, the percentage of mountainous terrain in a country is not necessarily equivalent to the percentage of mountainous terrain in the specific region(s) where most of the fighting takes place (the conflict zone). This point is heavily emphasized by Buhaug and Lujala (2005), who use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data to model the geography of conflict regions rather than the countries as a whole - though their results nonetheless match those of earlier work³. Similarly, Buhaug and Rod (2006), using the risk of civil war as the dependent variable, look at African civil wars and try to determine how factors vary across the continent; they find that mountainous terrain plays no role in determining conflict location or scope (territorial conflicts, for instance, are likely to occur in areas without mountainous terrain).

Some studies have tried to establish possible links between the relative location of the conflict area and the capital city. Many scholars expect that the location of the conflict will be dependent upon its scope - for example, rebel movements fighting

² It should be noted that despite referencing Buhaug and Lujala (2005), in which the measures of rough terrain used by Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier et al. (2004) are discredited, Collier et al. (2009) continue to use the same measure of their previous work. They include mountainous/forested terrain only due to its “intrinsic plausibility” (16), while suggesting that their negative findings are due to endogeneity: “Mountainous areas might be atypically poor, and so proxy wide regional inequalities. There is a long history of cities of the plains being attacked by the marches.” (23)

³ In their regression output, mountainous terrain has no statistically significant effect, while forested terrain is - surprisingly - associated with shorter rather than longer conflicts. See Buhaug and Lujala (2005), 413.

for the autonomy of a particular territory are expected to fight much further away from the capital city. This hypothesis is tested by Buhaug and Gates (2002), who look at geographic location and scope of conflicts; they find that the distance of the conflict zone from the capital is influenced by “the scope of the conflict, the size of the country, whether or not the objective of the rebels is to secede, and whether or not the rebel group has a religious or ethnic identity.”⁴ Buhaug and Lujala (2005) take this finding further; they find that conflict zone/capital distance is not only an indicator of conflict location/scope, but also represents the “single most influential factor” extending conflict duration: “Civil wars that occur at a distance from the capital - the presumed center of state power - are much more likely to turn into protracted contests than relatively proximate ones.”⁵ However, Raleigh (2007) reaches a far less certain conclusion about the importance of distance⁶.

Finally, the presence of natural resources (or Primary Commodity Exports - PCEs) in the conflict region is one of the most-tested and oft-debated factors in civil war literature. PCE presence means that the region has strategic/economic value to the state, and also a natural source of funding for the insurgents⁷. In political science scholarship, results have been decidedly mixed. Despite the work of case studies such

⁴ Buhaug and Gates (2002), 419

⁵ Buhaug and Lujala (2005), 413

⁶ Based on his case studies, Raleigh finds that “Distance from the capital is negatively related to conflict in half of the study area states, positively related in two, and insignificant in one.” See Raleigh (2007), 39.

⁷ Collier et al. (2009) articulate the three possible means for PCEs to affect conflict risk as follows: (A.) opportunities for rebel finance via “bunkering (tapping of pipelines and theft of oil)”, kidnapping/ransoming oil workers, or extortion rackets, (B.) provides an end unto itself for the rebels - capturing rents, and (C.) makes governments more remote from their populations since they do not need to tax them, and thus strengthens grievances. See Collier et al. (2009), 9.

as le Billon (2001), which argue for the significance of PCEs in funding rebel movements (sometimes regardless of popular support), Fearon and Laitin (2003) find that “neither the share of [PCEs] in GDP nor its square is remotely significant” in their model⁸. Collier et al. (2004) finds a similarly weak and statistically insignificant effect⁹. Buhaug and Gates (2002) suggest that the literature on resources may require a distinction between “point” versus “diffuse” resources - the former are “concentrated and capturable” (such as oil and pit mining). “Diffuse” resources such as drugs and diamond mining are harder for government to control¹⁰. Furthermore, they argue that resources close to the capital should be easier for government to control. Accounting for this distinction, they find that PCEs are robustly associated with scale and location of the conflict, though they do not test whether conflict incidence/duration are affected by resources - a conclusion reached by Buhaug and Lujala (2005), who find that gemstones and coca are associated with longer conflicts, but opium has no such effect.

Political Geography

In some studies, analysis of the relationship between civil war and geography focuses less on physical characteristics of the conflict terrain, and more upon the political geography of the area. Political geography has several dimensions: Location and

⁸ Fearon and Laitin (2003), 87

⁹ This finding actually contradicts the earlier results of Collier and Hoeffler (2004), in which the relationship between PCEs and conflict took the form of an inverted U-shape. They interpreted this finding as evidence that governments could use resource rents to buy off their opposition, hence reducing the risk of conflict past a certain point of wealth acquisition. See also Collier et al. (2009), 8.

¹⁰ Buhaug and Gates (2002), 420

heterogeneity of ethnic groups, and the strategic or symbolic importance of the region to both the government and the insurgency's base of support.

The ethnic/religious makeup of states is an oft-mentioned risk factor for civil wars, and many earlier studies include measures of ethnic/religious heterogeneity as independent variables - with varying results¹¹. Later research, however, tends to examine the geographic location and settlement patterns of ethnic groups; such approaches argue that ethnic conflict is not attributable to heterogeneity per se, but rather due to geographic dispersion of minority groups. This logic is epitomized by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), who demonstrate that countries with a large but dispersed populations face a higher risk of civil war, as do countries dominated by one ethnic group, and that social fractionalization - conversely - decreases the risk of conflict. In their view, the greatest risk factor comes from ethnic "dominance" - when the largest ethnic group represents at least 45% of the population. Toft (2009), assuming that "ethnic groups will seek to rule territory in which they are geographically concentrated"¹², groups ethnic settlement patterns into four categories: Concentrated majority, concentrated minority, urban, or dispersed. She finds that the last category is most associated with high levels of secessionist violence.

Finally, studies have also treated political geography as a motive unto itself. A particular geographic locale might be important not simply because of its physical geography, but rather because of its strategic value to the government and symbolic (homeland) value to the insurgents' base. The term "sacred space", coined in Hassner

¹¹ See for instance Fearon and Laitin (2003), who find a positive but insignificant effect of ethnic/religious diversity upon conflict risk, and Sambanis (2001), who concludes that ethnic heterogeneity is in fact positively and significantly associated with civil war.

¹² Toft (2009), 86

(2003), defines certain areas as “indivisible” (unable to be compromised) on the basis of their sentimental/religious value, and identifies them as “convenient resources for political mobilization.”¹³ Specifically, Hassner refers to sites such as Jerusalem’s Temple Mount (known to the Palestinians as Haram el-Sharif), which served as a catalyst for the breakdown of the Camp David Accords in 2000, or the Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar, Kashmir, where a theft in 1964 led Hindu-Muslim rioting and (eventually) the outbreak of the second Indo-Pakistani War. However, Hassner’s definition of “sacred space” is arguably too narrow, and is better encapsulated by Toft’s definition of “indivisibility” as a homeland for a particular ethnic group¹⁴. At the same time, the government may fear that allowing the territory to secede will inspire other ethnic minorities within the state borders to do the same - an example epitomized by the former Yugoslavia. It is the symbolic indivisibility of territory that, combined with the settlement patterns of the group based in the area, makes certain geographic regions more conflict-prone than others.

Re-Considered: Geography as a Factor of Identity

My overview of the civil war literature indicates two separate tendencies of scholars: Physical geography is either treated as a set of factors that provide tactical advantages to insurgents, or as less relevant than political geography. The literature focusing on physical geography overwhelmingly treats its variables as factors which

¹³ Hassner (2003), 3

¹⁴ “[I]n many places of the world, borders and boundaries seem fixed in time and in the imagination. The name of the land has remained the same for generations, and the people inhabiting that land would rather die than lose the hope or right of return. In this context territory takes on a meaning that far exceeds its material and objective description. It becomes not an object to be exchanged but an indivisible component of a group’s identity.” See Toft (2009), 1.

determine feasibility of civil war (Collier et al. (2009)'s term), while downplaying the importance of the motives of the insurgency's rank-and-file. In contrast, the literature on political geography tries to account for the motives that lead certain ethnic groups to take up arms against their governments, but it tends to regard settlement patterns and/or strategic/symbolic value of the territory as the only important geographic factors which make regions prone to conflict.

I suggest, however, an approach that regards physical geography as a set of factors which prolong conflict not by simply providing particular tactical or strategic advantages to the rebels, but as a component of the identity which successful rebel movements rely upon in order to recruit fighters from a particular population that constitutes their base of support. The idea that the geography of a population's locale shapes their identity is not by itself new - as suggested in the introduction by the T.E. Lawrence quote - but identity as a covariate is often absent from many studies on civil war geography. So, I postulate that, as a result of their geography, some populations (ethnic, religious, or otherwise) are more easily recruited to fight in order to protect their identity, and thus likely to fight much longer than others. Consequently, insurgencies that recruit from these populations will outlast counterparts that operate in terrain that is not favorable to identity-based movements.

But how does geography affect groups' identities? Studies such as Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004) suggest that the same rough terrain which provides tactical advantages to rebels also makes the development of economic and political infrastructure difficult and thus leaves these regions poor. But as Toft (2009) points out, such theories fail to account for cases in which insurgencies take

place in (relatively) wealthier areas¹⁵ - hence the need to consider the specific history of conflict regions. The effects of distance are more interesting; scholarship has speculated that distance determines both the location of conflicts (Buhaug and Gates (2002)) and how long they will last (Buhaug and Lujala (2005)), but why? Are ethnic groups located far from the capital more likely to develop a stronger sense of identity due to their isolation, or because of the weak repression potential for nationalist/secessionist/ideological impulses (as tested - but not confirmed - by Raleigh (2007))?

Some of the aforementioned works have, as mentioned, tried to consider the geographic differences between identity and non-identity¹⁶ movements - namely, where and how they tend to fight. Even here, however, scholarship is still far from satisfying in its conclusions. For instance, Gates (2002) postulates that “Rebel groups that aim to seize power from the state will tend to fight their wars closer to the capital city than secessionist groups, *ceteris paribus*”, and, perhaps not surprisingly, confirms this relationship¹⁷. Gates also considers another possibility: “Ethnically homogeneous groups with a strong sense of identity vis-a-vis the rest of the population will, *ceteris paribus*, tend to be characterized by higher solidarity preferences than other

¹⁵ Toft notes that economic development cannot be considered the causal factor in Northern Ireland and Spain, which were home to two of the longest-running insurgencies of the 20th century. She also points out that in the former Yugoslavia, secessionist demands and violence broke out in the richest regions first, not the poorest. See Toft (2009), 86

¹⁶ This classification refers to movements which have no political program besides overthrowing the government and taking control of the state machinery themselves. The R.U.F. in Sierra Leone and N.P.F.L. in Liberia are good examples, but it is debatable whether other “identity” movements also fall into this category.

¹⁷ Gates (2002), 115. Also note that this hypothesis is tested in Buhaug and Gates (2002): “Rebel groups with an ethnic/religious identity will tend to fight their wars further away from the capital city than non-identity groups.” (423).

types of rebel groups.” The causal logic here is that “homogenous ethnically-based rebel groups have more benefits in the form of nonpecuniary rewards to induce fellow members of the same ethnic group to join the rebel movement than an ethnically heterogeneous group. The same logic applies in an ideological space. In this way, as long as ideological or ethnically-oriented ethnic groups can distribute solidary and functional rewards, which rise with greater degrees of ethnic and ideological homogeneity, such groups will be able to recruit over a larger geographic area.”¹⁸ Aside from the fact that Gates’ article seeks to devise “microfoundations [in order to] understand rebellion” rather than apply his theories to collected data, he is conflating “identity” with “secessionist” violence - an assumption that is extremely questionable. Hezbollah, for instance, is an example of an identity movement that is not ethnic/religious separatists. Despite being based in South Lebanon and deriving its strength from the Shi’a population there, Hezbollah’s ultimate political goals require it to take control in Beirut - and the organization has taken its war to the capital on numerous occasions¹⁹.

