

# Inherently vulnerable? Ethnic geography and the intensity of violence in the Bosnian civil war



Jessica Di Salvatore \*

Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Available online 17 December 2015

### Keywords:

Civil war  
Ethnic conflict  
Bosnia-Herzegovina  
Ethnic security dilemma  
Ethnic groups  
GIS  
Settlement patterns

## ABSTRACT

Which geographic configurations of ethnic settlements are most susceptible to violence in ethnic conflict? Existing research on ethnic conflict focuses on regional configurations of ethnicity, thus neglecting how local vulnerable pockets of minorities may become primary targets for violence. The mechanism linking minority enclaves to more violence posits that the regional majority group will fight local minorities in order to (i) create ethnically homogeneous areas and (ii) remove potential support for the other group by the local minority. Minority enclaves that cannot easily receive outside support from their ethnic brethren are vulnerable and thus provide incentives to attack. The paper thus argues that the presence of vulnerable ethnic minorities in areas dominated by other ethnic groups heightens the perception of threat, suggesting that the implications of the ethnic security dilemma are more pronounced. The paper uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to develop measures of isolated and vulnerable minority enclaves. This novel measure captures local (micro) and regional (macro) patterns of ethnic settlements that remain veiled behind a focus on ethnicity in larger administrative units. In a quantitative case study of the Bosnian war (1992–1994), I show that the presence of local minorities within territories controlled by an enemy ethnic majority is associated with more violence. The results remain robust when accounting for the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNPROFOR) and across several robustness checks.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

In April 1992, Serb forces encircled the city of Bijeljina and cleansed the town of its Bosniak population. The city of Bijeljina is located in the middle of Bijeljina *opština* (municipality from now), which was ethnically Serb-dominated before the Bosnian war. As the map in Fig. 1 shows, the city was a Bosniak enclave surrounded by Serb settlements. After Serbs proclaimed the municipality part of the Serb Autonomous Oblast, the local majority of Bosniaks in the town of Bijeljina realized that an invasion was imminent and organized its defense around the Patriotic League. Their resistance, however, was not sufficient to defend themselves against the Arkanovci and other Serb forces, which quickly captured the town (Toal & Dahlman, 2011). After the invasion, they proceeded with the four-day long ethnic cleansing of non-Serb population (Human Rights Watch, 2000). The circumstances in which the attack occurred favored the offense: a loosely organized resistance defending a city that was completely surrounded by Serb-held areas. The tragic massacre of Bijeljina occurred in the early moments of the Bosnian

war and exemplifies how isolated enclaves entail a defensive vulnerability for the minority group and an offensive opportunity for the surrounding majority group. Indeed, the next target of the Serb offensive was Janja, another Bosniak majority town in the Serb municipality of Bijeljina (Toal & Dahlman, 2011).

The illustration of ethnic settlement patterns and violence in Bijeljina has implications for the relationship between ethnic configurations and violence in ethnic conflict. While explored in many studies, much of this research misses the multitude of possible spatial configuration of ethnic groups veiled behind non-territorial notions of ethnic diversity. Consistent results in different research designs and at different levels of analysis find that the degree of ethnic intermingling has a positive effect on the severity of violence. For example, when there are two or few groups of comparable sized (high polarization and intermediate fragmentation), clashes are remarkably severe (Costalli & Moro, 2012; Klasnja & Novta, 2014; Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005). These studies, however, focus on aggregate measures of ethnicity and overlook how local pockets of minorities increase the intensity of violence. Recognizing the importance of local and regional patterns of settlements, this paper theorizes that, as in the case of Bijeljina, enclaves hosting local minorities surrounded by a group of different ethnicity are more prone to violence because of the vulnerabilities induced by this spatial configuration. Majority groups devote resources to fight locally

\* University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

E-mail address: [j.disalvatore@uva.nl](mailto:j.disalvatore@uva.nl).

