

2016

Civil War determinants: The case of Iraq and Syria's civil war and the rise of Islamic State (ISIS)

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**Civil war determinants: The case of Iraq and Syria's civil war and the rise of
Islamic State (ISIS)**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Political Science

Program of Study Committee:
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Ames, Iowa

2016

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the effect of three key mechanisms—state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party assistance—on the probability of civil war onset from 1960 to 1999. Using cross-national data logistic analysis for 160 countries, I found that states with poor governance quality are more prone to civil conflict. This hypothesis is tested and confirmed using GDP/Per Capita and tax ratio as two indicators for the state's administrative quality. Second, ethnic grievances are measured by the degree of economic and political disparities across ethnic groups (horizontal inequality). In contrast, to several recent influential civil war researches, namely Collier and Hoeffler (2004), and Fearon and Latin (2003), I show that political and economic inequalities between groups actually increase the probability of civil conflict. Countries with large groups face economic and political discrimination along ethnic lines are more likely to experience internal conflict, as oppose to countries do not discriminate against minorities. Lastly, investigating the relationship between third party assistance and the risk of civil conflict onset, I use data for U.S. economic and military aid to foreign countries. However, the data failed to reach statistical significance. This may be due to lack of data for other third parties like the former USSR which actively provided economic and military aid to various countries opposing US interests during the Cold War. In the final section, I present a case study of the civil war in Iraq and Syria, which created environment for ISIS to emerge. The case study provides a brief history about the origin of the group from 2010-14, but the primary goal is to provide an explanatory argument of how each of the three mechanisms played out in Iraq and Syria's civil wars respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II nearly 122 civil wars have resulted in the death of over 16 million people worldwide, compared with 3 million deaths in interstate wars.¹ Internal conflicts typically last longer and bring about widespread economic, political, and social devastation--as seen in Afghanistan, Sudan, and today in Syria. Despite this heavy toll, civil conflicts have been studied far less than conventional wars, and lack of consensus on the conditions that contribute to the onset of civil conflict divided scholars into two camps; those who argue that the availability of opportunity has a more explanatory power in civil war onset, and those who caution that the role of ethnic grievances should not be underestimated. The underlying disagreement is twofold: 1) whether it is the “opportunity” or “grievances” that increases the risk of internal conflict, and 2) what constitutes “opportunity” and what constitutes “grievances”.

In light of this argument, this research aims to evaluate three prominent causes of civil conflict—state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party assistance—that most affect the risk of civil conflict, with the goal to reconcile these differences. I provide empirical evidence suggesting when we introduce the opportunity factors that affect civil war onset, such as state weakness, these factors are more likely to produce civil conflict in societies with economic and political inequalities between ethnic groups.

One interpretation of “opportunity” is the availability of finance—either to enable governments to suppress potential rebel groups or to facilitate rebel activities—that can determine the onset of civil conflict. Governments in relatively rich countries can collect more

¹ This figure is taken from Fearon and Latin’s (2003) article, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”

revenue and consequently spend more on security, making conflict less likely, while the availability of natural resources that are accessible to rebel groups, in turn finance the activities of these groups. For example, Collier & Hoeffler (2004) argue that people who join rebel groups are primarily driven by economic gains and that grievances are largely irrelevant.² While people may be rational actors who calculate costs and benefits of joining rebellion, they are unlikely to risk their lives in the absence of severe grievances or some sense of group loyalty that bonds them together. Hence, the availability of finance to rebel groups becomes problematic only when other conflict-causing elements are present, such as ethnic grievances.

A number of conflict scholars have found ethnic grievances statistically insignificant and therefore concluded that ethnic grievances have no, or little, effect on the risk of civil conflict onset. For instance, Fearon & Laitin (2003) argue that grievances such as economic inequality or government discrimination against minorities are less effective predictors of civil conflict when controlling for per capita income.³ Most of these studies have measured ethnic grievances based on the size and number of ethnic groups or simply based on language and culture differences. The problem with these measurements is that they do not account for the level of economic and political inequalities that exist between ethnic groups, which may be the driver of violence.

Differences in access to economic and political resources among ethnic groups provide potential dissenters with a strong motive to fight. This is referred to as horizontal inequality and

² Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler (2004) Greed and Grievance in Civil War. *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4): 563–595.

³ Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin (2003) Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. *American Political Science Review* 97(1): 75–90.

suggests that ethnic fractionalization that coincides with economic and political differences between groups can cause deep resentment and may lead to violence. Using the Minority at Risk (MAR) dataset, I find strong evidence that economic and political inequality between ethnic groups does matter, even after controlling for other major predictors of civil war.

There is a wider consensus in the literature with regard to state capacity in sustaining peace and stability. Generally, researchers have operationalized the concept of state capacity as the state's military, institutional, and administrative capability (Hendrix 2010).⁴ The first two dimensions of state capacity—military and the institutional quality—have received a great deal of attention, but the third dimension to a lesser degree. The state's administrative quality deserves greater attention, given the importance of this dimension in implementing policies that directly affect citizens' daily lives. According to the social contract theory, citizens accept state authority as long as the state delivers services and provides reasonable economic and security measures. When the government lacks the ability to do so, the contract breaks down and violence becomes more likely.

In an effort to build on the previous literature that emphasizes state capacity in understanding domestic conflicts, this paper finds that wealthier states with higher rates of taxation and redistribution capabilities have lower probabilities of civil war onset. This is not because wealth alone, often measured by per capita income, can substitute for a strong state, but states that have higher tax ratio are likely to have more efficient bureaucracy and redistribution

⁴ Hendrix, Gullen S. 2010. Measuring state capacity: Theoretical and empirical implications for the study of civil conflict. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(3):273-285

outcomes, which are associated with the reduction of grievances, and more social stability. Furthermore, bureaucratic efficiency is related to a strong military and law enforcement to surveillance and counter internal challenges.