Unlike Gates (2002) and Buhaug and Gates (2002), I am not interested only in whether identity movements tend to *fight* farther from the capital - I ask whether identity movements are more likely to *emerge* in regions located farther from the capital, regardless of whether they seek independence for said region. If the movement is separatist (or “territorial”), the answer seems almost too obvious - we would indeed expect secessionist movements to be located in regions far from the capital.

¹⁸ Gates (2002), 423

¹⁹ As we will see later, UNITA in Angola is another example of an “identity” movement that is not separatist.

But for identity movements that seek to control the capital city rather than just particular provinces, it is less obvious that such rebellions would necessarily spawn in distant, isolated, and rural areas. After all, what goals could they obtain by taking the capital city that would not be served better by fighting for autonomy from the state?

My intention is not to refute or discredit all of the literature on civil war and geography, but rather to demonstrate how studies which focus upon physical geography are incomplete without consideration of the identity which gives the rebel organization its appeal to particular populations targeted for recruitment. In the following chapters, I take an existing empirical analysis of physical geographic factors - that of Buhaug and Lujala (2005) - and demonstrate how the addition of the “identity” variable from their own dataset can allow us to expand upon their conclusions.

3

Methodology and Hypotheses

I have already postulated that a unifying identity (ethnic, sectarian, or ideological), which benefits the rebels' ability to recruit fighters and maintain internal cohesion, may be the missing causal link between geography and civil war. That is, a rebellious or secessionist group's identity is in part a function of the geography of its homeland, which in turn affects its capacity to prosecute civil wars. In other words, I expect that an analysis which looks at the physical geography of conflict zones without (at a minimum) considering whether the movement is identity-based overlooks that some of the explanatory power of geographic variables may instead be attributable to the rebel group's identity. At the same time, scholarship which examines the political geography of civil wars - such as ethnic divisions and dispersion patterns, or the strategic/economic value of the territory - can benefit from considering the impact of physical geography upon the insurgents' identity. I treat physical and political geography as interlinked, seeking to distinguish the effects of the former on

the latter, and, in turn, the effects of both sets of factors upon civil war duration.

Identity and Geography - Methodology

My analysis uses the data and survival-time model from Halvard Buhaug's and Paivi Lujala's 2005 article "Accounting for Scale: Measuring Geography in Quantitative Studies of Civil War" (*Political Geography* 24, pp. 399-418). As discussed in the previous chapter, Buhaug & Lujala's article argues that the relationship between civil war duration and geographic factors has been inadequately modeled by political scientists due to flawed units of analysis. Most work on civil war has measured geographic factors at the **national** level, rather than within the **conflict zone** specifically, even though it is fallacious to conflate the two. My own theory suspects a causal link between rebel identity and the geography of the conflict area, so I agree with Buhaug and Lujala (2005) that specific geographic features of the conflict zone that do not necessarily match the rest of the state. It is for this reason that I use their data and unit of analysis - the geographic factors that I expect to influence rebel identity are likely to be specific to the conflict region.

Data

Buhaug and Lujala (2005) created a new data set which combines the PRIO Armed Conflict dataset with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, in order to accurately model the geographic features of conflict zones and rebel-held territories. The data set also includes existing PRIO data which measure the independent variables at the country level and is used in two of their models. For my own work, I rely only upon the conflict region data, except in the case of covariates which do not rely upon

region-specific characteristics (such as whether or not the conflict is territorial).

Models and Variables

Using their GIS-based conflict zone data, Buhaug and Lujala (2005) run a Weibull regression to predict duration of civil wars based on geographic factors. Their model is an Accelerated Failure-Time (AFT) model in which the hazard of failure (which, in this case, means the likelihood of the conflict ending) increases with negative coefficients in the regression output, and decreases with positive coefficients. Therefore, negative coefficients should be associated with shorter conflicts, and positive coefficients with longer conflicts. Unlike Buhaug and Lujala (2005), I chose to use a Cox rather than a Weibull duration model, which means that positive coefficients are associated with a higher baseline hazard rate of failure (proportion of rebels groups surviving up to a certain time t_i), rather than longer conflict durations. I have chosen this approach because it does not assume a duration dependency that conforms to a parametric model, which may be a fallacious assumption. Furthermore, current civil war literature tends to favor Cox over Weibull models, despite its drawbacks¹.

The dependent variable in all of my Cox models is civil war duration (in years). Since these are duration models, the dependent variable is also derived from a “censoring” variable, which means that the data is censored if the conflict terminates in a given year. The independent variables are all geographic factors whose presence in the country or conflict zone is believed to prolong civil wars (here, the “dura-

¹ The big problem with using duration models, including the Cox model, is that these models assume independence of events - this is quite clearly NOT an assumption that we can make about civil wars. Such an assumption fails to consider that a country which has already experienced a civil war may be at risk of further war. It also fails to account for exogenous factors such as the spillover effects of neighboring conflicts. For a brief discussion of the Cox model’s popularity in civil war literature, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, see Steffensmeier et al. (2005), 7.

tion” variable) by providing advantages to insurgents that allow them to continue fighting. Most of these variables are continuous (and also coded using the natural log) - the land area of the country (“lnlandar”), population (“lnpop”), distance between the conflict zone and capital city (“lndistx”), percentage of the conflict zone that is mountainous (“lnmt_cf”), and percentage of forested area (“lnfrst_cf”). The remaining variables are dichotomous (dummy) variables indicating the presence of a rainy season (“rainseas_n”), gemstones (“allgems”), coca (“coca_n”), cannabis (“cannabis_n”), opium (“opium_n”), initial intensity of the conflict (“intens_1” - coded 1 if any battle deaths were reported in the conflict’s first year), and whether or not the conflict is over territory (“terr”). I pay particularly close attention to conflict zone/capital distance, which Buhaug and Lujala (2005) identified as the most significant geographic variable affecting conflict duration.

Before running my Cox models, I also run two ordered logit models in which “identity”² and “terr” (territorial conflict) are the dependent variables, while all other geographic variables are included as independent variables. These models are used to examine different geographic properties of both types of conflicts.

Identity and Geography - Hypotheses

Using regression analysis, I will test five different hypotheses related to geography and identity.

² In a previous study using the PRIO dataset, BuGates02 define the “identity” variable as thus: “[A conflict region] is given the value 1 if the rebels originate from different ethnic and/or religious groups than the government.”

H₁: Identity conflicts and non-identity conflicts exhibit different geographic characteristics

My first hypothesis is partially inspired by scholarship on modernization/economic development and civil war. The causal logic behind this hypothesis is similar to that of Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Raleigh (2007) and might seem intuitive at first: Rough terrain and distance reduce the government's accessibility into certain regions, preventing the extension of economic infrastructure into certain regions of the state, leaving these areas under-developed and poor. The economic deprivation of these regions works to the advantage of rebels, who not only have a pool of disaffected youth from which to recruit, but also the opportunity to construct a narrative which serves as the basis of the movement's identity. For left-wing insurgencies, the poverty of the region might be explained by an exploitative capitalist class, while ethnic and religious insurgencies can blame economic under-development on racism or sectarianism.

At the same time, it would be too parochial to assume that the effects of physical geography upon identity are exclusively materialist, since most rebel organizations - even leftist - clearly do not define their "identity" in purely socio-economic terms. As mentioned earlier, I am postulating that the history and culture of a particular group is shaped by the nature of the location in which it lives, drawing upon geopolitical theory. A group of people concentrated in a mountainous area can be expected to have different values than a group which is concentrated along the coastline, regardless of ethnicity. We may be able to regard rebel groups - are insurgencies based in mountainous regions more likely to be identity movements than those based in urban areas? Furthermore, does distance between the capital city (the seat of

power) and a secessionist or conflict-prone region affect the movement's identity - are identity movements more or less likely to fight close to the capital city?

H₂: Territorial conflicts and non-territorial conflicts exhibit different geographic characteristics

My second hypothesis is related to the first, but as I cautioned in the previous chapter, territorial conflicts and identity conflicts must not be conflated (a distinction not recognized by studies such as Gates (2002)). "Territorial" conflicts are secessionist wars in which the rebels seek autonomy for the disputed region in which they are based. We should not expect that these conflicts are necessarily all "identity" conflicts, or vice-versa. But there is reason to believe that territorial and non-territorial movements, like identity and non-identity movements, fight in different geographic conditions - we would expect non-territorial conflicts to be fought closer to the capital (which the rebels seek to control) than territorial conflicts, and whether this condition holds when controlling for identity.

H₃: Identity conflicts will last longer than non-identity conflicts

My third hypothesis addresses the aforementioned weakness of Buhaug and Lujala (2005): A failure to include the PRIO dataset's "identity" variable in their model and examine how the inclusion of this variable affects the coefficients of the geographic variables. I expect that (1.) identity conflicts will last longer than non-identity conflicts, and that (2.) at least some of the effect upon conflict duration attributed by Buhaug and Lujala (2005) to geographic factors might be attributed to identity.

H₄: Territorial conflicts will last longer than non-territorial conflicts

If we postulate that territorial conflicts are more likely to be fought farther from the capital (H2), and that conflicts fought far from the capital are more likely to last longer (according to Buhaug and Lujala (2005)), it should also follow that territorial conflicts will last longer than non-territorial conflicts. Testing this hypothesis will also be important in determining whether it matters more that a group's identity is in any way related to its claim to a "sacred space" or otherwise indivisible territory (as speculated by scholars such as Hassner (2003) and Toft (2009)).

H₅: Identity and conflict zone/capital distance combine to increase conflict durations

My last hypothesis is closely related to H3, but is intended to more directly illustrate the causal chain between geography, identity, and conflict duration that I have theorized. Is fighting far away from the capital city a sufficient condition for longer conflict, or is this variable merely a necessary but not sufficient condition for identity movements (that is, can identity movements fight close to the capital and outlast non-identity movements in otherwise comparable circumstances)? And likewise, do any of the other geographic factors found by Buhaug and Lujala (2005) to affect conflict duration work by themselves, or through identity?

Analysis and Interpretation

Brief Overview

My regression analysis contains two ordered logit models (intended to test my first two hypotheses) and two Cox models (used to test my last three hypotheses). My duration models are based on that used by Buhaug and Lujala (2005), although I used a Cox rather than a Weibull model, which means that positive coefficients are associated with a higher baseline hazard rate of failure, rather than longer conflict durations. The first step, therefore, is to re-run Buhaug and Lujala (2005)'s regression using a Cox model. My results appear in Table 4.1.

In Table 4.1, we are looking at how the covariates affect the baseline hazard rate of failure, rather than predicted survival times (as in Buhaug and Lujala (2005)'s Weibull model) but my conclusions are similar to those of Buhaug and Lujala (2005): Conflict-capital distance ("Indistx") has a coefficient of -.48, so an increase on this

Table 4.1: Geography - Cox Duration Model 1

	Model 1
lnlandar	0.39 * (0.10)
lnpop	-0.20 * (0.10)
terr	-0.51 * (0.25)
intens_1	-0.62 * (0.25)
lndistx	-0.48 * (0.08)
lnmt_cf	0.05 (0.08)
lnfrst_cf	0.29 * (0.08)
rainseas_n	-0.77 * (0.35)
allgems	-0.66 * (0.27)
coca_n	-2.38 * (0.89)
cannabis_n	-0.09 (0.29)
opium_n	-0.08 (0.47)
<i>N</i>	1482
Wald	158 on 12 df, p = 0.00
<i>R</i> ²	0.11 (Max 0.88)

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

variable is associated with a reduced hazard rate. Likewise, territorial conflict is also associated with a reduced hazard rate.

