When does regional autonomy prevent separatist conflict?

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Abstract

Autonomous institutions stabilize separatist regions if newly-empowered regional politicians can redistribute economic and political power away from local out-groups and toward their coethnics. Autonomy is most likely to prevent separatist war if the center is content to let the regional government reorder local life, usually because the autonomous territory is not home to any of the center's political allies. Autonomous regions are not effective in preventing separatist war if the newly-autonomous group shares territory with other groups that have more political sway with the central executive.

This paper contains two empirical investigations. The first is a case study of the Pattani rebellion in southern Thailand. I use public opinion data to show that the conflict is rated as more intractable by people who perceive the largest political and economic disparities between Pattanis and local non-Pattanis. That pattern is consistent with a demand for local redistribution of economic and political power. The second half of the paper analyzes cross-national data on regional autonomy and separatist war. The statistical relationship between autonomy and war is conditioned by the regime's political alignment with groups that share the autonomous territory.

Most ethnic conflict concerns territory. Of the 293 mobilized ethnic groups tracked by Minorities at Risk, 56% define themselves in terms of a territory where they ask for greater self-rule—they seek sovereignty, merger with a neighboring state, autonomy in a subnational jurisdiction, or special rights within their region (Minorities at Risk Project 2009). Territorial autonomy is the issue at stake in most ethnic civil wars and in the most protracted and deadly civil wars.[1] Where ethnic groups cross international borders, movements for ethnoterritorial self-rule can also spur interstate violence.[2]

Amidst this turmoil, the number of subnational autonomous ethnic jurisdictions has grown rapidly since the mid-twentieth century (Roeder 2007, p. 48). IGOs, international NGOs, and foreign aid offices routinely recommend ethnic territorial autonomy as a tool of conflict prevention and resolution (Wolff 2009, p. 28).[3] Ted Gurr argues that "international good practice for managing ethnopolitical conflict" includes the recognition of "the right of regional minorities to substate autonomy."[4] Hurst Hannum believes international norms have shifted in favor of "the idea that minorities should enjoy the greatest degree of self-government that is compatible with their particular situation. ... Where a minority is numerically significant and territorially concentrated, it might mean a substantial devolution of power through regional autonomous arrangements."[5]

Policy consensus notwithstanding, academics tend to argue that ethnic federations fuel conflict.[6] For example, Roeder (2007) claims that ethnofederalism increases the likelihood that the encompassing country will fracture.[7] Regional autonomy grants recognition to a subnational identity, reinforcing its salience. Autonomous institutions are also a resource for regional politicians,

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[1]Walter 2009; Cederman, Weidmann, and K. S. Gleditsch 2011; E. Jenne 2006.

[2]Saideman 2012.

[3]See also Sisk (1996), Lake and Rothchild (1996), Lijphart (1977), Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), Kaufmann (1996), Hartzell and Hoddie (2007), McGarry and O'Leary (2009), and Hechter (2000).

[4]Gurr (2001, pp. 180–181).

[5]Hannum (2006, p. 73).

[6]Zuber (2011), Christin and Hug (2012), Pospieszna and Schneider (2013), Brancati (2006), Sen (2006), Treisman (1997), E. K. Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe (2007), Cornell (2002), Roeder (2007), Bunce (1999), and Snyder (2000).

[7]For studies of the conditions under which ethnic federations fail, see Deiwiks, Cederman, and K. S. Gleditsch (2012), Giuliano (2011), and Hale (2004).

who can build patronage networks, control local security forces, and starve the center of taxes. Roeder argues these tools are often used to make the jump from autonomous region to new country.

Regional autonomy is also a tool for redistributing economic and political power among the people living in the autonomous region. Autonomy is pacifying—i.e., it reduces the probability of future separatist war—only when regional politicians can successfully restructure the local economy and society in order to favor the ethnic group that demanded autonomy. If regional autonomy does not accomplish that restructuring or the center cannot credibly promise to respect that restructuring, autonomy will not prevent war.

When is the center likely to prevent or reverse redistribution in a newly autonomous region? Central politicians are office-seekers who intervene in regional politics to help their political allies. The central executive's interventions in an autonomous region are on behalf of regional allies disadvantaged by the local government's policies. For example, in the 1960s, the Indian central government prevented the state government of Assam from passing pro-Assamese language legislation. The center's motive was its reliance on votes from non-Assamese people living in Assam.

Autonomy is particularly effective at ending separatism if the newly autonomous group does not share any territory with the central regime's supporters. Autonomy is least effective in preventing separatism by an ethnic group that shares its territory with people favored by the central regime. The threat of central interventions on behalf of the executive's allies undermines autonomous institutions as a tool for reshaping the regional balance of power. The failure of autonomy to restructure regional life radicalizes public opinion in favor of separation and encourages rebellion.

This paper explores these ideas in two ways. First, I present a case study from southern Thailand, a region with a long history of separatist organizing on behalf of Pattani Malay-speakers. In 2010, the Asia Foundation conducted a survey that asked Pattani Malays whether they thought autonomy would be able to end the separatist insurgency there or whether separation from Thailand would be necessary to end conflict. What sets apart the people who were autonomy skeptics?