Consistent with Fearon & Latin (2003), I argue that financially and bureaucratically weak states provide rebel groups with the opportunity to recruit more members of society, thus increasing the probability of civil conflict. Such states lack the ability to monitor and identify rebel group members within their borders and often conduct poor counter-insurgency operations that inflict a heavy toll on civilians, which is likely to drive noncombatants into rebel forces.⁵ However, measurement of state capacity with per capita income alone may not reflect the state's ability to maintain a monopoly on the use of force or delivery of services. Per capita income may be a good indicator of a government's coercive capacity and overall economic development, but economic wealth alone may not translate into the state's administrative capacity to implement economic and security policies efficiently.

To build on this argument, that economic wealth can substitute the states overall administrative and military capacity, I argue that another important indicator for the state's military and administrative capacity is the degree to which the state is able to raise revenue through taxation. This is because taxation is not only associated with strong military and administrative capacity through revenue increases, but also affects distributional outcomes and political stability. Such states have greater ability to provide public goods and collective security through a more stable and effective bureaucratic system.

⁵ Note: This paper makes a reference to both Collier & Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon & Latin (2003) in several places. This is not just because these works are the most influential and highly cited in recent civil conflict literature, but also their arguments are highly immersed in the idea of opportunity, which is relevant to my hypotheses.

The third factor that affects the onset and duration of civil conflict is third party intervention. The literature of civil war intervention shows the development of various theoretical approaches, with some viewing third party intervention as a response to civil war conditions; especially conflicts that have ethnic components make intervention more likely (Khosla 1999).⁶ Others have focused more on the actors involved in civil conflict rather than other features of the conflict (Salehyan et al. 2011).⁷ I hypothesize that when opposing third parties with geopolitical interests engage in a country's internal disputes by providing support in the form of military and economic aid, they increase the probability of civil conflict onset. This is because such support reduces any prospect for compromise and a negotiated settlement between the opposition and the government. I tested this hypothesis using data for U.S military aid and economic aid to foreign countries for 160 countries. However, I failed to find a significant correlation between third party assistance and civil war onset. This may be due to the lack of data for the opposing parties, such as the economic and military support from the former Soviet Union to other groups during the Cold War. Other influential intervention studies (for example, Regan & Meachum 2013) have found support for the effect of third party intervention on the risk of civil war onset. In their analysis, they develop a model that generates a risk score, which indicates the likelihood that a country will experience a civil war onset two years in the future. The risk scores are predicted based on a forecasting model that includes regime type, level of infant mortality, conflict neighborhood, and state discrimination.⁸ Their sample reflects a

⁶ Khosla, Deepa. 1999. "Third World States as Intervenors in Ethnic Conflicts: Implications for Regional and International Security." *Third World Quarterly* 20 (6): 1143–56.

⁷ Salehyan, Idean, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David E. Cunningham. 2011. "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups." *International Organization* 65.04): 709-44. Web.

set of countries experiencing a level of instability sufficient to put them at a higher risk of civil war, but that are not currently at war. One of the limitations of third party studies has been the emphasis on intervention after the conflict begins, due to lack of appropriate data. We know that the actions of third party actors prior to the conflict onset play an influential role in diffusing or exacerbating disputes between the opposition and the government.

This paper is organized as follows. First, I briefly review the literature on determinants of civil war, focusing on the “grievances” and “opportunity” model. Then three hypotheses follows; the “opportunity” model in terms of state capacity, ethnic “grievances” across groups, and the effect of third party intervention in civil war onset. Next, I empirically test the hypotheses using cross-national data for over 160 countries. The empirical test supports the first two hypotheses with regard to state capacity and ethnic grievances, but the third hypothesis fails to reach statistical significance. In the final section, I present a case study of the civil war in Iraq and Syria with the focus on the rise of the Islamic State group, also known as (ISIS). The case study provides a brief history about the origin of the group, but the primary goal is to provide an explanatory argument of how each of the three mechanisms played out in Iraq and Syria’s civil war.

⁸ Regan, Patrick M., and M. S. Meachum. "Data on Interventions during Periods of Political Instability." *Journal of Peace Research* 51.1 (2013): 127-35. Web.

CIVIL WAR DETERMINANTS

Literature on the study of internal conflict links the onset of civil war to some combination of “opportunity” and “grievances”. Traditional researchers have generally focused on the question related to group “grievances”, and the role of inequality, discrimination, and deprivation in why some groups choose to rebel. The combination of these three factors makes ethnically and religiously polarized societies more prone to civil conflict. Gurr (1970) suggested that the potential for collective violence depends on the discontent of the members of society, which is the result of gap between expectations and achievements.⁹ This gap is called relative deprivation and provides the motive for action through a “frustration” mechanism. Despite the logical appeal behind this argument, a number of scholars have challenged the validity of “relative deprivation” in explaining the onset of civil conflict. In part, this is due to the difficulty of measuring human frustration statistically (Brush 1996).

The critiques of relative deprivation argue that the existence of frustration and grievances is not enough to explain why some groups mobilize against the state. Inequality and grievances could only be considered a precondition and not the main driver for the occurrence of social unrest. Rather, they argue, the emergence of social movements is contingent upon the availability of resources needed for collective action. Tilly (1978) argues that collective violence is a struggle for power among contending groups; it occurs not when groups are especially discontented, but when they calculate that action will be successful, with benefits that exceed the costs.¹⁰ Therefore, rebel members are “rational actors” who calculate the costs and benefits of

⁹ Gurr, Ted Robert (1970) *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Tilly, Charles (1978) *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

rebellion. After all, rebel groups need to generate revenue to build a robust organization and cover the costs of rebellion. If the costs of rebellion outweigh the benefits, rebellion becomes unlikely regardless of the existence of grievances.

