

DISCRIMINATION AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE:
A CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY WITH
TWO TIME PERIODS

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Discontent of one form or another is commonly taken to be the root cause of political violence. Aristotle suggested that an outraged sense of justice lay behind all political revolutions. Marx argued that revolutionary violence would result from the progressive immiseration of the proletariat. More recently, Gurr (1970), Davies (1962), and the Feierabends (1966) traced the origins of violent political behavior to the frustrations of men and women who do not achieve the values they believe they can or should achieve. These arguments, generally known as relative deprivation theses, have engendered a plethora of controversial attempts at empirical validation. In particular, the late 1960s and 1970s brought a great deal of formal specification and testing of general causal models of political violence. Empirical studies since then have usually involved the use of multiple regression models to analyze the various factors presumed to influence the form, intensity, or extent of civil strife.

Criticisms have been directed at these studies on several grounds. First, because relative deprivation theory is based on subjective (i.e., individual) interpretations of reality, it has been rather resilient to empirical falsification because of the inherent difficulties in obtaining sufficient individual level data to directly test the theories. Second, the standard variables used to test these arguments at the cross-national level, the *World Handbook* indicators, are themselves subject to several criticisms. The indicators which measure the outcomes of violent conflict are based on the interactions between dissidents and regimes. However, relative deprivation theory purports to provide explanations for dissident action alone. Further, that these data are based on reports from accounts reported in newspapers and regional sources raises the issue of selective reporting and other biases.

It does not follow, however, that the empirical work on conflict is without merit. First, the difficulties of testing microlevel arguments are well known. Second, a great deal of quantitative research has been done using cross-

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national data, and this body of evidence provides us with a benchmark against which we can assess our results. Faced with the decision to either use less than perfect data or abandon cross-national research, we have chosen to use the less than perfect data.

Still, a rather different criticism can be brought against the cross-national studies done in the late 60s and 70s: empirical tests of the basic theoretical argument in the relative deprivation theories concentrated, understandably enough, on one time period (Russett 1964; Feierabend & Feierabend 1966; Gurr 1968; Gurr and Duvall 1973; Hibbs 1973; Nagel 1974). This raises the question whether the results obtained were relative to the period of time examined. For example, there is reason to believe that decolonization in Africa, student protest in the West, the cold war, detente, etc. could have substantial impacts on conflict processes. To the extent that this were true, we would expect that relationships found in one period of time might not hold true for another period of time. At the same time, no studies exist that give us any reason to believe that the impact of economic development, or economic and political discrimination on political violence in the 1960s would be the same a decade later. Strangely enough, none of the recent studies raise this question, even though some (Muller 1985; Muller and Seligson 1987) have examined the model in two time periods. We believe that it is important to examine whether a set of relationships valid at one point in time are the same at a later point. In this paper we develop a model, test whether the causal parameters persist over time, and report significant results that support the robustness of the basic relationship suggested in relative deprivation theory.

INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION VARIABLES

Any researcher developing a model in this field has several variables to choose from which can be interpreted as measuring relative deprivation. A major choice concerns the use of inequality measures (i.e., Gini scores of land and/or income inequality) and discrimination measures (i.e., Gurr and Gurr 1983). A large literature has been generated concerning the specific causal impact that inequality, as measured by the Gini score, has on political violence. This debate originally centered on the shape of the relationship (Russett 1964; Nagel 1974; Sigelman & Simpson 1977), but has more recently moved to questions about the validity of employing land inequality versus income inequality as a useful measure of economic inequality (Weede 1981; Muller 1985; Weede 1986; Muller and Seligson 1987; Midlarsky 1988; Muller et al. 1989). Underpinning these debates is an idea central to the relative deprivation theory that inequality leads to discontent, which leads to opposition to the government and ensuing conflict and violence. This paper leaves the debate about Gini scores to the existing literature, and instead examines a set of indicators that measure discrimination rather than inequality.

Gurr and Gurr (1983) report a data collection effort that grew out of an earlier project by Gurr (1966: 67-90). Collected in two time periods (circa

1960 and circa 1975) the data code both the extent and intensity of economic discrimination, political discrimination, and potential separatism in 86 countries. Gurr and Gurr (1983: 52) define economic discrimination as "the deliberate, invidious exclusion of social groups from some desired economic goods or conditions (values) because of the groups' ascribed characteristics." Political discrimination "is similarly defined in terms of systematic limitation of such groups' opportunities to participate in political activities or attain elite positions." Separatist groups are identified using two general approaches: "One is to search for the presence of group activity advocating greater autonomy for the group or for its region. The second is to look for the existence of structural conditions that typically are associated with separatism . . ." (Gurr and Gurr 1983: 74).¹ Finally, extent is defined as the size of the group(s) discriminated against relative to the population, and intensity is a judgmental coding of the degree of discrimination that the group(s) are subjected to (Gurr and Gurr 1983: 68).

The data are more qualitative than the Gini scores in that they are based on a coder's ability to assign values based on descriptive literature as opposed to counting land holdings or income levels. In comparison with the Gini score indicators, the Gurr and Gurr indicators are important to consider for two reasons. First, the data are not limited to economic factors, but include political factors as well. Second, the data focus on "a particularly invidious kind of inequality, that which is based on the ascriptive characteristics of groups . . ." (Gurr and Gurr 1983: 50). Thus, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional groups are the focus of attention. This is important because it provides a more strict test of the relative deprivation theory than indicators based on economic inequality alone: if groups who are systematically discriminated against do not respond in the manner that the theory suggests, we can have little confidence that the theory is useful.

In sum, we have chosen to use the Gurr and Gurr indicators rather than the Gini scores for several reasons: (1) comparatively more literature examine exclusively the Gini scores than the Gurr and Gurr indicators; (2) the Gurr and Gurr indicators measure economic discrimination, political discrimination, and separatism as opposed to just economic inequality; and (3) the Gurr and Gurr indicators provide a more strict test of the relative deprivation ideas because they focus on groups discriminated against for their ascriptive characteristics.

MODEL SPECIFICATION

A concern when performing multiple regression analyses is model specification (Kennedy 1987: 67-89). This is a process that is crucial for accurate parameter estimation and relies on the discretion of researchers to thoroughly examine the relevant literature. Regressing indicators of political violence on

¹ Gurr and Gurr (1983: 74-75) provide a detailed list of the coding definitions.