The skeptics were no more hostile to Bangkok than those who thought autonomy would pacify the south. Skeptics of autonomy also overwhelmingly said they preferred autonomy for the south, just as the autonomy optimists did. Autonomy skeptics stand out in their perceptions of the disparities between Pattani Malays and Thai-speakers living in the south. People skeptical of autonomy were more likely to blame conflict on Thai southerners, to believe Thai southerners had better economic opportunities than Pattani Malays, and to believe the local government favored Thai southerners. My interpretation of this data is that skeptics doubted whether autonomous institutions would be sufficient to rebalance economic and political power in favor of Pattani Malays.

A second, cross-national portion of this paper uses data from the ETH-Zurich project on ethnic power relations. I show that the central regime's regional political ties condition the relationship between autonomy and the likelihood of separatist war. I categorize ethnic groups according to who they share territory with—specifically, do they share territory with one or more ethnic groups that are comparatively favored by the central regime. The correlations between autonomy and war are quite different depending on whether the autonomous group's neighbors have access to central power.

This paper is part of a book project on territorial conflicts within states. The book will explain how states manage internal territorial conflict by pointing to the executive's political relationships with regional actors at odds over local power, land, migration and resources. I believe this is a more useful approach than looking for variation in central governments' nationalist fervor or their paranoia about the unraveling of the state. A second aim of the book project is to link the literatures on separatism and regional autonomy to discussions of migration and to literatures that focus on particular economic uses of land—e.g., conflict over arable land or mineral rights.

The next section of this paper reviews existing accounts of separatism and lays out my argument about when regional autonomy prevents separatist war. I then turn to the case study and cross-national empirics.

1 Why does autonomy fail?

Ethnoterritorial conflict is frequently blamed on the nationalism of central governments (Treisman 1997; Bakke 2015; Geertz 1963; Gellner 1964; Hechter 2000; Wimmer 2012). In Europe, strong states and strong civil societies allowed central nationalism to subdue the periphery. In weaker or newer states, minorities in the periphery are comparatively unassimilated. The central government is beholden to a relatively narrow "nationalist" elite, usually drawn from one or a few ethnic groups that gained an edge in modernization during an era of European domination. The center resists recognizing other ethnic groups as sub-nations. Instead, the regime champions a central nationalism designed to submerge other identities—e.g., Kemalism in Turkey or Pancasila in Indonesia—or an exclusionary ideology based on the ethnic group(s) that already hold(s) power—e.g., Hindutva in India or the Bahutu Manifesto in Rwanda. These ideologies reflect a mix of ethnic chauvinism in favor of the regime's core supporters and paranoia about the potential for national unraveling if other identities are acknowledged. Central governments are more or less resistant to autonomy for the periphery in proportion to the chauvinism of their followers (Wimmer 2012), the number of separatist threats they fear (Walter 2009; Roeder 2007), and the degree of cultural difference between the dominant group and the periphery (Esteban, Mayoral, and Ray 2012). Central actors also see regional autonomy as the loss of control over the material resources in the autonomous region (Williams 1977; Gourevitch 1979; Gellner 1983; Horowitz 1985). Therefore, the center is particularly likely to fight against autonomy for relatively wealthy or resource rich areas.

In this project, I assume the central government's attitudes about regional autonomy flow only from its concern with maintaining office. Interests and ideologies—e.g., the struggle for mineral rights or the strength of ethnic chauvinism—are located outside the government, in the citizenry, especially citizens who share territory. The central state's intervenes in regional autonomy to reward its supporters, win new allies, and, as necessary, to curtail costly unrest. For example, the government refuses autonomy to a resource rich region if it needs the support mineral-extracting

4

firms that oppose autonomy. If politically-connected firms are indifferent to regional autonomy, the central government is indifferent as well.

Regional autonomy empowers some actors in the area relative to others that share the same space. Autonomous institutions sometimes have de jure provisions to ensure that power is exercised by a particular group. These laws are usually not necessary, particularly if the autonomous region will hold elections. In those cases, the borders of the region can be drawn so that the intended recipients of autonomy will be a super-majority of the population. Sometimes regional autonomy empowers a group that has previously been subaltern, for example the newly autonomous areas for indigenous tribes in Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia. Sometimes regional autonomy empowers a group that is already dominant or that has a tenuous claim to the territory. Indian politics has a convenient terminology for the people who "own" the various federal states. The "sons-of-the-soil" in a particular state are not necessarily the numerical majority, the earliest known inhabitants of the place, or the only long-time inhabitants. The sons-of-the-soil are a political fact, not a demographic inevitability.

Although autonomous regions are meant to privilege particular groups, they typically have jurisdiction over a heterogeneous population. The other people in an autonomous region include smaller ethnic groups that consider themselves local and migrants from elsewhere in the country. For example, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in the southern Philippines is intended to provide Moros with greater self-rule. But Mindanao is also home to smaller indigenous groups like the T'boli and to Christian settlers from the northern Philippines.