This perspective is called “resource mobilization” theory, which emphasizes the continuities between a movement and institutionalized actions, the rationality of movement actors, and the strategic problems confronted by movements. Based on this perspective, the success of movements is largely determined by strategic factors and the political process in which dissenting groups become enmeshed (Jenkins 1983).¹¹ Since then, this argument has inspired numerous statistical analyses to explain what types of resources and tactics are significant for potential dissent groups to launch an insurgency and overcome the collective action dilemma.

State Capacity

In assessing the explanatory power of “opportunity” versus “grievances” arguments, Collier & Hoeffler (2004) find empirical support for the latter, because individuals who decide to join a rebellion are more driven by economic benefits than motives, they argue. And, the presence of natural resources provides rebel groups with the necessary funds to cover the cost of their rebellion. The most significant funding opportunities, they claim, tend to come from exportable natural resources: if rebels can extract and sell resources, or extort money from those who do, then they are more likely to launch a civil war.

¹¹ Jenkins, J. Craig. "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 9.1 (1983): 527-53. Web

This argument is more actor-focused and largely undermines other forms of opportunities in initiating civil war, such as state weaknesses. Researchers have suggested that opportunity and grievances models are not mutually exclusive and civil war should be defined as complex events that result from a combination of factors that include grievances and opportunities. In a state where grievances are high, mobilization becomes more likely when opportunities arise.

Opportunity, however, is not a clear concept; it may come in different forms, such as political instability, state weakness, or structural conditions. Opportunities are not only associated with the rebel group's calculations of its own strengths and strategies, but also provide explanations for the state's ability to challenge potential rebellion. Fearon & Latin (2003) identify specific factors that increase a state's vulnerability to insurgency, such as poverty, political instability, and rough terrain. These factors matter primarily in the likelihood of civil conflict, because they proxy the state's overall capacity to fight insurgency. At the heart of their argument is that the state's overall economic development determines its coercive ability to find and monitor potential rebels through a robust military and police force.

Fearon & Latin (2003) hypothesize that financially, organizationally, and politically weak governments render insurgency more feasible and attractive due to weak local policing and corrupt counter-insurgency practices. They measure a state's administrative and military capacity based on economic variables such as per capita income. States with higher per capita incomes may have stronger administrative and military capacity, factors that are decisive in deterring rebellion from initial stages. Such states are able to monitor and impose necessary sanctions on disaffected citizens, should they decide to rebel. Conversely, low capacity states generally lack sufficient bureaucratic penetration into the society and sufficient institutions of coercion to carry

out this task, thus facing serious challenges in monitoring and suppressing dissent. This creates an environment that is conducive for rebel groups to recruit disaffected citizens into their ranks.

While state capacity seems to be an intuitive factor that can affect the onset and duration of civil conflict, it has been a difficult concept to operationalize (Hendrix 2011; Sobek 2010).¹² Measures such as per capita income can be simplistic and don't directly reflect the state's ability to administer all of its territory, maintain a monopoly on the use of force, or deliver services. Thus, measuring the states' administrative and repressive capacity with per capita income alone may not present an accurate picture of the state's overall ability to challenge potential dissent. Per capita income is an important indicator of a government's military and economic capacity, but economic wealth alone may not substitute for a state's administrative capacity to implement law and order (Zeynep, Dursun, and Patrick 2010).¹³

To build on Fearon & Latin's argument that economic wealth can substitute for the state's overall administrative and military capacity, I argue that another important indicator for the state's military and administrative capacity is the degree to which the state is able to raise revenue through taxation of the population. States have greater ability to provide public goods and collective security through a more stable and effective bureaucratic system. Moreover, revenue extraction establishes some sense of connectedness between the government and citizens through the exchange of goods for protection (Levi 2006).¹⁴ However, as predatory theory

¹² Sobek, David (2010) Masters of their domains: The role of state capacity in civil wars. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(3): 267–271.

¹³ Taydas, Zeynep, Dursun Peksen, and Patrick James. "Why Do Civil Wars Occur? Understanding the Importance of Institutional Quality." *Civil Wars* 12.3 (2010): 195-217. Web.

¹⁴ Plous, S. "Of Rule and Revenue. Margaret Levi." (Review). *Ethics* 100.2 (1990): 430-32. Web.

predicts, rulers face a variety of constraints in raising revenues through taxation, such as their relative bargaining positions and the cost of transactions.

It is argued that interstate rivalries and territorial threats loosen some of these constraints on the ruler's ability to extract revenue from the populations (Gibler & Miller 2014; Thies 2004).¹⁵ In the time of interstate war and rivalries, governments are able to extract more tax revenue from their population, and may face less opposition from citizens. Gibler & Miller (2014) argue that the ability of a state to control potential rebellions resides in a combination of two factors—the level of connectedness of the state with the population and the repressive strength of the government, which is measured by the ability of state to implement its policies, by force if necessary. In their estimation, during an external threat to a state's territorial integrity, individuals in the targeted state become more connected with the state and less tolerant of the internal rival groups. Thus, they would be more willing to contribute to the state's defense and to central government.¹⁶

This hypothesis is originally derived from Tilly's famous argument "war makes states, and states make war", which is inspired by the European state-building experience during the 16th century, that suggests that external threats and war that involved territorial occupation fostered a sense of national identity and allowed the rulers to extract revenues from society in exchange for protection. The theory introduces four steps in the state building process--

¹⁵ Thies, Cameron G (2004) State building, interstate and intrastate rivalry: A study of post-colonial developing country extractive efforts, 1975–2000. *International Studies Quarterly* 48(1): 53–72.