How is identity related to geography?

My first hypothesis postulates that identity conflicts and non-identity conflicts exhibit different geographic characteristics - particularly values on the conflict zone/capital distance variable. While I emphasize the importance of distinguishing between “identity” movements and “territorial”/secessionist movements, it is plausible to expect that movements with an identity (particularly an ethnic identity) are likely to emerge farther from the capital, regardless of whether they desire independence for particular territories. They might also base themselves in areas that are more mountainous and/or covered in forest. To test H_1 , I have estimated an ordered logit model in which I use identity conflict (a binary variable - 0 or 1) as the dependent variable, as seen in Table 4.2.

The key findings to take away from the output in Table 4.2 are as follows:

- If a conflict is territorial, it is likely to be an identity conflict as well.
- **Conflicts taking place far from the capital are also more likely to be identity conflicts.**
- Somewhat surprisingly, conflict zones that are covered in forest and which have a rainy season are less likely to be identity conflicts, while mountains are not associated with identity conflicts in any meaningful way.
- Conflict zones that have opium-producing regions are more likely to be identity conflicts.

My third finding suggests that rough/inaccessible terrain is not necessarily a determinant of whether a conflict is an identity conflict. While the second finding is

Table 4.2: Identity Conflict vs. Geography - Binary Logit

	Model 1
(Intercept)	-4.33 * (1.14)
lnlandar	-0.35 * (0.16)
lnpop	0.50 * (0.16)
terr	3.63 * (0.50)
intens_1	-0.54 (0.36)
lndistx	0.46 * (0.13)
lnmt_cf	-0.08 (0.12)
lnfrst_cf	-0.27 * (0.11)
rainseas_n	-1.73 * (0.45)
allgems	0.93 * (0.43)
coca_n	-15.53 (1749.49)
cannabis_n	15.05 (949.96)
opium_n	0.34 (0.65)
N	382
AIC	296.07
BIC	501.23
$\log L$	-96.04

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

consistent with both Gates (2002) and Buhaug and Gates (2002), the output suggests a need to re-run Buhaug and Lujala (2005)'s model with the "identity" variable and

examine how its inclusion affects the regression coefficients for the other variables.

How do territorial/non-territorial conflicts vary in geography?

In H_2 , I speculated that territorial conflicts and non-territorial conflicts exhibit different geographic characteristics. While the link between identity and territorial movements is not necessarily indistinguishable, it is intuitive to expect that a territorial movement will be located in a region far from the capital. As with H_1 , we can test this hypothesis with another logit model, seen in Table 4.3.

We can see from Table 4.3 that:

- Conflicts taking place far from the capital are likely to be territorial conflicts.
- Conflict zones with gemstones are **less** likely to be territorial conflicts.

Adding Identity into Buhaug and Lujala's Model

Since the logit regressions in the previous sections suggest that some geographic factors (particularly conflict-capital distance) are associated with identity conflict, I will re-run Buhaug and Lujala (2005)'s model with the identity variable. This model will allow me to test my third and fourth hypotheses (H_3 and H_4). My results can be seen in Table 4.4.

The output from Table 4.4 offers tentative support for some of my suspicions:

- The “identity” variable is, perhaps unsurprisingly, associated with a reduced hazard rate, and is also statistically significant.

Table 4.3: Territorial Conflict vs. Geography - Binary Logit

	Model 1
(Intercept)	-9.22 *
	(1.20)
lnlandar	-0.36 *
	(0.16)
lnpop	0.43 *
	(0.14)
intens_1	0.30
	(0.31)
lndistx	1.16 *
	(0.20)
lnmt_cf	0.10
	(0.11)
lnfrst_cf	0.18
	(0.09)
rainseas_n	-0.40
	(0.35)
allgems	-1.98 *
	(0.39)
coca_n	-15.88
	(960.08)
cannabis_n	0.51
	(0.78)
opium_n	0.71
	(0.50)
N	385
AIC	360.57
BIC	550.33
$\log L$	-132.29

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

- Although increased conflict-capital distance (“Indistx”) is associated with a reduced hazard rate and statistically significant in both models, the size of the coefficient drops from -0.48 in Figure 1.3 to -0.41 in Figure 1.4. Thus, the

Table 4.4: Geography - Cox Duration Model w/ Identity

	Model 1
lnlandar	0.33 * (0.10)
lnpop	-0.14 (0.10)
identity	-0.98 * (0.27)
terr	0.01 (0.30)
intens_1	-0.64 * (0.26)
lndistx	-0.41 * (0.08)
lnmt_cf	0.06 (0.08)
lnfrst_cf	0.25 * (0.07)
rainseas_n	-1.02 * (0.32)
allgems	-0.57 * (0.23)
coca_n	-2.61 * (0.93)
cannabis_n	-0.07 (0.23)
opium_n	0.12 (0.34)
<i>N</i>	1479
Wald	156 on 13 df, p = 0.00
<i>R</i> ²	0.12 (Max 0.88)

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

inclusion of the “identity” variable in the model may reduce the explanatory power of “lndistx”.

- Both identity and distance appear to matter - ignoring identity gives an artificially inflated effect for distance, because conflict-capital distance is correlated with identity.
- Territorial conflicts, however, **do not** appear to last longer than non-territorial conflicts - the coefficient is both positive and not statistically significant. The effect of this variable is now insignificant.

The results suggest, overall, that distance and identity are both important factors in conflict duration when in combination.

We can better interpret this model by plotting survival functions for different scenarios, and then adding confidence intervals. Using the Zelig package in R, I have created functions for scenarios in which the “identity” variable is set to 0 and 1, as seen in Fig. 4.1.

These functions show the percentage of conflicts (on the Y-axis) that survive up to a given point in time (X-axis), and the dotted line corresponds to the second scenario (in which the “identity” variable was set to 1). The confidence intervals suggest that when the other variables are held at the median, the baseline hazard rate of failure (conflict termination) is consistently lower for identity conflicts vs. non-identity conflicts at any given point in time.

In the plot visible in Fig. 4.2, however, I ran two survival functions in which the “Indistx” variable was set to the 1st and 3rd quartile values, while “identity” was held at 0, and all other variables were held at their median values. These functions suggest a very different conclusion from Buhaug and Lujala (2005)’s analysis: There appears to be no significant difference in the survival rates of insurgent groups when

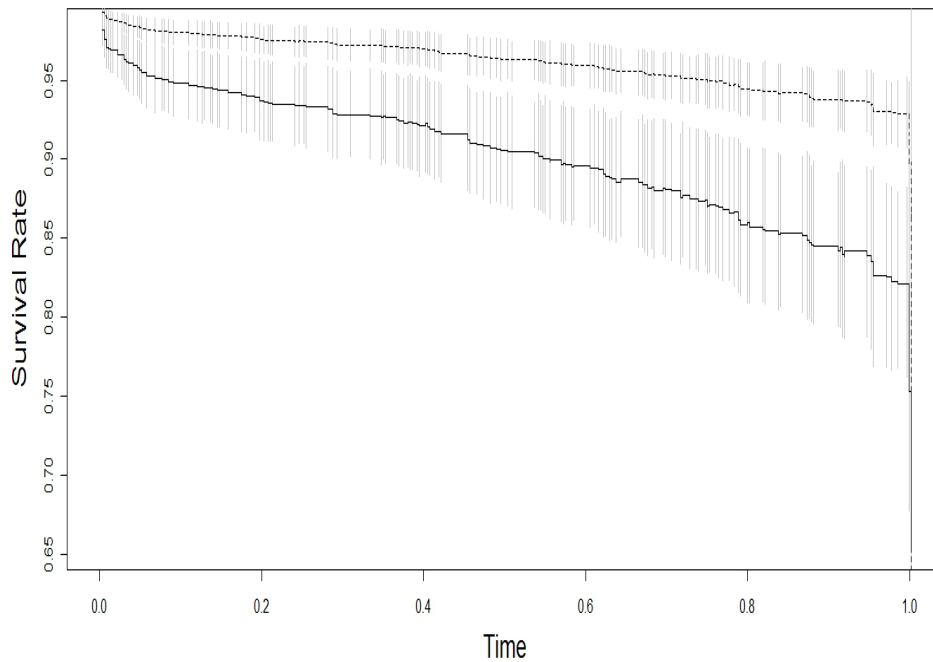


FIGURE 4.1: Identity vs. Non-Identity Movements

distance is varied, if the conflicts are not identity-based. It must be cautioned that this simulation is not particularly meaningful - since we have a proportional hazard model, shifting a variable associated with a positive difference in the baseline hazard inevitably produces a change in the hazard rate for the model.

Adding Interaction Between Identity and Geographic Distance

Given the results in the previous section, I have decided to add an interaction term into the model for conflict-capital distance (“*Indistx*”) and identity conflict (“*identity*”). This model allows me to test H_5 , in which I speculated that the combination of the aforementioned variables combines to increase conflict duration. My results

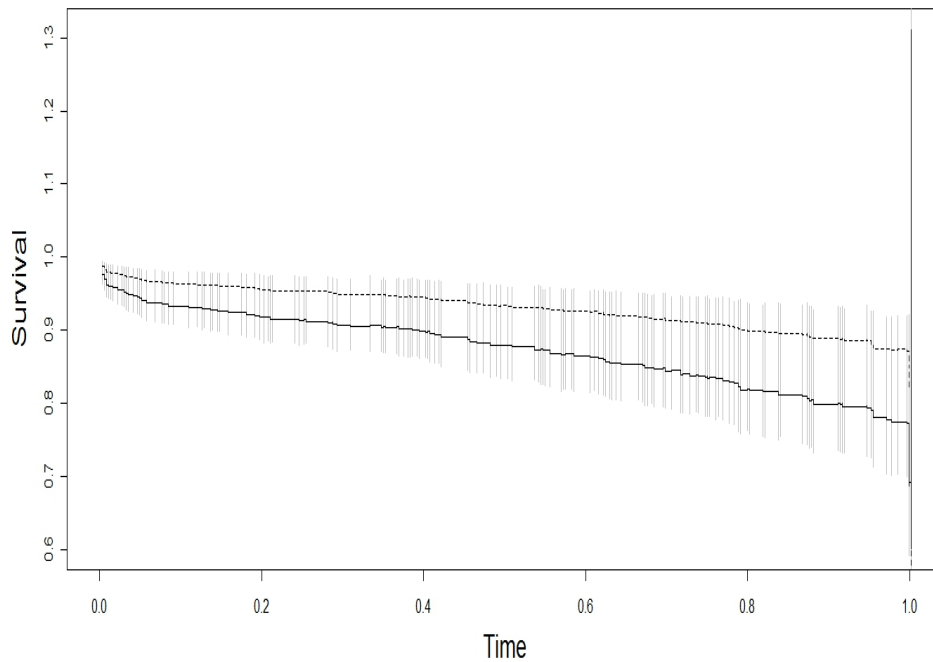


FIGURE 4.2: Close vs. Far Conflict/Capital Distance

appear in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 provides some further results of interest. On the one hand, the coefficients and effects for both “identity” and “Indistx” increase substantially. On the other hand, the interaction term coefficient and effect is associated with an increase in the hazard rate but is also not statistically significant. Does this mean that the combined effects of identity and distance do not increase conflict duration above the effects of the individual variables?