In other work, I've argued that the popularity of demands for regional autonomy often stems from a desire for redistribution among the people who share that regional territory. Shared territories are arenas for political, economic, and cultural competition. Shared territory means conflicting narratives about homelands or manifest destinies and mutual fears of being displaced by unequal rates of migration or natural population increase. In this milieu, regional politicians use local power to favor their backers with measures like quotas in hiring and education, language policy,

or restrictions on migration or trade. People in the ethnic group granted autonomy expect that, at a minimum, they will have equal economic and political opportunities in the autonomous region. Often, they expect to have primacy there.

From this point of view, autonomy fails if the central government intervenes to limit redistribution to the autonomous ethnic group from other local people, such as minorities or migrants. Whether the center will do so depends on who the newly-autonomous ethnic group shares territory with. If the neighboring groups hold little sway in the center, autonomous institutions will be able to address the targeted group's grievances and diminish its propensity for rebellion. If neighboring groups are have substantial clout in the central government, the national executive is likely to prevent autonomy from disadvantaging these neighbors too greatly. The autonomous ethnic group's aspirations for local dominance are thwarted. People become susceptible to the argument that only independence can ensure the ethnic group is truly empowered in its own homeland.

The next section uses data on the appeal of separatism among Pattani Malays living in the southern region of Thailand. I present a survey that asked locals whether regional autonomy would end conflict in the south. The people most doubtful of autonomy were the ones who felt most aggrieved about disparities between Pattani Malays and other ethnic groups in the south.

2   Separatism in southern Thailand

Thailand's southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwas, and Pattani are ethnically and religiously distinct from the rest of the country. About 80% of the population in these three provinces speaks Pattani-Malay (also called Yawa) as a first language, while Thai is the dominant language elsewhere. Most of the remainder of the southern population is Thai-speaking, with a small number of Chinese speakers. The three southern provinces are 94% Muslim and 6% Buddhist (Klein 2010). Almost all Pattani-Malays are Muslims, while Thai-speakers in the three southern provinces are split between Islam and Buddhism. Thailand as a whole is 90% Buddhist.

Yala, Narathiwas, and Pattani were once part of the sultanate of Patani (Haemindra 1976).[8] Separatist insurgents fought in the 1960s and 1970s to reestablish a Patani polity. The current insurgency similarly emphasizes the regional Pattani-Malay identity over Islam per se. Although there are Thai- and Chinese-ethnicity Muslims in southern Thailand, the insurgency is exclusively oriented toward Pattani-Malay Muslims.

The current war began in the early 2000s (Funston 2008). In 2004, militants made a successful surprise attack on an army base, gaining national and international attention. The insurgents were highly fractionalized and, through 2010, had no identifiable organizational structure or leadership with credible control over rebel violence (Funston 2008; Liow and Pathan 2010). Nonetheless, 6,500 people have been killed since 2004 (Engvall and Srisompob 2016).

Between 2004 and 2010, successive Thai governments had a consistently hardline response to insurgency. Emergency laws gave the military immunity from prosecution for deaths in custody and torture. Despite multiple elections and coups in the 2000–2010 period, every central regime steadfastly opposed autonomy for southern Thailand, even in limited forms such as an elected governor. (Thailand is a unitary state with unelected provincial level governments).[9] Bangkok's resistance to autonomy was embodied in a National Reconciliation Council (NRC) appointed in 2005:

> Reporting in June 2006, [the NRC] made a series of modest proposals for improving the quality of justice, security, and governance in the deep South ... The NRC's proposals were considered too progressive by most government officials but did not go nearly far enough for most Malay Muslims. The NRC refused to engage seriously with ideas of substantive decentralization ... let alone any proposals for different forms of autonomy (McCargo 2008, p. 10).[10]

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[8]Satun district, to the west of Songkhla, is 70% Malay-speaking Muslims but was not a part of the Patani sultanate (Funston 2008, p. xiii).

[9]The exceptions are Bangkok and Pattaya City, both in central Thailand.

[10]See also McCargo (2012, chp. 4).

Gunaratna and Acharya (2013), rightwing analysts who oppose southern autonomy (174), admit that there was no political will in the capital to implement the NRC's recommendations and that powerful conservatives in the government immediately moved to quash the NRC's tangible suggestions, such as the recognition of Malay as a "working language" in the south (156–157). Outside of southern Thailand, the Pattani insurgency has a low profile. Nonetheless, there are some ultranationalist politicians in central Thailand who point to the insurgency as a threat to the dominance of Buddhism and Thai language in national life.

Bangkok was more concerned with protecting Thai speakers in the south from violence. Army soldiers were embedded with Buddhist temples and public schools to protect non-Pattanis. Buddhist monks were given military escorts when collecting alms. Queen Sikrit personally sponsored the creation of Buddhist self-defense militias in the south.