¹⁶ Gibler, Douglas M., and Steven V. Miller. "External Territorial Threat, State Capacity, and Civil War." *Journal of Peace Research* 51.5 (2014): 634-46. Web.

eliminating rivals outside of territories (war-making), eliminating internal rivals (state-making), protecting those parties that support their continued rule, and finally, to accomplish the first three activities, states must engage in the extraction of resources from the population and territory they are attempting to control.

However, a number of scholars have argued that the European model of state building has not travelled well in the post-colonial and civil war-prone developing countries, mainly due to the presence of international norms blocking interstate rivalries escalating into actual war and territorial expansion. They argue that great powers combined with international structure have prevented the emergence of strong states in the developing world in a manner parallel to that of early modern Europe. Following this perspective, Thies (2004) examines the effects of both interstate and intrastate rivalries on extractive capacity in the context of state development in Sub-Saharan, North African, and Asia. He comes to the same conclusion that the lack of serious external threats has led to weak state structures, and in particular inefficient fiscal bureaucracies and tax systems.

The studies focus on the effect of the external factors on the government's ability to collect revenue through taxation and they largely ignore the internal factors, such as the country's economic conditions, internal rivalries between groups, the existence of natural resources, and the type of government institutions that may determine the government's ability to collect revenue. If the state already suffers with internal rivalries and has weak institutions, external rivalries may only present opportunities to the potential dissenters to put more pressure on the government, thus leading to more violence and instability. External rivalries are still too

common in regions of Africa and the Middle East, but these rivalries have not resulted in less internal conflicts and greater national unities. This could be due to the internal factors, namely ethnic heterogeneity, colonial history, and the presence of natural resources (Herbst 1990).¹⁷ In the Middle East, for example, the Arab-Israeli and Iran-Saudi rivalries have not contributed to the increase of state capacities for two reasons: first, Middle Eastern societies still suffer with identity crises along ethnic, regional, and religious lines due to their colonial history. There is no a strong sense of belonging to a particular state among people. Oftentimes, loyalty to certain religious or ethnic groups overcomes the sense of nationalism (Razi 1990) ¹⁸. The Arab-Israeli rivalry has at times created some sense of unity among Arab societies, but this unity was rather to serve the authoritarian rulers at times of crisis. The Iran-Saudi rivalry has had serious consequences in deepening sectarian divisions and political crises within the countries of Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Second, most Middle Eastern states heavily rely on oil to generate revenue. There is very little reliance on domestic taxation and a lack of transparency and political accountability between states and citizens. If the government doesn't extract revenue from the people and instead substitutes revenue from natural resources, the social contract between the state and citizens becomes less pronounced (DeRouen & Goldfinch 2012).¹⁹ Corrupt leaders share the wealth with certain elites to retain power rather than pursue legitimacy through the social

¹⁷ Herbst, Jeffrey. "War and the State in Africa." *International Security* 14.4 (1990): 117. Web.

¹⁸ Razi, G. Hossein. "Legitimacy, Religion, and Nationalism in the Middle East." *The American Political Science Review* 84.1 (1990): 69. Web.

¹⁹ Derouen, Karl, and Shaun Goldfinch. "What Makes a State Stable and Peaceful? Good Governance, Legitimacy and Legal-Rationality Matter Even More for Low-Income Countries." *Civil Wars* 14.4 (2012): 499-520. Web.

contract (Ross 2004).²⁰ Thus a larger percent of the population comes to perceive them as being deprived from the country's wealth. This is even more problematic in ethnically divided societies where one ethnic group has dominated the government, which is largely the case in the developing countries.

This is not to suggest that oil-rich states that are ethnically fractionalized are doomed to experience internal conflict and are never able to establish an effective bureaucracy. In fact, some studies have argued that an abundant of oil revenues enables incumbents to both reduce taxes and increase patronage and public goods, making it possible for them to buy off a larger set of potential challengers and reduce dissent (Smith 2004).²¹ However, the prospect of establishing an effective bureaucracy that benefits average citizens in such states may be low. In contrast, governments that depend on tax revenues are obligated to be more transparent and less corrupt, two essential components in building an effective bureaucracy.

In short, states with higher tax ratios have greater abilities to establish a sufficiently bureaucratic system that can facilitate economic growth, reduce the likelihood of corruption, and enhance the government's ability to deliver public goods and provide security, which in turn reduces grievances. Conversely, in a state where the bureaucracy and institutions of coercion is too weak to provide public goods and collective security, grievances are likely high, thus

²⁰ Ross, Michael L. "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases." *International Organization* 58.01 (2004): n. pag. Web.

²¹ Smith, Benjamin. "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999." *American Journal of Political Science* 48.2 (2004): 232. Web.

increasing the probability of social unrest. This may be more prevalent in ethnically divided societies.