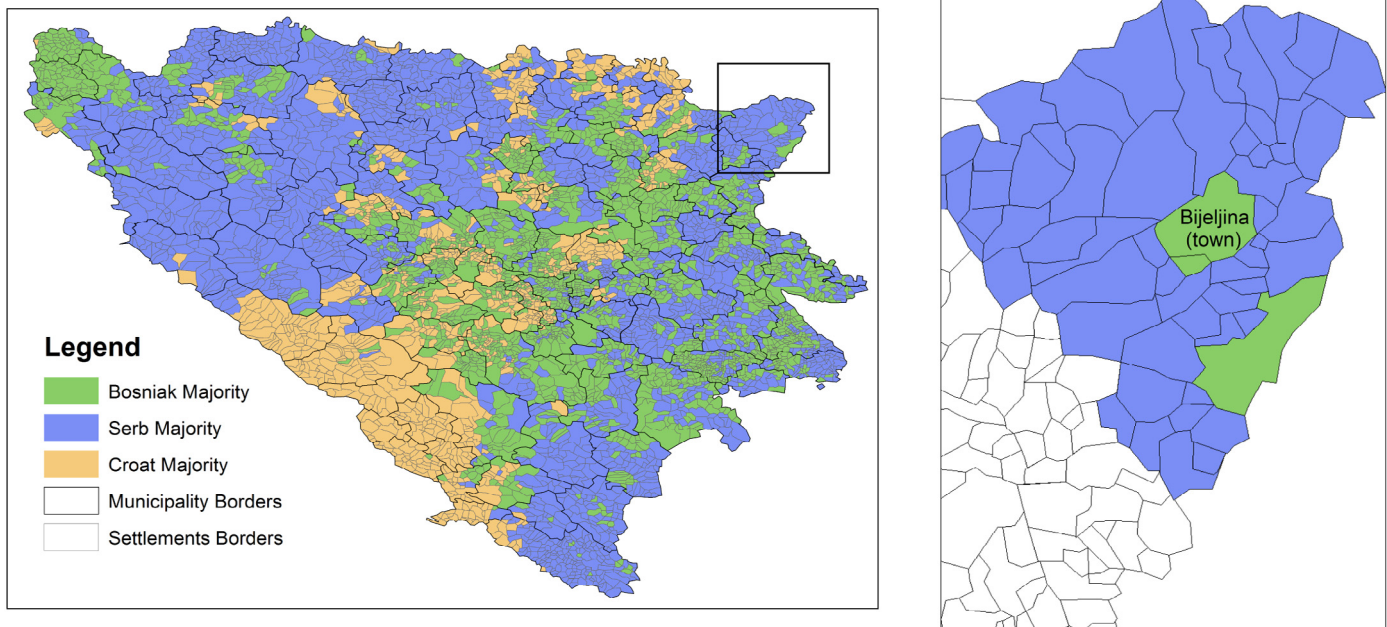


Fig. 1. Detail of Bijeljina settlements within Bijeljina municipality.

vulnerably minorities in order to (i) create ethnically homogeneous areas with stable control and (ii) remove potential support for the other group.

This paper makes two contributions to the existing literature on ethnic civil wars. First, it shows that both regional *and* local ethnic group distribution are important for understanding how ethnic intermingling produces intense ethnic violence. The proposed mechanism posits that local sources of insecurity affect the strategic objectives of regionally dominant ethnic groups. In ethnic civil war, power and control are more stable if territorial homogeneity and elimination of opponent's supporters can be achieved. The perceived threat to a majority group's territorial control induced by the presence of local-level minorities explains how village or town-level settlement patterns produce the conditions for violent collective behavior at a higher level of aggregation (the region or municipality). In other words, the severity of ethnic security dilemma varies in space and this variation is accounted by ethnic patterns at the local level. Second, the paper introduces a novel measurement of ethnic intermingling that captures ethnic vulnerability emerging from geography and demographic concentration. Using fine-grained data on the spatial distribution of ethnic groups within administrative units, I measure the spatial variation of threat and vulnerability by identifying isolated enclaves of undefended local minorities surrounded by a majoritarian opponent ethnic group. This specific configuration of local ethnic enclaves cannot be captured by measures of ethnicity that measure the level of intermixing.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I review the literature on the severity of ethnic conflict. The second section presents the argument of how intermingled ethno-demographic patterns create vulnerabilities and increase violence. I then describe the construction of the vulnerable minorities' measure and compare it to other measures of ethnicity. The empirical section tests the hypothesis with data on the Bosnian conflict (1992–1995). I show that the size of the vulnerable minorities is linked to higher levels of violence using a variety of estimation methods. Results for the violence-increasing effect of minority enclaves remain consistent when

accounting the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNPROFOR) and the endogenous relationship between peacekeeping and violence. I conclude with policy implications and suggestions for future research.

### Ethnicity and violence in ethnic conflict

Civil conflict scholarship has explored the link between the distribution of ethnic groups and the intensity of violence within states. This literature has highlighted how the polarization of ethnic groups (Costalli & Moro, 2012; Esteban & Ray, 2008; Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005) and groups' regional distribution within the country (Melander, 2009; Weidmann, 2011) are associated with the intensity of conflict. These conceptualizations of ethnic diversity, however, neglect that local intermingling also shapes the dynamics of violence.

Arguments on polarization emphasize the implications of the number and size of ethnic groups for violence. Since group size can be thought of as a proxy for its ability to mobilize resources, large groups can be expected to fight harder in locations where their population share is approximately the same. This effect of the size and share of ethnic groups has been analyzed using an index of polarization (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005). Society is polarized when there is a small number of fairly large groups with high intra-group ethnic homogeneity and high inter-group ethnic heterogeneity (Esteban & Schneider, 2008). Using countries as units of analysis, Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) shows that conflict in highly polarized societies tends to be very severe, conditional on conflict actually breaking out. Applying polarization to within-country variation in intensity, Costalli and Moro claim that violence is highest when polarization is high (i.e. groups are large) and fractionalization is at intermediate levels (i.e. the number of groups is small) because groups have to fight harsher to reach their objectives (Costalli & Moro, 2012, 804). Their analysis shows that polarization is indeed a good predictor of intense violence in the Bosnian conflict. Yet a limitation of this work on polarization is that it neglects the spatial location of groups, making it impossible to know whether

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1061850>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1061850>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)