We can use this equation to test the different values on the study variables (note that we are assuming all else is held constant):

Table 4.5: Geography - Cox Duration Model w/ Identity + Interaction

	Model 1
lnlandar	0.22 * (0.10)
lnpop	-0.15 (0.09)
identity	-3.67 * (1.10)
terr	-0.14 (0.30)
intens_1	-0.61 * (0.23)
lndistx	-0.57 * (0.10)
lnmt_cf	0.09 (0.07)
lnfrst_cf	0.18 * (0.08)
rainseas_n	-0.85 * (0.30)
allgems	-0.58 * (0.22)
coca_n	-2.39 * (0.99)
cannabis_n	0.03 (0.24)
opium_n	0.12 (0.32)
identity:lndistx	0.53 * (0.20)
<i>N</i>	1479
Wald	210 on 14 df, p = 0.00
<i>R</i> ²	0.14 (Max 0.88)

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

$$\hat{Y}_{duration} = -3.67\hat{X}_{identity} - 0.57\hat{Z}_{lndistx} + 0.53\hat{V}_{interaction}$$

To begin, we can compare different values on the “identity” variable (0 and 1) while “lndistx” is held constant at 1:

$$\hat{Y}_{duration,non-identity} = -3.67(0) - 0.57(1) + 0.53(0 \times 1) = -.57$$

$$\hat{Y}_{duration,identity} = -3.67(1) - 0.57(1) + 0.53(1 \times 1) = -3.71$$

As in the previous Cox model (without the interaction term), we see that adding identity produces a greater effect on duration. However, when we set the “lndistx” to a much higher value (such as 7, which is close to the maximum value for the variable) **and** include an “identity” value of 1, the effects of the two variables cancel each other out:

$$\hat{Y}_{duration,identity+fardistance} = -3.67(1) + 0.53(1 \times 7) = -0.02$$

This interpretation of the interaction model suggests that if identity and conflict zone/capital distance are conditional upon each other, they are also substitute causes of duration. Identity groups will outlast non-identity groups, while those fighting far from the capital tend to outlast those fighting close it. If a rebel group has either of these two characteristics, it will tend to outlast counterparts without such advantages, but having both provides no special advantage.

To further illustrate that the two variables are interchangeable, I have run several additional simulations to illustrate different variation on conflict zone/capital distance and identity (which can be seen in Fig. 4.3, Fig. 4.4, Fig. 4.5, and Fig. 4.6). The simulations are meant to illustrate that difference in baseline hazard rates for variation on both terms is not significant, and that the confidence intervals always overlap.

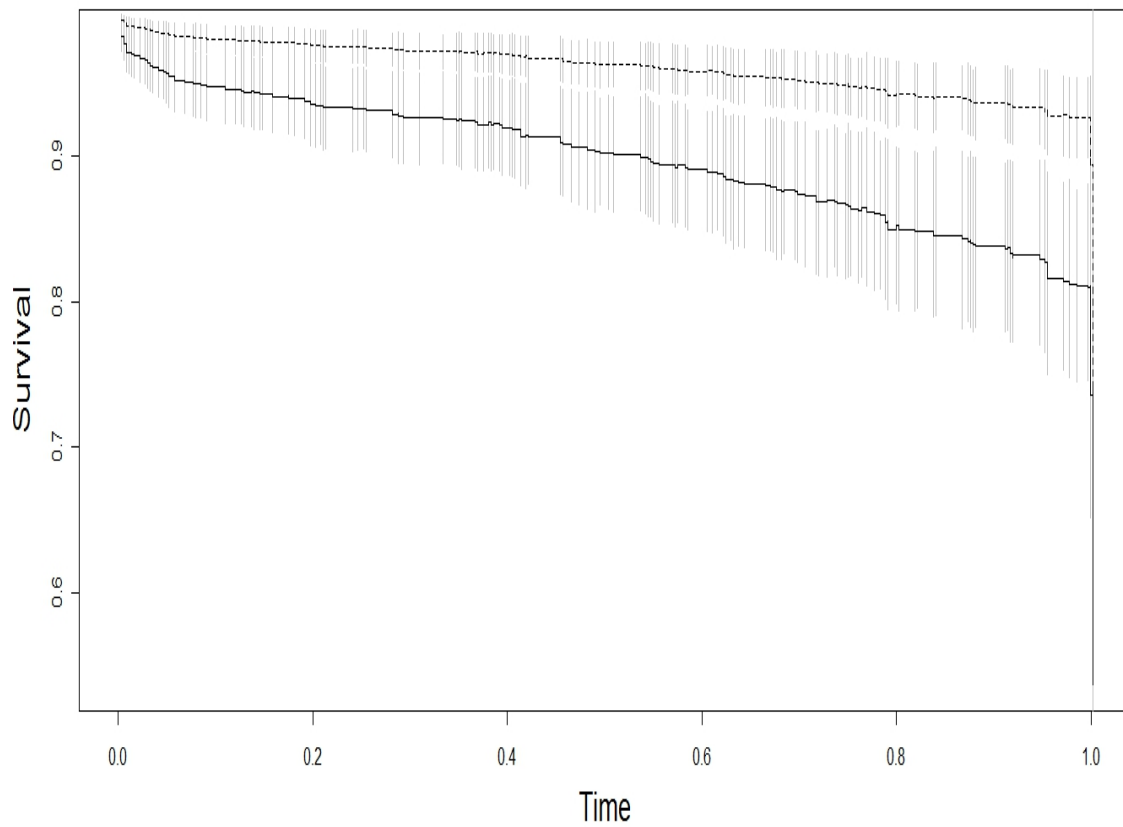


FIGURE 4.3: Interaction Model 1 - Identity vs. Non-Identity Conflicts, Conflict-Capital Distance = 5.00

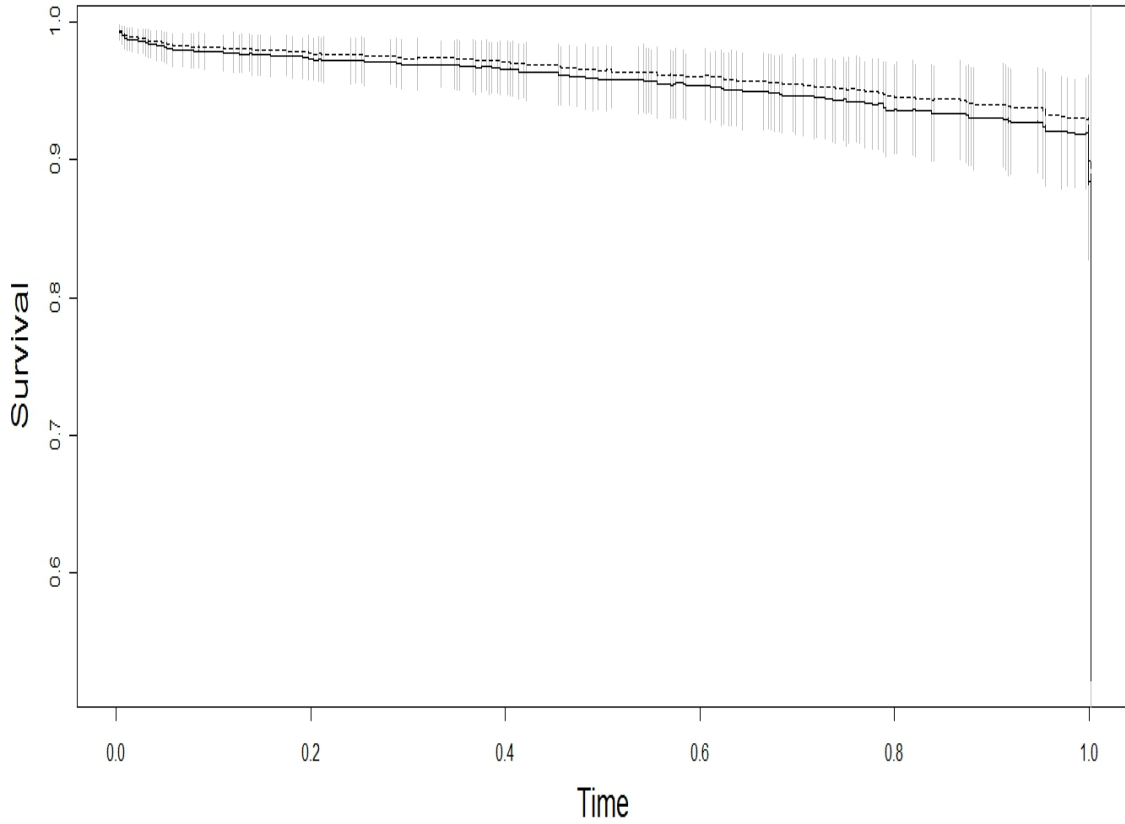


FIGURE 4.4: Interaction Model 2 - Identity vs. Non-Identity Conflicts, Conflict-Capital Distance = 6.56

The last two plots are particularly notable: Surprisingly, setting identity at 0 does not show a predicted effect with a small standard error. This might be because only a small number of cases are non-identity movements and also fight far from the capital. Overall, however, my analysis in this section appears to confirm the hypothesis of Gates (2002): “Geographical distance is not always necessary. Ideology and ethnicity

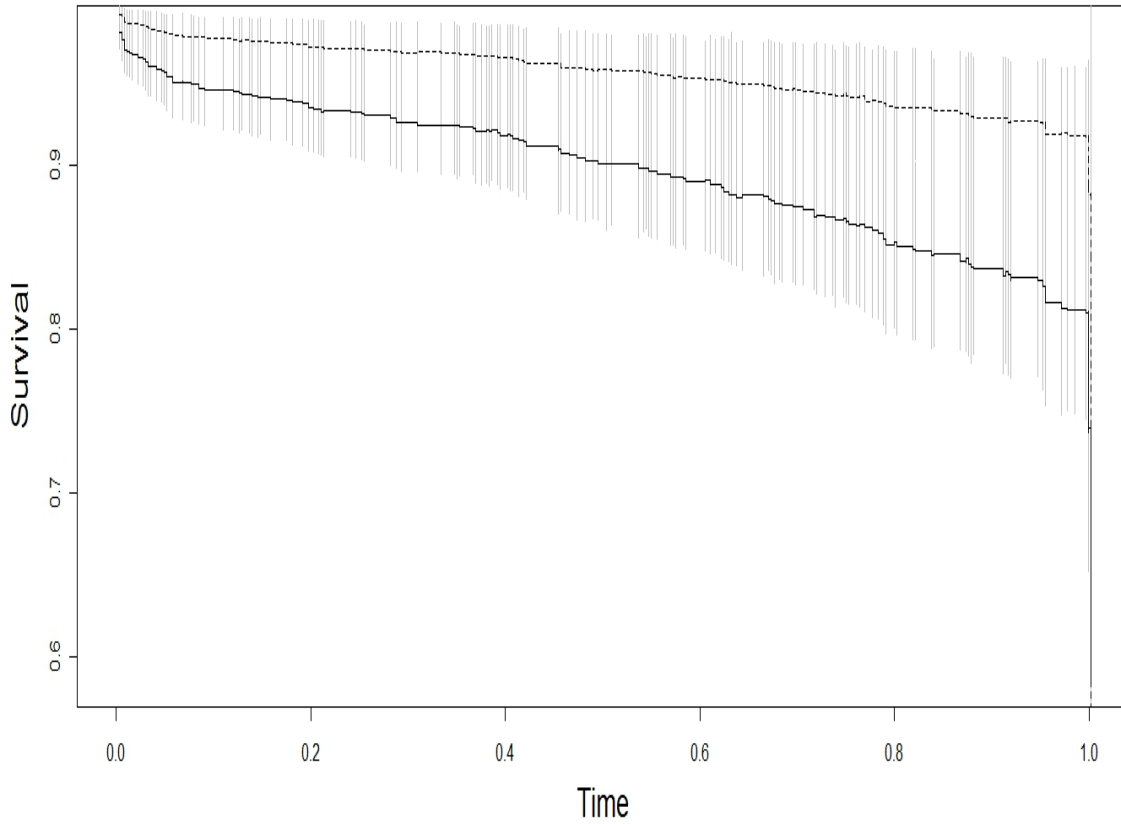


FIGURE 4.5: Interaction Model 3 - Identity = 0, 1st/3rd Quartile Values for Conflict/Capital Distance