Ethnic Grievances

The proponents of the opportunity model have underemphasized the role of ethnic grievances in the probability of civil conflict, and they argue that what matters most for initiating rebellion is the availability of opportunities and that motive is not a significant factor. Critics of this model have argued that civil conflict could be a combination of several factors that include opportunity and grievances. For example, Gurr (2000) reconciles these approaches by combining these models, arguing that mobilization depends on availability of collective identity, shared motivations and opportunities for collective action.²²

Some have argued that the relationship between ethnic grievances and the onset of civil conflict should be approached in a way that can account for the level of ethnic grievances among groups, the shared identity, and the opportunity is available to them depending on the type of political regime and the country's socioeconomic factors (Ellingsen 2000; Buhaug et al. 2014; Kaufmann 1996).²³ For a group to mobilize, it first needs a common identity, which is readily

²² Gurr, Ted Robert. *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2000. Print.

²³ Ellingsen, T. "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?: Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44.2 (2000): 228-49. Web

Buhaug, Halvard, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. "Square Pegs in Round Holes: Inequalities, Grievances, and Civil War." *International Studies Quarterly* 58.2 (2013): 418-31. Web.

available among ethnic group members, based on common language, history, and religion.

Ethnic groups that share fundamental factors like history, beliefs, race, religion, language, or homeland often make conflict particularly pervasive and intractable. Kaufmann (1996) claims that this identity particularly becomes hardened further by conflict, and any threats to that common identity will prompt individuals to support groups claiming to represent their ethnic identity.²⁴ A collective identity, however, is not enough for a group to mobilize in the absence of severe grievances among the ethnic groups in a given country. Grievances in the form of economic and political discrimination directed at certain groups may motivate their members to resort to violence. Lastly, to overcome the collective action dilemma, there has to be some form of opportunity for the potential dissent group to mobilize. Opportunities for rebellion may be the result of government provocation, state weaknesses, and physical conditions, such as geography or mountainous terrain (Ellingsen 2000; Fearon & Latin 2003).

The probability of civil conflict when these conditions work together is reflected in Ellingsen's (2000) analysis. Examining the level of ethnic diversity and the probability of civil conflict onset, she finds some support for the effect of ethnic diversity on the probability of civil war, but concludes that a country's political regime and socioeconomic level rather than ethnic diversity is more significant in predicting civil conflict. Her measurement of multi-ethnicity, however, is based on the degree of ethnic fragmentation, the size of the largest minority within a country, and ethnic affinities. Other researches have argued that it is not so much

²⁴ Kaufmann, Chaim (1996) Intervention in ethnic and ideological civil wars: Why one can be done and the other can't. *Security Studies* 6(1): 62–100.

fractionalization, but rather polarization between two ethnically large groups that increases the risk of civil conflict. An ethnically polarized society indicates that there are few groups and that they are roughly matched in terms of capability. This makes for a volatile situation of groups competing for power and resources. Whereas, an ethnically fractionalized state means that each group is too small to have the capabilities to mobilize for rebellion, thus decreasing the risk of civil conflict (Forsberg 2008; Bhavnani & Miodownik 2009).²⁵

While some of these authors found a relationship between ethnic diversity and civil conflict, other researchers like (Collier & Hoeffler 2004; Fearon & Latin 2003) find no effect of ethnic diversity on the onset of civil conflict. These studies have largely followed the traditional way in measuring ethnicity by looking at the demographic size of groups rather than their economic and political status as the origin of conflict. Because fractionalization has been seen as a proxy for ethno-political grievances, many researchers have concluded that ethnic grievances have little or no explanatory power for the onset of civil conflict (Buhaug et al. 2014). Furthermore, many of the origins of these arguments have been built on the relative deprivation that assumes conflict stems from a gap between rich and poor, and they measured income inequality based on interpersonal wealth comparison.

²⁵ Forsberg, Erika (2008) Polarization and Ethnic Conflict in a Widened Strategic Setting. *Journal of Peace Research* 45(2): 283–300.

Bhavnani, R., and D. Miodownik. (2008) "Ethnic Polarization, Ethnic Salience, and Civil War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53.1 : 30-49. Web.

Cederman & Girardn (2007) echo this concern, arguing that using conventional indicators of ethno-linguistic (ELF) index offers little explanation for ethno-nationalist civil wars. Such tests assume that violence is primarily a reflection of individual, as opposed to group-level, dynamics. Instead, they offer an alternative index exclusion called “N” which deviates from standard fractionalization measures by introducing state centric and ethnic configuration by populating group level, rather than individual level mechanisms.²⁶

Another counter argument to the opportunity model is that part of the problem that the relationship between ethnic grievances and the probability of civil conflict has not found statistically significant is because researchers have tested whether ethnic diversity has a direct influence on the probability of civil war onset. Some researches that have tested for conditional argument suggest that if we introduce factors that have a direct positive effect on civil war onset, these factors are more likely to take hold and produce a civil war in the state with ethnic fractionalization. This is because of the social cohesion within ethnic groups, which allows them to overcome collective action problems associated with a costly and risky venture such as rebellion and provides natural lines upon which the society can split (Blimes 2006).²⁷

Buhaug et al. (2014) argue that measuring ethnic diversity through fractionalization and other individual based indices such as, GINI-coefficient rather than group-level grievances has been the reason of why most literature on civil war fails to link ethnic division to civil conflict.

²⁶ Cederman, Lars-Erik, and Luc Girardin. "Beyond Fractionalization: Mapping Ethnicity onto Nationalist Insurgencies." *American Political Science Review* 101.01 (2007): 173-85. Web.

²⁷ Blimes, Randall J. "The Indirect Effect of Ethnic Heterogeneity on the Likelihood of Civil War Onset." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50.4 (2006): 536-47. Web.