2.1   Would autonomy end violence? Pattani Malays' views

Regional autonomy has yet to be tried as a solution to Pattani Malay separatism. What would successful autonomy look like from the point-of-view of ordinary Pattani Malays? In this section, I present a survey that asked Pattani Malays whether autonomy might end conflict or whether independence was necessary to end conflict. Pattani Malays who thought autonomy would not end the conflict were not exceptionally hostile to the central government. Nor were they averse to autonomy relative to the status quo. The autonomy skeptics stand out in their perception of a deep conflict between Pattani Malays and Thais living in the south. My interpretation of that finding is that skepticism of autonomy was related to doubts that local government would be sufficient to empower Pattani Malays relative to local Thais.

The Asia Foundation conducted an opinion survey in southern Thailand between July 2 and August 30, 2010 (Klein 2010). The sample included an equal number of respondents from each of three southern provinces. Within each province, districts were randomly selected as survey sites, with the goal of obtaining an equal number of respondents from rural and urban districts. The

analysis below is of respondents who said their first language was Pattani-Malay and that they were Muslim.

Comparisons of other Asia Foundation surveys to election results and political outcomes suggest a right-wing "house effect." Surveys seem to overestimate support for the military, the monarchy, and the Democrats. If that house effect holds in the survey data presented here, the portrait of public opinion will be more pro-regime than reality. The mean level of support for Bangkok and central policies is probably overstated and sympathy with insurgent aims is probably understated. Nonetheless, the differences between self-proclaimed the autonomy skeptics and autonomy optimists are still potentially illuminating.

The Asia Foundation asked respondents whether independence was necessary to end the conflict in the south or whether autonomy might end conflict. The Asia Foundation's translation of the question reads:

> Some people think that those people involved in the separatist conflict will not stop fighting until it [sic] separates and forms a new state, while others think that some form of local self-government like that in Aceh or Bangkok would probably be enough to end the conflict. Which is closer to your opinion?

This question taps both a general sense of how intractable the conflict is and how useful the respondent believes autonomy would be in redressing local grievances. (A problem with this question is that there is no obvious answer for a respondent who believed the conflict could be ended without any political changes.) Among Pattani Malays, 24% told enumerators the conflict would not end until separation from Thailand. 57% said local self-government might end the conflict. A fair number of people (18%) refused to answer the question.

Table 1 compare autonomy skeptics and autonomy optimists in terms of other survey questions, which measure attitudes toward the central state, regional autonomy, and Thai-speakers living in the south. With regard to the central government and Thai nationalism, the survey asked:

9

- How do you feel regarding the job the national government is doing?

- Despite our differences, as Thais we have many values that unite us. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

- I will read you a list of institutions. Please rate its integrity according to the scale on this card: The military

The top lines of Table 1 show that a large majority of Malay respondents endorsed the central government's performance. Almost all agreed that Thais are united by shared values. On the other hand, only about a fifth of Pattani Malays rated the military as having "a lot" or "some" integrity. Notably, on all three of these questions, autonomy optimists and autonomy skeptics had very similar opinions. In other words, the people who thought only independence could end conflict in southern Thailand were not especially hostile to central institutions or unwilling to endorse Thai nationalism as an abstraction. The final column in Table 1 shows a test of the difference in autonomy skeptics' and autonomy optimists' replies to survey questions on central nationalism. The small differences between the groups are not statistically significant.[11]

The next questions in Table 1 concern local autonomy. In addition to the question asking Pattani Malays to choose between autonomy and independence as means to end the conflict, the Asia Foundation asked "Some have suggested that political decentralization or limited autonomy might help resolve the long-term conflict in southern Thailand. Do you agree or disagree?" A little over 70% of Pattani Malays endorsed autonomy in response to this formulation. That rate of endorsement held even among people who more skeptical of autonomy when asked to choose between autonomy and independence. The Asia Foundation also asked about the desirability of autonomy and a greater local role for the Malay language without mentioning the potential for conflict reduction:

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[11]The F statistics reported are from tests of differences in proportions. Table 4 reports univariate logistic regressions with similar substantive implications.

Table 1: Comparing Pattani-Malays who thought autonomy would end conflict in Southern Thailand to those who said only separation could end war

	Not end until separation	Self-government might end	F-test of indep.
Central government			
Satisfied w central gov.	74%	78%	0.60
Thais united by values	91%	88%	0.44
Military has integrity	23%	21%	0.11
Local autonomy			
Autonomy might end conflict	71%	73%	0.13
Decentralize government	69%	75%	1.0
Elect governor	71%	72%	0.046
Require officials speak Malay	96%	97%	0.12
Require Malay in school	96%	96%	0.012
Shared territory			
Conflict w S not central Thais	31%	19%	4.4*
Local Thais and Pattani-Malays receive			
…Equal economic opportunity	58%	78%	12**
…Same standards of justice	37%	49%	3.7+
…Same access gov. positions	57%	69%	3.7+

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.12$

- Some people say that one way to reduce tension between urban and rural areas and improve governance, would be to devolve some powers from the central government to local governments and to directly elect governors and other local officials (as is done in Bangkok). Other people believe that government will be more effective and efficient if centrally controlled. Which is closer to your view?