can compensate for the lack of geographical distance.”¹

¹ Gates02, 126

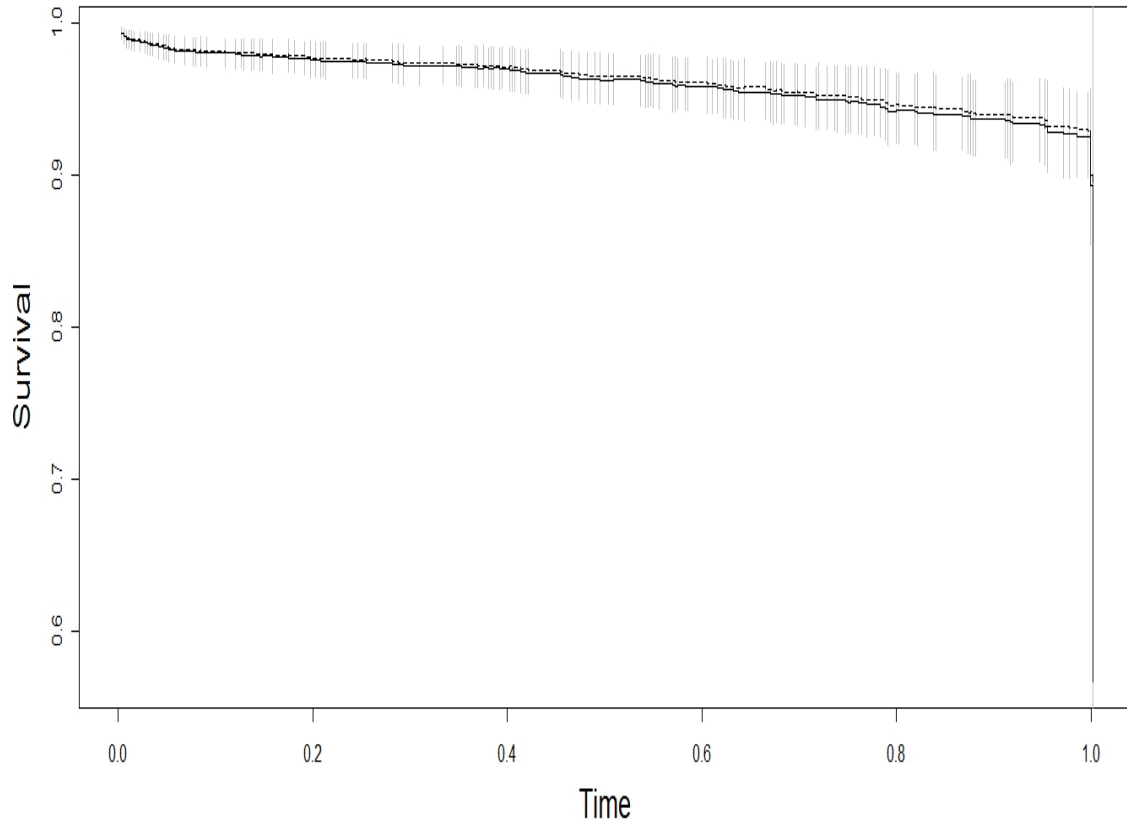


FIGURE 4.6: Interaction Model 4 - Identity = 1, 1st/3rd Quartile Values for Conflict/Capital Distance

Case Studies: Angola and Mozambique

Overview:

In the previous chapter, my regression analysis has shown that whatever association might be drawn between geography and conflict duration, identity can effectively substitute for unfavorable environmental conditions. Yet I also demonstrated that there are still some geographic differences between identity and non-identity conflicts - regardless of whether or not they are territorial. In order to illustrate the relationship between geography and identity, I have selected two civil wars to use as case studies in a controlled comparison - the Angolan Civil War (1975-2002) and the Mozambican Civil War (1976-1992). Ultimately, identity is the decisive factor in both of these cases - I demonstrate its importance to rebels in Angola, and credit the absence of a distinct and unifying identity in Mozambique with the downfall of rebels in that conflict. My case study comparison follows the time-tested “method

of difference” first articulated by John Stuart Mill in *A System of Logic*¹, in which case studies are selected for similar general characteristics but different values on the study variable.

Angola and Mozambique are ideal case studies for a number of reasons, not the least of which are historical similarities. Both sub-Saharan African countries are former Portuguese colonies, and both descended into civil war shortly after their independence from Portugal (both countries also achieved independence in the same year - 1975). Both wars also became proxy conflicts in which external powers intervened with funding, arms, and even ground troops: Soviet/Eastern Bloc-supported Marxist regimes fought anti-communist rebel movements backed by the South African apartheid regime and other states.

A quick glance at the values on the independent variables in Table 5.1² further demonstrates why Angola and Mozambique are such excellent case studies for my purposes. Geographically, both countries have similar values for most of the geographic variables: High values on conflict zone/capital distance, similar conflict zone land area, and relatively mountainous terrain (both countries are dominated by plateaus)³. Most importantly, Angola and Mozambique differ in value on the identity conflict variable, which I have identified as decisive in my regression analysis, but do not vary on the territorial conflict variable, whose significance has been disputed in the previous chapter. Both conflicts also lasted for a very long time, but significantly,

¹ For a brief overview of this case study comparison method, see Chapter 2 of Evera (1997).

² This table was generated using R 2.13.0 to examine the dataset.

³ There is, however, one substantial difference between these two conflicts, as will be seen - Angola had an abundance of oil and diamond wealth, which was used by the conflict parties to fund their efforts. In Mozambique, external funding was the only source of income for the rebels.

Table 5.1: Case Study Comparison - Dataset Values on Study Variable

Country	Angola	Mozambique
Duration	1975-2002 (27 years)	1976-1992 (16 years)
Territorial Conflict?	No	No
Identity Conflict?	Yes	No
Conflict Zone/Capital Distance	6.35	6.56
Land Area of Conflict Zone	7.13	6.67
Mountainous Terrain	2.64	2.95
Forested Terrain	3.85	2.95
Gemstones?	Yes	No
Rainy Season?	Yes	No

the Angolan Civil War outlasted Mozambique's Civil War by over a decade.

Given the similar geographic characteristics of both countries, can we associate the substantial difference in conflict duration with the absence of a coherent rebel identity in Mozambique? I argue that Angola's UNITA rebels legitimized themselves through a nationalist program that was both ethnically inclusive, yet appealing to the aspirations of the Ovimbundu tribe from which the group recruited most of its fighters. The Ovimbundu identity which UNITA exploited was shaped by the geography of the Central Angolan Bi Plateau in which the tribe originated. In both of my case studies, I seek to demonstrate how the physical geography of both countries influenced the experience of the rebels' respective bases of support, and consequently, the potential for each insurgency to cultivate a unifying identity.

Angola:

As one of sub-Saharan Africa's longest conflicts (lasting 27 years), the Angolan Civil War is an ideal case study for examining factors that are hypothesized to affect conflict duration. Jonas Savimbi's National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the largest insurgent group seeking to oust the Luanda-based Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government from power, benefited from diamond mining and other favorable geographic conditions, such as a base located far to the Southeast. It is ostensibly an "identity" civil war because the membership of the two main factions was mono-ethnic: The MPLA government drew support mostly from the Mbundu tribe, while UNITA was 95% Ovimbundu, an ethnic group comprising 38% of the Angolan population⁴). Yet the Angolan Civil War was also not a separatist conflict, since both sides ultimately wanted power in Luanda - both groups were, in other words, Angolan nationalists rather than ethnic nationalists. While UNITA has sometimes been depicted as a loot-seeking organization driven by Savimbi's personal ambitions and/or a puppet of external powers, other scholarship has demonstrated the importance of UNITA's Ovimbundu identity to its appeal. It was this sense of identity that allowed UNITA to endure as a viable armed movement for over a quarter-century. As I demonstrate, the Ovimbundu identity was shaped heavily by the central highlands of Angola.

⁴ A third faction, the FNLA, was mostly Kikongo, though this group became irrelevant and marginalized early in the conflict

The Geography of the Ovimbundu:

When Angola and geography are discussed in case studies on civil war, scholarship tends to focus upon the role of Primary Commodity Exports (PCEs) in prolonging the civil war by allowing both sides to purchase arms and other war material. For much of the conflict, UNITA financed itself through an extensive diamond mining operation in the northeast of the country, while the MPLA government funded itself through oil reserves in the northwest and Cabinda province. Angola is the second-largest Sub-Saharan oil producer and fourth-largest diamond producer in the world⁵, and UNITA officials have often acknowledged the importance of diamonds to the organization's struggle⁶. The use of mineral resources to finance the war effort on both sides took on greater importance in the 1990s, after the Cold War ended and both sides lost their superpower sponsors; indeed, the failure of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol, which was intended to end the war by integrating UNITA into a unity government, was largely attributed to disputes over control of diamond production. The fact that Angola's PCEs were a substantial source of funding is not their only significance; as Philippe le Billon observes, the location of resources in Angola was just as important as their presence⁷.

⁵ Ciment (1997), 7

⁶ For example, in 1998, former UNITA Chief of Staff General Arlindo Pena 'Ben Ben' claimed that "diamonds are UNITA's lifeblood. Without them UNITA wouldn't be able to maintain its options. We needed to have choices,. . . [seeing] what the government is doing now [attacking UNITA], UNITA needed to maintain military reserves so that the government doesn't destroy us. This is the reality." See le Billon (2001), 68.

⁷ le Billon points out that the MPLA was able to use oil as an "economic sanctuary" for financing the war effort due to the "almost exclusively off-shore location of the oil fields, putting the sector out of the reach of UNITA attacks, and the MPLA's military hold on, and 'ethnic' affiliation with, the seat of power, Luanda." Likewise, he argues that UNITA's access to diamonds would have been largely negated had the diamonds been available only from kimberlites or seabed deposits, in which

The tendency to reduce Angola's conflict geography down to its natural resources, however, ignores the importance of the area in which UNITA operated and recruited most of its fighters. Until the late-1990s, the war was fought mostly in the central part of the country, the heart of Ovimbunduland. Clionadh Raleigh's "conflict density" map, created using ACLED data, indicates that the greatest proportion of conflict-related incidents took place in the central highlands provinces of Bie and Huambo, the northern provinces of Uige and Zaire, and the southern provinces of Cuando Cubango⁸. Huambo in particular served as one of the most important flashpoints in the conflict, becoming the "Jerusalem of Angola" due to its political, strategic, and symbolic significance to both sides. At one point, this city, formerly known as Nova Lisboa ("New Lisbon") during the colonial area, was even declared by Savimbi to be the capital of a new Democratic Socialist Republic of Angola, though it fell to MPLA forces early in the conflict. This did not mean that UNITA itself operated from Huambo; for strategic reasons, Savimbi based his forces in Jamba, far to the southeast of Angola and close to the borders with Namibia and Zambia⁹. But the scope and location of the fighting in the civil war calls attention to the distinctive geographic features of central Angola which shaped the region's history.