Instead, they argue that group-based analysis underlines socioeconomic marginalization among ethnic groups exhibit a positive and statistically significant effect on the risk of civil war. Ethnic grievances is likely to become a significant factor in the onset of civil conflict after we introduce the factors that directly affect the risk of civil conflict to societies with great economic and political inequalities between groups,

Whether the size of the dominant and dominated, as well as the number of ethnic groups in a given country, may cause domestic conflict is largely determined by the level of economic and political grievances along ethnic lines, rather than by the size and number of the groups itself. Thus, political and economic marginalization among ethnic groups might be a better predictor in determining the link between ethnicity and civil war. Because discrimination collectively directed against certain ethnic groups might very well encourage its members to join the resistance regardless of their own economic and political status, which in turn makes it easier for the rebel groups to recruit more members of that disaffected group. Collective discrimination may strengthen the sense of solidarity and identity among members of an ethnic group. As the result, they may set aside their individual preferences in favor of their ethnic group's collective interest in order to push back against the opposing groups. In this environment, individuals are more willing to make sacrifices on behalf of their group, thus decreasing the problems associated with collective action.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES: STATE CAPACITY

State capacity as it pertains to civil conflict generally examines military strength, administrative capacities, and the quality of the state's political institutions. The combination of these three dimensions determines the states' ability to achieve collective security. Strong states will not only lower the risk of civil violence through the use of physical coercion, but they are able to address the demands of their citizens in ways that reduce incentives for violence (Hendrix 2011; Sobek 2010).

The state's repressive capacity to deter potential challengers is usually measured by its military capability. A strong police and military force is an essential element of government's ability to project its forces across its borders. Collier & Hoeffler (1998) suggest that militarily capable states reduce the opportunity for challengers to form an armed insurgency against the state. A strong military is not only characterized with physical coercion to suppress dissents, but it practices a strong counter insurgency in a way to impose the minimum cost on civilians. This is crucial because poor counter insurgency practices render insurgency more feasible and attractive. Those include a propensity for brutal and indiscriminate retaliation that helps drive noncombatants and locals into rebel forces. Furthermore, since state's military is the centerpiece of the state's repressive capabilities, rebels factor the size, strength, and skill of the state forces into their decision to rebel.

Alternately, measures of military strength alone may not capture the aspect of state capacity that most affects the decision to rebel. More bureaucratically capable states are in better positions to provide public services and security measures, which are related to reduction in grievances. Citizens in strong states are more able to have their grievances ameliorated or, at the

very least, a strong state may be able to limit any escalation of the dissent. This implies that the civil-war producing effects of grievances might actually be less in strong states, as oppose to weak states (Sobek 2010). Bureaucratic capacity, however, may not only relate to social service provision, corruption and economic mismanagement, but a factor that prevents the government from being able to monitor its citizens, and determine the identities and whereabouts of potential rebels. For example, Fearon & Latin (2003) argue that the state's military and administrative capabilities determine the government's ability to monitor and suppress dissent before it is developed into a full-blown insurgency, because such states are able to collect and manage information on potential dissents. Where the state is able to monitor its population, it can control and discipline its citizens even without the use of force.

One perspective on administrative capacity concerns the state's incentives and abilities to extract revenue from society through taxation. This is because taxation is not only associated with strong military and administrative capacity through revenue increases, but also affect distributional outcomes and political stability. Unlike oil-rich states that have little incentive to build the state's capacity to levy taxes and deliver public goods, or to encourage the growth of other economic sectors (Reno 1995), governments that depend on tax revenue must in return provide public goods and reasonable security to their citizens through an efficient bureaucratic system.²⁸ Those who pay taxes expect in return an efficient service from the government. Levi (2006) argues that governmental capacity to extract revenue is enhanced through the population's quasi-volunteer compliance, that is, compliance backed by coercion, but primarily motivated by a perception that the social contract is fair. Such dependency between the state and

²⁸ Reno, William. "Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone." *Trends in Organized Crime* 2.4 (1997): 67. Web.

citizens are absent in countries make little effort to collect tax revenues, thus leading to weaker bureaucratic system and poor governance. According to Ross, despite their level of income would predict, oil-producing countries tend to have weaker state apparatus, because their rulers see no need to invest in the bureaucratic capacity to collect taxes. These states became vulnerable to rent seeking and unable to develop sound economic policies and effective bureaucracy in a way to organize and address the interest of their people.

The strength and weakness of a state is contingent upon its ability to provide political (public) goods to citizens living within its borders. The essence of that political good usually implies codes and procedures that together constitute an enforceable rule of law, security of property, a judicial system, and a set of values that legitimize and validate the local version of fair play. Most importantly, the state's prime function is to provide the political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion. The delivery of a range of political goods becomes possible only when a reasonable measure of security has been sustained (Rotberg 2004: 3-6).²⁹

These goals—social welfare, peace, and security within a state—may be achievable through an effective bureaucratic system, and states with high administrative capacity are likely to perform well across these categories. Conversely, States fail to deliver basic public goods to their citizenries tend to lose legitimacy and come to be perceived as weak. Poor governance in

²⁹ Rotberg, Robert I. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

the form of corruption and weak administration does not only generate dissatisfaction and grievances with the existing political system, but also increase the opportunity structure for rebellion. Under such circumstances, as the opportunity model suggest, rebellion becomes more feasible. Citizens then turn more and more to the kind of sectional and community loyalties, transferring their allegiances to group leaders. As the result, confrontation and violence between the state and such groups becomes inevitable. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: The probability of civil conflict increases as the quality of governance decreases.

Ethnic Grievances: Horizontal Inequality

Civil conflicts are often assumed to be struggles in which some ethnic groups claim to restore injustices imposed upon them by some other groups. This doesn't necessarily mean that ethnic grievances always lead to civil war. In fact, ethnic grievances may be present almost everywhere to some extent, but have caused civil conflict in fewer places. For "grievances" to translate into collective political violence, potential dissent groups must be able to mobilize the disaffected groups. This is in line with Tilly's argument, that postulates that individuals' motivations lead to action when they have access to resources for mobilization; both motive and opportunity may be readily available in weak states.