- Which do you prefer: appointed provincial governors, or directly elected provincial governors?

- Should there be a requirement that state officials posted in the south be able to speak Pattani Malay?

- To acknowledge the distinct cultural identity of the south, all children in the south should study both Thai and Pattani-Malay in primary school. Do you agree or disagree?

A super-majority of autonomy skeptics and optimists alike endorsed devolution of power to local governments and directly elected governors. More than 95% of Pattani Malays wanted officials in the south to speak Malay and school children to study Malay. Here again there was no difference of opinion between those who thought only independence could end conflict and those who were more sanguine about autonomy. Thus, Pattani Malays were overwhelmingly in favor of local autonomy over the status quo. That generalization does not vary much between people who reported that only separation would end war and those that were more optimistic about autonomy.

The difference between autonomy-skeptics and other Pattani-Malays lies in perceptions about relations with Thai-speakers living in southern Thailand. The last group of questions in Table 1 captures those differences. First, enumerators asked: "In your opinion, is the tension and conflict in the south usually between Malayu Patani and Central or Issan [Northeastern] Thai people; or is it usually between Malayu Patani and Southern Thai; or about the same?" Autonomy-skeptics were much more likely to tell enumerators that the conflict was primarily with Southern Thais.

31% of autonomy skeptics characterized the conflict this way compared to 19% of those who were optimistic autonomy would end conflict. Three more survey items asked about local inequalities:

- Do you feel Thais and Pattani-Malays have equal economic opportunities in your area?

- Do you feel that there are different standards of justice for Malay and Thai?

- Do you feel that Malay people have fair access to positions of responsibility in local government, or are these positions usually reserved for Thai people?

People who believed autonomy would fail were less likely to say local Thais and Pattani-Malays had equal economic opportunities (58% versus 78%) or access to government jobs (57% versus 69%). They were more likely to perceive different standards of justice for the two communities (63% versus 51%). Recall that the autonomy skeptics do not stand out in terms of their attitudes toward the center or the institutional details of local government. Instead, people who said only independence could end conflict in the south also perceived the greatest disparities between Thais and Malays in regional economic and political life. Respondents who saw a greater need for redistribution of economic and political power away from southern Thai speakers and to Pattani Malays did not believe autonomy would end conflict.

3   When does regional autonomy prevent separatist conflict? Cross-national evidence

In the final section of this paper, I analyze the relationship between regional autonomy and the onset of ethnoterritorial civil war using cross-national data on ethnic groups. I use the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) Dataset v 2.0 (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009) to create a list of potentially-separatist ethnic groups, 1946–2013.[12] Using the

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[12]I transform the EPR "group-period" data into "group-year" observations.

companion GIS dataset, GeoEPR-ETH v 2.0 (Wucherpfennig et al. 2011), I identify EPR groups that are regionally concentrated and include only these groups in the data. Thus, the data condition on territorial concentration.[13]

EPR also codes separatist and non-separatist rebellion at the ethnic group level.[14] Throughout the analysis below, *Separatist war onset* is the dependent variable. The dependent variable is coded as missing for ethnic groups fighting an ongoing civil war—separatist or not.

The GIS data in GeoEPR-ETH can be used to characterize ethnic groups according to which other groups they share territory with and to categorize the central government's political ties to those neighbors. In EPR's coding, an ethnic group is either included in central power or excluded. EPR assigns included ethnic groups to a ranked tier of central power and excluded ethnic groups to non-ordinal sub-categories. I note whether an ethnic group shares a territory with some other group that is more politically important to the central executive, creating the dummy *Share territory w more powerful*. This indicator captures shared territory with any group that is (a) included in the central regime and (b) has a higher ranking in terms of access to national power. Groups that do not fall into this category include those that have no shared territory and those that share territory with neighbors at the same political rank or lower.

I determined groups' territories using only the initial entries in the GeoEPR-ETH dataset. For a given ethnic group, neither the amount of shared territory it has nor the identity of overlapping groups change over time. Only changes in political alignments among a fixed set of neighbors produce changes in the coding of shared territory with regime allies. This set-up avoids capturing alteration of settlement patterns due to war or local government policies in the period under study.

The EPR data also contain a measure of territorial autonomy, defined as follows:

For a group to be coded as regionally autonomous, two conditions must be jointly

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[13]The GeoEPR-ETH categories that correspond to regional concentration are "regionally based" and "regional and urban." The codings for groups without a regional concentration are "migrant," "urban," and "dispersed." There are no cases of separatist rebellion by groups in the latter categories.

[14]Based on the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (N. P. Gleditsch et al. 2002).

satisfied:

1. There is a meaningful and active regional executive organ of some type that operates below the state level (for example, the departmental, provincial, or district level) but above the local administrative level;

2. group representation is not token: group members exert actual influence on the decisions of this entity and their representatives act in line with the group's local interests.