The central highland Bie Plateau is characterized by a moderately humid climate with 1,000-1,500 mm annual rainfall in the northernmost parts (at the highest levels

case, "UNITA would undoubtedly have found their control and exploitation more difficult, if not impossible, due to access and investment problems." See le Billon (2001), 63-71

⁸ Raleigh (2007), 14

⁹ Hare notes that UNITA's decision to use Jamba as its base of operations allowed it to remain under the protection of South African Defense Forces (SADF) artillery and aircraft, since Namibia was under South African administration at the time. The SADF also set up the bunkers, anti-aircraft batteries, and minefields which protected Savimbi's base. See Hare (1998), 5.

of elevation)¹⁰, and 600-800 mm further south. The fact that this area is a plateau makes it both naturally defensible, by virtue of elevation, and also extremely rural, by virtue of weather. 80-90% of the population makes its living in agriculture (and nearly half of Angola's rural population residing in the region). For Portugal, which became Angola's colonial patron following the Berlin Conference in 1885, the Bie Plateau was an ideal location in which to establish plantations that grew coffee, maize, and cotton. However, in the earliest days of Portuguese contact with the Ovimbundu, penetration of the plateau proved difficult - as the anthropologist Wilfrid Dyson Hambly pointed out, "the Ovimbundu were, in the early centuries of contact with the Portuguese, invaders encouraged in the building up of their tribal life and resources...Never were the Portuguese strong enough completely to subjugate northern Angola. Relationships with natives, especially the Bihean section of the Ovimbundu, were directed toward alliances on a commercial basis."¹¹ This informal system of alliances was codified after the 1885 Berlin Conference, when Angola officially became a Portuguese colony - under the system, the colonial administration worked out deals with Ovimbundu chieftains in which plantations were built to grow crops that were later transported to the coast via the Benguela Railway. In return, the plantations employed a substantial number of Ovimbundu workers who migrated

¹⁰ The name "Ovimbundu" itself means "people of the fog", in reference to the misty conditions on the plateau.

¹¹ Hambly further elaborates upon the natural defensibility of the Bie Plateau by calling attention to the placement of villages, which "are built on hillsides having a commanding view of the surrounding country. There is in the nature of the land a natural protection from enemies." He also explains that the nomadic traditions of the Ovimbundu can be attributed to their environment: "the Benguela Highlands are an admirable base from which expeditions both predatory and commercial might, and actually did set out eastward to the interior of Africa, and southwest to the cattle-keeping country." See Hambly (1934), 109-114

from the southern and centremost parts of Angola; at least one estimate from 1958 suggested that 75% of the indigenous male population was involved in coffee production¹². In comparison to central Angola, the northwest areas of the colony were far more directly linked - culturally and socially - to the Portuguese administration. In Luanda, in particular, the Portuguese assimilation program sought to end tribal cultural identities and practices in order to produce Africans who were considered *civilizados*. Ethnic identity was considered a threat to this program; consequently, northwestern Angola developed a cultural identity that was arguably more urbanized and cosmopolitan, compared to the other areas of Angola where tribal identity tended to flourish even under colonialism¹³

Another major component of the Ovimbundu colonial experience was their conversion to Christianity. Indeed, Heywood traces the roots of Ovimbundu nationalism to the North American Congregational missionaries' work in the Bie Plateau: "the Ovimbundu were able to use their adherence to Protestantism as a channel for their aspirations. The eventual outcome was the construction of a substantial network of schools, hospitals, and other institutions which would eventually become the nucleus for an alternate, Ovimbundu-controlled structure."¹⁴ More importantly, Christianity did allow the Ovimbundu to become somewhat Westernized¹⁵ while still retaining

¹² Guimaraes (1998), 20

¹³ As Guimaraes points out, this is also one of the reasons that the Luanda-based anti-colonial forces gravitated towards Marxism rather than an ethnic identity - though the MPLA was still mono-ethnic in practice if not in theory. See Guimaraes (1998), 24-25.

¹⁴ Heywood (1989), 50

¹⁵ Hambly observed that "Christian missions have an influence on dress, beliefs, and habits". He also pointed out that Christianity had altered the justice system in Ovimbunduland: "Appeal to a chief or a king was the old method of securing justice, and at present such appeal may be made by an aggrieved Ovimbundu; but should the appellant be dissatisfied he turns to the Portuguese

their ethnic pride. Heywood describes the effect as such: “While the missionaries looked upon this transformation primarily as a mechanism for religious conversion, to the Ovimbundu it was an alternate society under their control.”¹⁶

Contrary to later perceptions by other tribes, Ovimbundu relations with the Portuguese were not always rosy. Declines in the prices of commodities grown in Angola could lead to dissatisfaction and revolts, such as the Bailundo Revolt of 1902, whose historical significance later resonated with Ovimbundu nationalists in UNITA. However, the Ovimbundu experience under colonialism from the late 19th century onwards can be described as fairly independent; that the tribe’s identity endured under colonialism is, in large part, due to their environment. This sense of independence and nationalism did not prevent their ostracism by other tribes - the Kikongo, who were predominantly farmers displaced by colonists, saw the Ovimbundu workers who worked on plantations as “subservient”, while the Mbundu and northwestern tribes saw them as less sophisticated and rural¹⁷. It is perhaps no surprise that one of the major issues in the Angolan Civil War became the MPLA government’s attempts to create a Soviet-style cooperative farm system, along with their attempts to promote Marxism in the countryside. MPLA administrators went to rural areas to carry out Luanda’s policies and coerce peasants into the state-run cooperatives (often at gunpoint). Consequently, during the Civil War, these cooperative farms later became frequent UNITA targets, though they also had the side effect of scattering peasants

court.” See Hambly (1934), 347.

¹⁶ Heywood (1989), 51

¹⁷ The fact that Portuguese displaced the Kikongo farmers, many of whom wound up in Zaire, made them more difficult for the FNLA to mobilize behind the Angolan nationalist cause, since they were away from Angola for so long that they no longer regarded it as their own country. See Ciment (1997), 33

across the countryside. To the Ovimbundu, the MPLA government was attempting to exert a level of control that surpassed that which they had known even under the Portuguese¹⁸. The perceived threat from the MPLA to their distinct cultural and historical identity, fostered under the colonial system, served the goals of Jonas Savimbi when he founded UNITA.

When we consider the Ovimbundu experience under colonialism and afterwards, two conclusions emerge:

- The Ovimbundu developed an extremely strong sense of identity that is, in part, a consequence of the Bie highlands' geography.
- The Ovimbundu were often resistant to efforts by Luanda - whether administered by Portugal or the MPLA regime - to control them.

In the next section, we will see the ways in which UNITA exploited nationalist sentiment amongst the Ovimbundu.

How UNITA Exploited the Ovimbundu Identity:

Jonas Savimbi, UNITA's founder and driving personality, has garnered a reputation internationally as a con-artist whose rebels had no genuine cause. During the Cold War, the MPLA regime and many on the the Western political left accused him of being a puppet for apartheid South Africa, while in the 1990s, Savimbi was accused of being motivated solely by personal ambition at the expense of ordinary Angolans.

¹⁸ As Ciment points out, UNITA often allied itself with traditional Ovimbundu chieftains who represented rural interests; the MPLA tried to discredit UNITA by pointing out that many of these chieftains had previously been co-opted by the Portuguese, in order to discredit UNITA's claims to represent Angolan nationalism. See Ciment (1997), 16.

Savimbi's ideological wavering is obviously consistent with his choice of sponsors - originally trained and armed by the People's Republic of China in the 1960s, Savimbi claimed at first to be a Maoist, but later advocated anti-communism, democracy, and free-market economics in order to gain support from South Africa and the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, when the Cold War ended, Cuban troops and Soviet advisers withdrew their support for the MPLA, which meant that ideology could no longer be used to justify the war. Savimbi advocated elections in 1992, and then promptly went back to war after he lost these same elections. From 1992 until the end of the war in 2002, Savimbi funded UNITA through an extensive diamond-mining operation based more to the north of the country, rather than the central Bie and Huambo provinces in which UNITA had originated.

Whatever opportunism might be evident in his foreign policy, however, Savimbi's ability to recruit domestic supporters to his cause rested almost entirely upon Ovimbundu nationalism - as Heywood puts it, "having a domestic political base brought more political gain than pleasing foreign supporters."¹⁹ Savimbi already had close personal connections to the struggle, since his family had a deep anti-colonial background. His grandfather had fought in the Bailundo Revolt of 1902, while his father was also a nationalist who took pride in his language and culture (despite also being willing to exploit his Protestant status to be an *assimilado*)²⁰. Savimbi also used his familiarity with the Umbundu language and Ovimbundu culture to appeal to his followers' sense of identity. UNITA propaganda and popular myth portrayed Savimbi as a type of "hunter-king", a particularly evocative motif in Ovimbundu culture

¹⁹ Heywood (1998), 150

²⁰ Heywood (1989), 51

harkening back to the pre-colonial days²¹ Savimbi's education and ability to evade security forces only appeared to corroborate this mythology that he developed around himself. UNITA also gained attention well into the 1990s when Savimbi began conducting witchcraft trials at Jamba, another Ovimbundu ritual still practiced in the most rural areas of the Bie highlands²². Even UNITA's economic and social policy borrowed heavily from Ovimbundu tradition (rather than foreign ideologies such as Maoism or free-market democracy, which Savimbi advocated in order to appease his superpower sponsors). In the 1980s, UNITA started a program called Terras Libres ("Free Lands") based out of Jamba, which Heywood describes as having "a striking similarity to [the system of government] which the Ovimbundu had established in the central highlands during the colonial period."²³ There was, thus, never any doubt that UNITA was a distinctly Ovimbundu movement at a time which presented an alternative to the "Kongo chavinism" of the FNLA and the mestizo-led leadership of the MPLA - and as mentioned previously, the supporters of both movements already held derogatory stereotypes of the Ovimbundu. As one UNITA supporter put it: "We needed something we could identify with... psychologically it was healthy for the Ovimbundu...UNITA was something that was ours, something we could work for, something we could touch and really be proud of."²⁴

Portraying his movement as a vehicle for Ovimbundu aspirations did not mean

²¹ For more on the glorification of hunters in Ovimbundu society, see Hambly's chapter on Religion. Hambly reports visiting several mausoleums built from rock and adorned with animal bones - these tombs were encountered in the district of Ganda and in the Vasele country in the hinterland of Novo Redondo. See Hambly (1934), 272-273.

²² Heywood (1998), 147

²³ Heywood (1989), 60

²⁴ Heywood (1989), 52

that Savimbi could openly describe UNITA as an Ovimbundu nationalist movement. At times, he sought to downplay the ethnic dimension of the conflict and reminded his supporters that they were first and foremost Angolan nationalists rather than Ovimbundu nationalists specifically²⁵. Furthermore, whatever ethnic tensions existed between the Ovimbundu and other tribes, and however much Savimbi might have legitimized himself through appeals to Ovimbundu culture, some scholars do not believe that Savimbi's appeal to Ovimbundu ethnic pride was effective by the 1990s. Bender points out that the MPLA had recognized the need to better integrate Ovimbundu leaders - including some who had served in UNITA itself - into its own ranks. MPLA President Eduard dos Santos appointed a number of Ovimbundu to ministerial and deputy ministerial positions in 1992, in anticipation of the elections required by the 1991 Bicesse Accords. By the time the elections took place, Ovimbundu constituted over half of the armed forces and nearly a third of the Cabinet members²⁶. Bender summarizes the results as thus: "The result is that Savimbi's old appeals to ethnic solidarity ring hollow and do not have the same effect they had a decade ago. This has left Savimbi in the untenable position of fighting a war without a cause."²⁷ This almost certainly explains why UNITA was increasingly forced to recruit young men and boys to JURA (its youth wing) through press-ganging and top-down indoctrination by the time of the Lusaka Protocol in 1994 and Savimbi's

²⁵ For instance, Savimbi made an address to supporters in December 1974 where he called attention to the Lunda and Cokwe role in UNITA and told supporters that UNITA was "not a mono-ethnic organization". See Heywood (1989), 66.