There are a number of factors that affect opportunities for potential dissents to mobilize citizens, some of which relates to the ability of a state to address citizens' demands or its coercive capacity to deter potential challengers. If a state has the ability to address the grievances of their citizens in ways that reduce the incentive for political violence, it can limit the ability of opposition groups to overcome the problems of collective action.

Ethnic groups are often argued to have more grievances and an easier time mobilizing against the state, as opposed to other groups that do not share the same identity. Grievances among ethnic groups are more likely, when the country's political power is divided along ethnic lines, ruling elites can disproportionately favor their own ethnic group at the expense of others (Denny & Walter 2014).³⁰ Since such groups have stronger social ties and live close together, they will have an easier time mobilizing if they face collective discrimination. Thus, decreasing the cost of collective action for opposition groups to access materials, manpower, and organizational resources to mobilize and recruit members of such groups into their ranks. The stronger the sense of grievances among certain ethnic groups, the more readily the potential rebel groups will be able to overcome the collection action dilemma blocking armed resistance.

Putnam's (2000) social capital theory explains part of the picture for why it is easier to overcome the collection action dilemma among the members of the same group.³¹ The sense of common identity among the members of the same ethnic group allows for greater cooperation between them reinforced by greater trust due to sharing common culture, language, and norms. Collective economic and political discrimination directed against a specific group strengthen this sense of identity and sense of belongings to the repressed group paves the way for collective action even in the face of serious threat. Shared norms and values also facilitate cooperation among members of non-ethnic groups, but this cooperation may not always stand strong in the face of serious threat.

³⁰ Denny, Elaine, and Walter Barbra. "Ethnicity and Civil War." *Peace Research* 51.2 (2014): 199-212. Web.

³¹ Putnam, R. D. (1995). *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*. *Journal of Democracy* 6: 65-78

Economic inequality becomes politically salient, paving the way for social unrest when there is deep inequality between groups rather than within groups. (Buhang, Cederman, and Gleditsch (2014) present empirical evidence that countries with one or more ethnic groups radically poorer than the national average, and countries with large groups discriminated from national politics have a significantly higher risk of armed conflict. In contrast, the individual-level (vertical) grievances in a society, such as the Gini coefficient of income disparity have weaker impacts on the risk of civil conflict. A number of contemporary examples from Africa to the Balkans to the Middle East support this hypothesis. For example, much of the violence we see today in Burundi is the result of economic and political inequality between the ethnic majority of Hutu and minority Tutsi. The key factor of the social unrest in Bahrain during the “Arab Spring” was due to inequalities between the Sunni elites, which holds disproportionate of the country’s wealth and political power, and the Shiite majority. The substantial economic and political exclusion of these groups in their respective countries by comparison with other groups may have been one of the major factors in encouraging members of these repressed groups to mobilize against their states. In some of these states, public policies were formed to deliberately target minorities restricting their political and economic participation in the government leading to widespread poverty and underrepresentation among minority groups. Such systematic discrimination by dominant groups is likely to face with resistance from the oppressed groups, thus increasing the likelihood of civil conflict.

H2: All else equal, the probability of civil conflict increases as the political and economic inequality between ethnic groups increases.

Third Party Assistance

Since World War II, The dramatic increase in civil conflicts posed a new challenge to domestic and international security. This increase in civil conflict was largely driven by the rivalries between the United States and former Soviet Union during the Cold war when both sides struggled for spheres of interest and influence around the world. During this time, the military and economic support provided by the two major powers to their proxy groups led to the onset of civil conflict in places like Vietnam, Korea, and various countries in Latin America. Major powers intervened in nearly 40 percent of some 140 civil conflicts between 1944-94 (Regan 2000). Traditional realists argue that this trend is likely to increase in the post cold war area, because major powers possess both the resources and global interest to undertake such actions. Neorealist, however, argue that the end of cold war coupled with the emergence of new global problems such as the proliferation of ethnic conflicts might result in less intervention by major powers due to few strategic interests in third world countries to warrant major power interventions.

Intervention, however, was not limited to major powers. Third party intervention often carried out by neighboring countries to support ethnic or religious affiliated groups, or destabilize the rival state. Such interventions have had more ethnic characteristics, because of the existence of ethnic affinities between the intervener and the target state. Kholsa (1999) finds it that neighbors were responsible for over half of the total of 975 interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. One possible explanation, she argues, is that, while territorial boundaries were often arbitrarily drawn in most Third World regions in the colonial era, it is in Africa that they are the most haphazard. Numerous ethnic groups such as the Tutsis and the Somalis are spread across

three or more, often neighboring states. These divisions might make some African governments more willing to intervene in neighboring countries in support of their ethnic groups.

Furthermore, Salhyan et al. (2011) argues that third parties often sponsor opposition groups that share their goals, and ethnic ties to the rebel organizations is likely to reduce this concern. In this regard, ethnic and religious ties can serve as a screening device when sponsoring states choose which rebel groups to support

Regan (1996) demonstrates that when major powers intervene in intrastate conflicts, the effect on the probability of success can be quite significant, when compared to the effectiveness of intervention by non-major powers. For example, he shows that military intervention by a major power is more likely to succeed than a military intervention by a minor power.³² Likewise, the effect of a major power intervening on behalf of either the government or the opposition shows a considerable increase in the probability of success over minor-power intervention. One inference is that, under almost all strategies for intervening major powers are considerably more likely to succeed than minor powers. This is not surprising considering the resource and power major powers possess relative to minor powers. Other researchers conclude that regional intervention is likely to increase the duration of the conflict, as their military and economic support might not be enough to dramatically tip the balance of power between the opposing sides.