The term "meaningful" here refers to executive organs that carry out core competencies of the state, involving, for example, cultural rights (language and education) and/or significant economic autonomy (for example, the right to levy taxes, or very substantial spending autonomy). The second condition also implies that a given regional entity must have de facto (as opposed to mere de jure) political power. . . . non-territorial forms of autonomy (such as the recently established minority councils in Serbia) do not fall under this definition of regional autonomy.[15]

In older versions of the EPR data, regional autonomy was only coded for groups that did not have access to central power. Newer versions of the data record regional autonomy for groups included in power except those at the top two tiers, which EPR calls "Monopoly" and "Dominant." I extended the coding of autonomy to these most powerful groups. A monopoly/dominant group is coded as having regional autonomy if it (1) has some set territory according to EPR[16] and (2) the country is federal. In future iterations of this project I will revisit the coding regional autonomy.

Rather than estimate models with a combination of interacted and uninteracted autonomy and shared territory variables, I created dummy variables for the different combinations of interest.

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[15] See the 2014 EPR codebook, page 6.

[16] Only two monopoly/dominant groups lack a set territory per EPR: Cape Verdeans in Guinea-Bissau from 1974–1980 and mainland Chinese people in Taiwan from 1949–1986. Neither country is federal, so neither of these groups would have been coded as having regional autonomy even if they had set territories per EPR.

The dummies ease interpretation but do not effect the substantive meaning of the models. Model 1 below includes dummies for (A) *Autonomy * Share territory w more powerful*, (B) *No autonomy * Share territory w more powerful*, and (C) *Autonomy * Share territory w equal/less powerful*. The omitted reference category is (D) *No autonomy * Share territory w less powerful*. Model 1 separately controls for whether the ethnic group in question is included in central power or not (*Ethnic group in power*).

Model 2 breaks apart the autonomy/territory categories in Model 1 according to whether the main ethnic group is included in central power. The new dummies are equivalent to a triple interaction between inclusion in central power, regional autonomy, and the power of other groups in the shared territory. Model 2 represents those interactions by including the following dummy variables:

 (A) *Autonomy * In-power * Share territory w more powerful*

 (B) *No autonomy * In-power * Share territory w more powerful*

 (C) *Autonomy * In-power * Share territory w equal/less powerful*

 (D) *No autonomy * In-power * Share territory w equal/less powerful*

 (E) *Autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory w more powerful*

 (F) *No autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory w more powerful*

 (G) *Autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory w equal/less powerful*

The omitted reference category is (H) *No autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory w equal/less powerful*.

I expect that the difference in rates of rebellion between autonomous and non-autonomous groups varies according to the power of overlapping groups. I expect that groups with less powerful neighbors have lower rates of rebellion under autonomy than under non-autonomy. Ethnic groups with more powerful neighbors have unchanged or higher rates of rebellion under auton-

16

omy compared to non-autonomy. I can also compare (1) the difference between autonomous and non-autonomous groups conditional on less powerful neighbors to (2) the difference between autonomous and non-autonomous groups conditional on more powerful neighbors. The first of these quantities is expected to be a negative number and the second a positive number or, at least, a more modest negative number.

Political alignments between central regimes and groups that share territory are not exogenous to the existence of autonomy or to subsequent violence. Some regimes come to power on the back of promises to reverse or curb regional autonomy or to promote it. Endogeneity problems also mean that autonomy would probably be positively correlated with violence even if autonomy were pacifying, either on average or in some populations. Autonomous institutions are usually created as a concession to strong subnational identities and prior collective action. A positive correlation between ethnoterritorial autonomy and future ethnoterritorial war is predictable for the same reason that chemotherapy is positively associated with cancer deaths. In a recent *APSR* article, Cederman, Hug, et al. (2015) propose using British colonial history as an instrument for subnational autonomy. However, colonial history cannot instrument for group-level variation in autonomy over time.

Thus, in the empirics below, I cannot isolate a "treatment effect" of shared territory or regime alignment on war. Instead, I demonstrate conjunctions of regime alignments and autonomy arrangements associated with higher and lower probabilities of war.

3.1 Model specifications

Using the variables just described, I estimated logistic regression models of the onset of separatist civil war incorporating group fixed effects. The fixed effects set up comparisons within an ethnic group's own history, comparing periods when its neighbors were more and less powerful, while holding the identity of those neighbors constant. The fixed effects also take account of the initial demographic balance between ethnic groups in a region. Due to migration and differential growth rates, ethnic groups' population shares change over time and those changes are often politically

fraught. Cross-national data like the EPR dataset or most measures of ELF do not capture changes in the relative size of ethnic groups. Thus, once group fixed effects are introduced to the statistical model, it is not possible to control further for relative sizes of ethnic groups.