²⁶ At the time, the Secretary-General of the MPLA and Prime Minister, Marcolino Moco, was Ovimbundu.

²⁷ Bender (2001), 94

death (which led to UNITA's immediate surrender in 2002)²⁸.

Nonetheless, if UNITA's identity became weaker in the final decade of the war, it can be argued that Savimbi skillfully exploited the Ovimbundu identity with great success for over 20 years, exacerbating the length of an already-brutal conflict. And the ethnic consciousness recognized by Savimbi as a unifying identity in UNITA owes a great deal, as we have seen, to the nature of the environment which the Ovimbundu called their home.

Case Implications:

Rather than approach Angola as a case in which external funding and exploitation of mineral wealth fueled bloodshed, I have demonstrated that the Ovimbundu identity was truly the decisive factor in prolonging the conflict. When the rural central highlands population felt that their way of life was threatened by the MPLA's collective farming program, Savimbi rallied the Ovimbundu to resist. That the Ovimbundu developed such a strong sense of identity in defiance of both the Portuguese colonialists and the MPLA regime is a product of the geographic features of the Bie Plateau. However, while I have speculated that conflict zone/capital distance is the single geographic feature most likely to prolong conflict, the Bie Plateau's mountainous (or rather, steep) terrain and rainy season appear to have been the geographic factors that were most instrumental in shaping the Ovimbundu identity²⁹. This is not to

²⁸ It should be noted that Bender fails to account for several major blunders by the MPLA. The most notable of these blunders is the Bloody Friday massacre of 1993, in which MPLA forces ethnically cleansed Bakongo and some Ovimbundu in territory that they controlled, due to fears that these elements would support covert UNITA attacks within Luanda. Such incidents may have, at least temporarily, galvanized Ovimbundu support for UNITA.

²⁹ Interestingly, my conclusions match those of Raleigh; in his own study, Angola was the only country in which mountainous terrain appeared to affect conflict incident density. See Raleigh

say that this variable is irrelevant - the colonial experience of Angolans in Luanda - a city closer to the coast than the Bie Plateau - was clearly different than that of the Ovimbundu in central Angola.

Mozambique:

In contrast to the intractability of the Angolan Civil War, in which the peace process repeatedly broke down repeatedly and the only solution proved to be military defeat of the rebels, the Mozambican Civil War ended with a peaceful resolution. In October 1992, the ruling Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the rebel National Resistance Movement of Mozambique (RENAMO) signed the Rome General Peace Accords, which marked the end of 16 years of war. The Rome Accords followed a lengthy process of democratization in which Mozambique transitioned from a one-party socialist state to a multi-party system in which FRELIMO and RENAMO would be the largest center-left and center-right parties (respectively). The war caused immense suffering - killing nearly 900,000 people, displacing millions, and threatening millions more with starvation and disease - but it also represents one of the few examples of successful conflict resolution in contemporary Africa.

Mozambique's Civil War ended peacefully because RENAMO, unlike Angola's UNITA, was a rebel group that had no indigenous roots - rather, it was a group created by Rhodesia to de-stabilize Mozambique and punish FRELIMO, a regional rival. Later supported by South Africa's apartheid regime, RENAMO remained almost entirely dependent on external support for the duration of its 16-year struggle against FRELIMO. Ironically, the opportunity for RENAMO to find an indigenous base

(2007), 29.

of support was readily available: Like Angola, Mozambique was divided by region and tribe. Furthermore, Mozambique's divisions were, much like those of Angola, attributable to the country's geography - which FRELIMO failed to grasp when it embarked on a massive collective farming program that became the subject of much discontent in rural areas. Yet despite the potential to capitalize upon anti-FRELIMO sentiment, Margaret Hall observed in 1990 that RENAMO had nonetheless "failed to develop the political identity commensurate with its military strength."³⁰ The absence of an identity meant that the leadership RENAMO, unlike UNITA in Angola, chose to cut its losses rather than risk further losses in combat.

Mozambique's Physical and Political Geography:

Mozambique is characterized by a long plain along the entirety of its coastline, extending north to south, and a low plateau that runs across the entire west of the country. The border with Zimbabwe and Malawi to the west is extremely mountainous, and the interior highlands have moderate temperatures with cool, dry winters. Mozambique has few mineral resources, except for natural gas wells in the south. Rather, the country's most important natural resource is its fertile land. The Zambezi Valley in the north is the main agricultural region, while the Zambezi River, which bisects the country, serves as a major maritime transportation route. 90% of the population is involved in agriculture; in the north, most agriculture is at the subsistence level, while the south and central provinces tend towards plantation agriculture and commercial farming. The major export crops are cashews, cotton, and

³⁰ Lunstrum (2007), 156

vegetable farming for the South African market³¹.

Due to its geography, Mozambique has far less natural economic potential than Angola, Portugal's other colony, so it is perhaps unsurprising that it was never viewed as the higher priority for development and investment. Portuguese merchant activity rarely extended past the southernmost regions, where most of the major settlements were located. Most railroads and roads were built east-to-west (despite the country's north-south orientation), and ports were built mostly to export to Rhodesia and South Africa. This meant that the north was almost never well-integrated with the south. Indeed, the primary commodity in northern Mozambique for Portugal during the nineteenth century was slave labor; more than a million Mozambicans were captured and sold into slavery - some were sent to North and South America, while others worked in brutal conditions on plantations in Mozambique itself. As mining became a major industry in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, many Mozambicans immigrated south to labor in the mines and escape the slave trade - by 1910, over 80,000 were working the mines³².

The north/south regional differences affected not only economic development under Portugal, but the nature of tribal relations as well. Mozambique has high ethnic diversity, with at least nine major groups - the Tsonga, Shona, and Ndau occupy southern/central Mozambique, while Lomwe and Makua occupy the area immediately north of the Zambezi, and the Yao and Makonde account for most of the far northern population. Due to high immigration and emigration through the nineteenth century in response to slavery and economic conditions, none of these

³¹ Ciment (1997), 12

³² Finnegan (1992), 28-29

groups is exclusive to Mozambique, and all are highly dispersed and thus poorly unified. However, while tribal identity might not be as strong in Mozambique as Angola, regional divisions do exist. Mozambicans in the north and central areas have an extremely biased view of southerners, whom they regard as “Shangaan”³³. Additionally, the underdevelopment of the north under Portuguese colonialism meant that most northern regions tended more towards local leadership, such as the Makonde chieftains of the Mueda Plateau. Many of these chiefs became *regulos* who received Portuguese compensation for their help in recruiting forced labor and enforcing policies legislated in Maputo - playing, in essence, a de facto administrative role.

FRELIMO failed to appreciate the importance of regional differences when it took power in 1975 after a lengthy war for independence. More often than not, FRELIMO dismissed divisions as inconsequential and products of colonialism which could be fixed simply by reversing colonial-era policies - an understanding that was partially true, but lacked important nuances. These misunderstandings are attributable in large part to the southern backgrounds of FRELIMO’s leaders. The movement’s first leader, Eduardo Mondlane, was a member of the southern Tsonga tribe who had spent much of his life seeking education in Portugal and the United States before joining a Mozambican independence movement in Tanzania. Mondlane’s successor and Mozambique’s first post-independence president, Samora Machel, was also a Shangaan, the son of farmers in the southern Gaza province. Neither leader appeared

³³ This term refers to followers of Soshangange, the grandson of Gaza, who was from Zwide’s Ndwandwe Kingdom in South Africa. Under his rule in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Kingdom of Gaza was a mini-empire which had a long and bloody rivalry with northerners who immigrated during the *mfecane* and were led by N’qaba. For more on the history of the Shangaan/Ndwandwe rivalry, see Cabrita (2000), 21-23)

credible as a post-independence leader to northern Makonde, who regarded him as part of the colonial administration which was perceived as far more beneficial to southerners than northerners³⁴. Like the MPLA and Angola and many other third world governments, FRELIMO implemented a “villagization” program to establish cooperative farms in which peasants were expected to plant commercial crops for export. This economic program was also married to programs of social change in which healthcare and education would be brought to the countryside, while cultural traditions such as tribal bonds were to be “killed”³⁵. In a country which was prone to major droughts and food scarcities (sometimes up to 200,000 tons), centralized economic planning and social programs might have appeared to make sense at the time, but FRELIMO’s approach was radical and draconian in its implementation.

Villagers were not only coerced into moving into and working on government-administered communal farming villages³⁶, but were also subject to “re-education” programs intended to make them into New Men. Traditions seen as oppressive towards women, such as polygamy, were banned. The *regulos* were removed from power, and peasant committees (“dynamizing groups”, or People’s Assemblies) were formed in their place to elect newer and more progressive local leaders³⁷. FRELIMO

³⁴ In 1965, the CIA commented on the lack of support for FRELIMO sentiment in the northern regions, noting that Mondlane was unappealing because he was a “U.S.-educated intellectual who has only a tenuous relationship with the Makondes, and it will be extremely difficult for him to build up dedication to a political cause among these largely primitive tribesmen.” See Cabrita (2000), 19

³⁵ The infamous slogan “kill the tribe to build the nation” came from Machel himself, and was used by FRELIMO to articulate its views towards traditional rural leadership until the 1980s.

³⁶ As Elizabeth Lunstrum observed, the villages themselves were designed to maximize surveillance of families, with nearly identical housing units designed in close proximity to each other. See Lunstrum (2007), 117-19.

³⁷ In practice, this usually meant that power was in the hands of FRELIMO *secretarios*, who were supposedly serving an interim administrative role.

discouraged dissenters as “unfaithful” to the nation and encouraged fellow community members to punish them. Finally, FRELIMO started a campaign aimed at the destruction of Mozambique’s indigenous and exogenous (Catholic, Muslim) religious traditions. As Christian Geffray observed, writing in 1984, “the discourse of progress and equality disguised the conquest of rural society by the cosmopolitan, lusophone towns.”³⁸ However, despite the new policies, many of the villagers continued to adhere to traditional leaders and practices. In several administrative districts, villagers continue to follow their chiefs, even electing many of them to the People’s Assemblies. When dissenters were not rooted out by the locals, FRELIMO jailed many and sentenced others to hard labor terms.

In short, Mozambique’s geography represented significant obstacles to modernization and development that were not addressed by the Portuguese, and FRELIMO’s attempts at modernizing and unifying the country only provoked opposition. Yet whatever opportunity FRELIMO’s policies might have provided to RENAMO to build a popular mass movement, the rebels’ cause almost never amounted to anything resembling a political identity.

RENAMO’s Lack of Domestic Base/Legitimacy and Identity:

Unlike Angola, there were not three different (and predominantly mono-ethnic) brands of Mozambican nationalism seeking power in the capital even before the Portuguese left. Despite both countries’ colonial histories (including the shared experience of the slave trade), Mozambique’s tribes were highly fragmented and dispersed. While tribal identity persisted, no tribe was as large or unified as either

³⁸ Geffray (1990), 81

Angola's Ovimbundu (UNITA) or even the Kikongo (FNLA). On the contrary, as James Ciment points out, the migration of Mozambican workers to the South African mine meant that they became more cognizant of the class differences in the southern provinces, in which white elites sat atop the social order, supported by a middle class of merchants, civil servants, and professionals (usually *assimilados*), and a lower class of African farmers. This labor migration increased support for the egalitarian agenda of FRELIMO in the southern provinces³⁹.