The available time-varying controls include group population (Ln *group population*) and, at the country level, logged GDP per capita and regime type (dummy variables for democracy and anocracy). I also measure whether an ethnic group's region was rich or poor relative to the country as a whole. EPR provides estimates of the GDP of an ethnic group's region as a share of the country's total GDP, as well as the region's population as a share of the country's population. I used those measures in variables for regional wealth or deprivation. If G is the region's share of national GDP and P is its share of the national population, then:

$$\text{Relative regional wealth} = \begin{cases} \frac{G}{P} & \text{if } G > P \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$\text{Relative regional poverty} = \begin{cases} \frac{P}{G} & \text{if } G < P \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Finally, models include a variable for the number of years a group has gone without war and cubic splines of that variable. Below, most of these controls are statistically insignificant, probably because of group fixed effects. Ethnic groups in power are less likely to go to war and wars break out more often under anocracy. These results are consistent with previous findings.

3.2   Model results

Table 2 reports the regression coefficients and standard errors for two models of separatist war onset. The hypotheses of interest require comparing the magnitude of these coefficients, however. Those tests are reported in Table 3.

The first half of Table 3 compares groups with and without autonomy, holding constant the power of their neighbors. Do groups without powerful neighbors have lower rates of rebellion under autonomy than under non-autonomy? In Model 1, autonomy is associated with lower war

18

Table 2: Territorial overlap with regime supporters, autonomy, and war

	Separatist war onset	
	Model 1	Model 2
Autonomy * Share territory with more powerful	1.6** (0.61)	
No autonomy * Share territory with more powerful	0.12 (0.39)	
Autonomy * Share territory with equal/less powerful	−1.3 (0.99)	
Autonomy * In-power * Share territory with more powerful		1.0 (0.90)
No autonomy * In-power * Share territory with more powerful		−0.23 (1.3)
Autonomy * In-power * Share territory with equal/less powerful		−16** (0.87)
No autonomy * In-power * Share territory with equal/less powerful		−0.86 (0.78)
Autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory with more powerful		1.5* (0.64)
No autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory with more powerful		0.071 (0.42)
Autonomy * Out-of-power * Share territory with equal/less powerful		−0.95 (1.0)
Ethnic group in power	−0.70 (0.62)	
Ln group population	1.5 (3.9)	1.5 (3.9)
Ln country GDP per capita	−0.29 (0.21)	−0.29 (0.22)
Relative regional wealth	21* (9.4)	21* (9.5)
Relative regional poverty	7.2* (3.3)	7.2* (3.3)
Democracy (0/1)	0.071 (0.47)	0.074 (0.48)
Peace years w/ splines?	Yes	Yes
Observations	3231	3231
Ln likelihood	-364	-363
Group fixed effects?	Yes	Yes

$^{+}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Interpreting how territorial autonomy interacts with regime alignments in models of civil war onset

Null hypotheses	Model 1	Model 2
I. Autonomous and non-autonomous groups are equally likely to rebel when …		
(a) Share territory w equal/less powerful group	−1.3	
(b) Share territory w more powerful group	1.5**	
(c) In power and share territory w equal/less powerful group		−15**
(d) In power and share territory w more powerful group		1.3
(e) Out of power and share territory w equal/less powerful group		−0.95
(f) Out of power and share territory w more powerful group		1.4**
II. The difference in probability of rebellion between autonomous and non-autonomous groups is the same if …		
(a) Share territory w equal/less powerful cf. share w more powerful	−2.7**	
(b) In-power group shares territory w equal/less powerful cf. shares w more powerful		−16**
(c) Out-of-power group shares territory w equal/less powerful cf. shares w more powerful		2.4*

$^+$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

risk among groups sharing territory with equal or less powerful interests (see line Ia in Table 3). The negative coefficient (-1.3) is equivalent to an odds ratio of about 0.3, a substantial reduction in the likelihood of war. This reduction is statistically insignificant, however.

By contrast, groups that share power with more powerful neighbors are more likely to rebel in periods of autonomy. The comparison for Model 1 appears in line Ib in Table 3. The difference between the coefficients on *Autonomy ∗ share territory w more powerful* and *No autonomy ∗ share territory w more powerful* is 1.5 or an odds ratio of about 4.5. Groups with more powerful neighbors are estimated to have more than four times higher odds of rebellion in autonomous periods compared to non-autonomous periods. This difference is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.

In Model 2, I separate ethnic groups according to inclusion in central power and the power of their neighbors. Autonomy and war are negatively correlated for groups with less powerful neighbors. Groups that are included in central power and have equal/less powerful neighbors are *much* less likely to rebel if they have autonomy (line Ic). The difference in coefficients of -15 implies that the likelihood of separatist war is several orders of magnitude lower under autonomy. Similarly, out-of-power groups with less powerful neighbors are less likely to rebel under autonomy than non-autonomy (line Ie). The size of this difference (-0.95) is modest and statistically insignificant, however.

Groups with more powerful neighbors have higher rates of rebellion under autonomy than non-autonomy. That generalization holds among groups in power at the center (line Id) and groups without access to central power (line Ie). In both cases, the estimated increase in risk of conflict is around a four-fold increase in the odds of war. That estimate is statistically significant among the sub-group that is out-of-power.