Due to FRELIMO's long-standing solidarity with Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) militants in Rhodesia, the white regime under Ian Smith sought to find a means of punishing its neighbor. Ken Flower, the chief of Rhodesia's Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), did not seek to create an indigenous anti-FRELIMO mass movement based upon non-Marxist Mozambican nationalism, and strong enough to unite the various tribes to cooperate with one another. Flower sought to create an army of "flechas"⁴⁰ "assistance from Portuguese who had immigrated to Rhodesia from Mozambique and were familiar with the local languages and terrain. More importantly, Flower's contacts put him in touch with Andere Matsangaissa and Afonso Dhlakama, two former FRELIMO military officers and cabinet members who had been sacked on corruption charges. These two men would become the first and second (respectively) leaders of RENAMO⁴¹, which was formed in 1975 in Gorongosa Province and began carrying out guerrilla

³⁹ Ciment (1997), 33

⁴⁰ This term translates to "arrows", but is also synonymous with "pseudo-terrorists. See Flower (1987), 300

⁴¹ While Matsangaissa was officially the first RENAMO commander, it is possible that former Portuguese agent Orlando Cristina, who served as RENAMO's General Secretary, may have been the de facto leader who pulled Matsangaissa's strings. See Cabrita (2000), 222-24.

attacks against targets in the central provinces of Mozambique, as close to Maputo as possible.

The methods by which RENAMO prosecuted its war against FRELIMO revealed not only its barbarity, but also its extremely parochial goals. The targets of RENAMO's attacks were almost never government troops, but rather the communal villages that had been the centerpiece of FRELIMO's rural program. Crops were burned and infrastructure was sabotaged, while civilians were raped, abducted, forced to serve as slave labor, and often murdered. Young men were also conscripted to serve as RENAMO guerrillas, in some cases after being forced to execute family members⁴². RENAMO's reputation for cruelty earned the group international pariah status⁴³ and meant that the group depended entirely upon the external funding of Rhodesia and then South Africa, which became RENAMO's new patron after Ian Smith's regime fell and sought to punish FRELIMO for supporting the African National Congress (ANC). RENAMO's tactics and recruitment practices might seem counter-intuitive, since they often failed to distinguish between FRELIMO supporters and dissenters and stood little chance of winning over the peasantry. But winning popular support was almost never the point of RENAMO's tactics. Rather, the goal of RENAMO was to make Mozambique ungovernable. Domestically, the peasantry

⁴² While exact figures are unknown, one observer claimed in the 1980s that of the RENAMO militants he had met and interviewed, 90% had been forcibly recruited. See Hall (1990), 45.

⁴³ Unlike UNITA in Angola, RENAMO did not receive American funding, despite fighting against a Soviet-aligned regime. This did not mean that it never tried - after an extensive lobbying campaign in the mid-1980s, Pat Buchanan, then White House communications director, and CIA Chief William Casey agreed to a meeting with RENAMO representatives in Washington, D.C. to discuss an aid package. Their efforts were quickly halted when the U.S. State Department published the Gersony Report in 1987, which detailed RENAMO's terrible human rights record. See Ciment (1997), 118 for more on RENAMO's attempts to secure U.S. aid.

would see that FRELIMO could not protect them and provide the social services it promised. Internationally, Rhodesia and South Africa hoped to show the world that Africans were incapable of self-government. This focus eclipsed almost all other considerations. To the extent that RENAMO had a political program at all, it rarely extended beyond criticism of FRELIMO's programs and vague calls for democratic reform, with few attempts to redress these grievances in "liberated" areas⁴⁴. RENAMO's first Congress was not even held until June 1989, which indicates how little the group cared about ideology or any sort of political program. And unlike UNITA, RENAMO had no ethnic base. There were some signs of ethnic kinship within the movement: Dhlakama was Ndaou, as were many leaders in RENAMO, but there were also many non-Ndaou people among the RENAMO leadership, and RENAMO never once made appeals to any sort of ethnic solidarity⁴⁵.

Despite RENAMO's lack of an identity and half-hearted (at best) attempts to win popular support, the movement did develop some indigenous appeal, which explains why the group has successfully evolved into the main opposition party in Mozambique following the peace process⁴⁶ in spite of its reputation as the "Khmer

⁴⁴ As Finnegan notes, RENAMO, like FRELIMO, did try to "re-educate" the peasantry in order to remove any loyalty to FRELIMO's Marxist policies. But after speaking with several people who lived in RENAMO-controlled zones during the war and were forced to attend political meetings, Finnegan claims that "opposition to FRELIMO and its works was the sole theme" and that there was "[no] effort to build a consensus, or to consult with ordinary people, on any issue" - ironic, given RENAMO's ostensible commitment to democratic reform. Areas controlled by RENAMO also had few, if any, social services. See Finnegan (1992), 74-77 for a description of village life under RENAMO during the war.

⁴⁵ Despite RENAMO's non-ethnic/sectarian bias, resentment of Dhlakama's disproportionately Ndaou inner circle led to the formation of the break-away faction Uniao Nacional Mozambique (UNAMO) under Gimu Phiri. See Hall (1990), 47 for more on this movement.

⁴⁶ In the 1994 elections, Dhlakama ran for President and won 34% of the vote, while FRELIMO's Joaquim Chissano won 53%. RENAMO also won 38% of the seats in Parliament, compared to 44% won by FRELIMO. It has continued to win a significant minority of the vote in every free election

Rogue of Africa”. RENAMO’s leadership (or at least their handlers) recognized that FRELIMO’s attempts to dismantle traditional leadership and culture were alienating the peasantry; as Ken Flower observed in 1987, the “surprising ease” with which RENAMO developed was an indication that its CIO backers “were proceeding on right lines.”⁴⁷ In 1983, Dhlakama demonstrated RENAMO’s attitude towards traditions when he remarked that, “The colonialists exploited us, but at least they didn’t try to wipe out our traditions because they are so-called ‘reactionary’.” Not only did RENAMO encourage religious practices and institutions to persist in areas that it controlled, but local religious figures were often enlisted to provide legitimacy⁴⁸. However, other scholars have observed that RENAMO’s appeal lay not in its acceptance and embrace of tribal culture, but rather in its ability to break tribal bonds through forced recruitment. Although press-ganging remained the primary means of recruitment for the entirety of RENAMO’s armed campaign, some observers reported that morale was often high at many RENAMO bases. This was in all likelihood because many recruits, who had been poor and hungry prior to their conscription, preferred the excitement and comradeship of RENAMO to the banality and poverty of village life. RENAMO afforded many the chance to loot, pillage, and rape - and thus ensured a loyalty that outweighed any tribal kinship. RENAMO was also assisted by FRELIMO incompetence - rather than conducting counter-insurgency warfare, FRELIMO tactics revolved more around seeking a diplomatic solution by

held since 1994. See <http://africanelections.tripod.com/mz.html> for a summary of Mozambique’s election results since the transition to democracy.

⁴⁷ Flower (1987), 302

⁴⁸ For example, a Shona *n’anga*, or spiritual healer, was employed at a RENAMO base in Inhambane Province to treat injured fighters. Similar practices were reported at RENAMO bases in Casa Banana and the Gorongosa area, where the group had originated. See Hall (1990), 44-48.

encouraging South Africa to stop supporting RENAMO. FRELIMO appealed to the United States and Europe to put pressure on South Africa to end its support for RENAMO, which led to the signing of the the 1984 Nkomati Accords, which required FRELIMO to stop harboring the ANC if South Africa agreed to stop arming RENAMO⁴⁹. The fact that FRELIMO made little attempt at undermining RENAMO strength through counter-insurgency practices such as winning “hearts and minds” meant that RENAMO’s tactics worked - the rural areas remained poor, and staying in RENAMO even after press-ganging remained more appealing to many of its fighters than returning to villages. As Geffray observed, “pillage [had] become a way of life” in which RENAMO’s guerillas stayed willingly⁵⁰.

However, despite the tunnel-vision approach to the peace process adopted by FRELIMO, the Nkomati Accords effectively marked the beginning of the end for RENAMO. Cut off from South Africa, the organization sought to legitimize itself and preserve the support it had already gained in rural areas. The alternative was military defeat and no chance of surviving as either an army or a political party.

Case Implications:

Although it addressed some grievances and developed some indigenous support, RENAMO’s lack of a coherent identity meant that it could only survive militarily so long as it had external backing. Unlike Angola, Mozambique’s tribes were too fractured to unite in the same way that UNITA could unify the Ovimbundu. This is a problem that is attributable in large part to the experience of colonialism and the labor

⁴⁹ South Africa violated the Accords in secret - it sent six months of weapons and supplies to RENAMO in advance of the talks

⁵⁰ Geffray (1990), 83

migration of the 19th century - and this experience, as we have seen, was mostly a consequence of geography. Due to weak economic potential, the Portuguese did not properly develop the northernmost and central provinces of Mozambique; the slave trade was the most economically viable aspect of the colony. As with Angola, the conflict zone/capital distance seems far less important in Mozambique than identity, but the geographic distance between Maputo (a port city located at the very tip of the South) obviously meant that Mozambicans in this area had a different colonial experience than northerners and those in the central provinces. Their experience, however, was one of migration and ethnic fragmentation, rather than unity.

6

Conclusion

My analysis and case studies have both clarified and obfuscated the role of geographic factors, particularly distance, in prolonging civil wars. In my regression analysis, I have demonstrated geographic differences between identity and non-identity conflicts (the former tend to be located farther from the capital city than the latter), yet I also found that, contrary to my expectations, there is no reason to expect that identity groups absolutely must recruit from locales with certain environmental characteristics. It is possible for an insurgency to have a cohesive identity, regardless of whether it is close to the capital city or located in a remote and distant region.

In my case studies, it is evident that geography shaped the different colonial experiences of both Angola and Mozambique. It is also evident that both the Ovimbundu (on Angola's Bie Plateau) and the various ethnic groups which occupied the northern and central regions of Mozambique developed very different cultural identities as a result of the physical distance between themselves and the capital city.

This is a consequence of colonialism; the Portuguese deliberately chose port and cities and tended to emphasize development of the coastal regions for commercial purposes. Thus, in both cases, the ethnic groups and tribes located closer to the capital city not only formed the nucleus of the post-colonial regimes, but were distrusted by their compatriots located in farther regions. However, the decisive factor in the creation of an identity for post-independence, anti-regime movements was the level of ethnic dispersion. Due to their geographic location (on an easily defensible plateau), Angola's Ovimbundu resisted many of the excesses of the slave trade and plantations which served to fragment tribes in Mozambique (and thus limited their capacity for organized resistance). Furthermore, the Ovimbundu simply had more favorable demographics - they constituted a larger population than any single tribe in Mozambique. In comparison, the natural poverty of Mozambique's northern and central regions meant that many of its tribes migrated south or were simply enslaved - breaking their cohesion.

Overall, my case studies suggest that I failed to consider the variable which Toft (2009) identified as most important to civil war - ethnic settlement/dispersion patterns. While I have criticized authors of empirical studies that include physical geographic variables but not human geographic variables, it appears that I fell into a similar trap. Nonetheless, I have still demonstrated the importance of integrating these factors into the same statistical models, and suggested a new causal chain between geography and civil war that appears promising. It remains plausible that geography makes certain ethnic groups more cohesive and more viable as insurgencies, though there is still more work to be done on this subject.

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