To sum up the results of Model 2, autonomy is negatively associated with war among groups that do not share territory with more powerful neighbors. That association is statistically significant in the subset of groups that have access to central power. Autonomy is positively associated with

21

war among groups with powerful neighbors. That relationship is statistically significant among groups without power at the center.

The lower portion of Table 3 compares the sizes of the differences between autonomous and non-autonomous groups across each category of shared territory. Line IIa is based on Model 1. It tests the null hypothesis that the difference between autonomy and non-autonomy among groups with less powerful neighbors is the same as the difference between autonomy and non-autonomy among groups with more powerful neighbors. That null hypothesis is easily rejected. Lines IIb–c are based on Model 2. The difference between autonomy and non-autonomy is extremely large for in-power groups with less powerful neighbors compared to in-power groups with more powerful neighbors (line IIb). Line IIc report a statistically significant difference in the influence of autonomy on out-of-power groups with powerful neighbors compared those without powerful neighbors.

The conclusion to be drawn from Tables 2 and 3 is that even naive estimates of the effects of autonomy are quite different depending on the political power of other groups in the autonomous region. Autonomy is associated with less risk of separatist war if the autonomous ethnic group does not share territory with regime allies. If the autonomous ethnic group shares its region with neighbors who have superior access to the central government, autonomy is not so pacifying. In fact, the rate of rebellion is higher among autonomous compared to non-autonomous groups sharing territory with the powerful. Model 2 shows that power at the center further conditions the relationship between autonomy, shared territory and rebellion.

4   Autonomy and territorial conflict

A growing share of states have at least one regional government that was created for the express purpose of granting autonomy to a particular ethnic group. Even more countries have adopted some form of political decentralization in the past decades, with the side effect of creating jurisdictions were regionally-concentrated ethnic groups have greater sway. Is this kind of power devolution

likely to be encourage or discourage separatism?

The most important power sub-national governments have is their ability to redistribute political, social, and economic resources among the people in their jurisdiction. The most vehement opponents of subnational autonomy tend to live in the autonomous region, alongside autonomy's proponents. The central executive's interventions in autonomous regions are prompted by complaints from allies in that region.

Autonomy is most likely to prevent separatist war if the newly-autonomous group does not share territory with any of the center's political allies. The center is content to let the regional government reorder local life in favor of its coethnics. Autonomous regions are not effective in preventing separatist war if the newly-autonomous group shares territory with other groups that have more political sway with the central executive.

The first half of this paper presented survey data from southern Thailand, where ethnic Pattani Malays share territory with ethnic Thais, and a separatist insurgency demands independence. Would autonomy help end the war there? In this case, an autonomous Pattani Malay district would have a substantial minority of ethnic Thais, whose coethnics hold power in Bangkok. Survey data shows that Pattani Malays who saw greater conflicts of interest between their community and local Thais were the most skeptical that autonomy would bring peace to the region. These autonomy skeptics were not especially hostile to Bangkok and they endorsed autonomy relative to the status quo.

The second half of the paper uses cross-national data to show that the statistical relationship between regional autonomy and separatist war is conditioned by the regime's alignment with competing groups in the autonomous area. Autonomy has a negative association with war when granted to ethnic groups that do not share territory with regime allies. Autonomy granted to groups that overlap important regime supporters is associated with a higher probability of separatist war, by contrast. The regime's political alliances with communities sharing the autonomous region determine whether local self-rule prevents war.

The arguments here recast the debate over ethnic autonomy. For opponents of autonomy, it is a step along a continuum that ends in state collapse. For proponents, autonomy protect minorities from the excesses of modern nation-state building. My arguments suggest that subnational autonomy is less destabilizing than its opponents fear and less egalitarian than its proponents hope.

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Table 4: Logistic regressions of which Pattani-Malays said only separation could end war (Reanalysis of data in Table 1)

	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14
Central government												
Satisfied w central gov.	−0.21 (0.28)											
Thais united by values		0.31 (0.47)										
Military has integrity			0.098 (0.30)									
Local autonomy												
Autonomy might end conflict				0.11 (0.29)								
Decentralize government					0.28 (0.28)							
Elect governor						−0.065 (0.31)						
Require officials speak Malay							0.19 (0.54)					
Require Malay in school								−0.060 (0.55)				
Shared territory												
Conflict w S Thais									−0.66* (0.32)			
S Thais & Malays equal econ. opportunity										0.92** (0.27)		
S Thais & Malays equal justice											0.48+ (0.25)	
S Thais & Malays equal gov. opportunity												0.52+ (0.27)
Constant	−0.66** (0.23)	−1.1* (0.45)	−0.85** (0.15)	−1.0* (0.40)	−1.3** (0.39)	−0.80** (0.27)	−1.0+ (0.58)	−0.79 (0.59)	0.37 (0.59)	−2.1** (0.39)	−1.1** (0.18)	−1.6** (0.40)
Sampling strata	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Sample size	462	467	457	447	451	467	466	467	430	464	467	451

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$