Other researches have focused on the attributes of the actors involved in civil conflict rather than the features of the civil war as a whole that make intervention more likely Using

³² Regan, P. M. "Conditions of Successful Third-Party Intervention in Intrastate Conflicts." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40.2 (1996): 336-59. Web.

principle-agent framework, Salehyan et al. (2011) show that both rebels and sponsoring states evaluate their costs and benefits into their decision whether to support or receive support.

Sponsoring states want to impose the maximum damage to the rival state with the minimum cost, while the rebels want to maximize their resources, but still have autonomy on their own actions.

They argue that rebels, who are moderately strong, have transitional constituency and who are fighting governments that are engaged in an international rivalry with other states are most likely to receive external support. Because, such rebel organizations are likely to pose a significant challenge to their host state to an extent that justifies supporting them.

These studies make major contributions in understanding of how and why third party intervene into another countries civil conflict, and the consequences of their intervention on the onset and duration of civil conflict. However, they do not tell us about the effect of the opposing third party intervention in the form of providing military and economic support to the opposing sides of the conflict. While some researches have studied the consequence of more than one external actor into other countries disputes, they are largely focused on the role of third party in the negotiation settlement aspect. Few disagree that civil wars end with the negotiation settlements due to lack of information about the resolve, demand, and strength of the other side. For example, Walter (2000) argues that since settlement through negotiation is almost impossible to reach between the parties of civil conflict, third party intervention is necessary to manage the conflict. She suggests that unlike interstate wars, civil wars rarely end in negotiated settlement because credible guarantees on the terms of the settlement are almost impossible to arrange by the combatants themselves. Negotiations do not fail because indivisible stakes, irreconcilable differences, or high cost tolerances make compromise impossible, as many people argue. They do not fail because bargains cannot be struck. Negotiations fail because civil war opponents are asked to do

what they consider unthinkable. At a time when no legitimate government and no legal institutions exist to enforce a contract, they are asked to demobilize, disarm, and disengage their military forces and prepare for peace.³³

Others like Thyne (2006) dispute this claim suggesting that third party intervention could actually introduce more uncertainty to the bargaining situation if it is sent in the form of cheap signals, thus increasing the likelihood of bargaining failure between government and opposition. He demonstrates that during intrastate bargaining, third party signals information about the likelihood of aiding either the government or the opposition.³⁴ Such signals introduce more uncertainty to the situation because the government may interpret the signals differently than the opposition, increasing the likelihood that the opposition makes unacceptable demand to the government or leaders of the opposition may use the signals to encourage people to fight when the odds of successes are low. That's why despite the peaceful predictions of bargaining, civil wars happen frequently and, once it occurs an end to the conflict through negotiation becomes difficult.

In light of these studies, I hypothesize that when more than one third party with geopolitical interests engage into other countries civil dispute, they may increase the probability of civil war onset. By providing economic and military support to one side or the other, third parties reduce the likelihood of peace settlements through negotiation, thus increasing the

³³ Walter, Barbara F. "Designing Transitions from Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization, and Commitments to Peace." *International Security* 24.1 (1999): 127-55. Web

³⁴ Thyne, C. L. "Cheap Signals with Costly Consequences: The Effect of Interstate Relations on Civil War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50.6 (2006): 937-61. Web.

probability of civil war onset. In an environment of uncertainty about the other side's strength, third party support in the form of economic and military aid introduces more uncertainty to the situation. This was a common practice during the Cold War, when the two major powers often engaged in proxy wars by providing economic and military support to the opposing parties in a number of countries.

Some interventions have been designed to help one side win the conflict and others have been carried out to alleviate humanitarian crisis. The latter is carried out to manage the conflict and the intervener's objective is to stop killing innocent civilians or prevent genocides from taking place. Such interventions sometimes has drawn multilateral cooperation and resulted in some sort of settlements. Third party engagement into another country's civil conflict, however, was not always an act of goodwill by foreign power, but often driven by self-interest.

Such interventions whether in the form of direct military intervention, military or economic aid generally makes war last longer; the most protracted conflicts are those in which both sides are receiving outside support (Regan 2000). Of the 60 percent of post WWII civil conflicts that experience intervention, three-fifth involved more than one intervener.³⁵ States often pursue interventions as a foreign policy tool in response to either convergent or divergent geopolitical and strategic interests of other states. Potential interveners undertake evaluations of the changing civil war context, which is constituted not only by ground conditions, but also the decisions made by other third parties as well (Findley and Teo 2006).³⁶ Geopolitical interests can range from asserting dominance, access to natural resources or protecting ethnic brethren in the

³⁵ Regan, Patrick. "Civil Wars and Foreign Powers." (2000): n. pag. Web.

³⁶ Findley, Michael G., and Tze Kwang Teo. "Rethinking Third-Party Interventions into Civil Wars: An Actor-Centric Approach." *The Journal of Politics* 68.4 (2006): 828-37. Web.

target country. This type of intervention is argued to exacerbate the scope and duration of civil conflict. Conflicts involving more than one outside actor are typically last longer, cause more fatalities, and are more difficult to resolve through negotiation. They introduce new actors to the conflict with agendas of their own, changing the bargaining dynamic to include both state and non-state actors. Thus, third party engagement is likely to increase the likelihood of civil war onset, when it involves more than one outside actor with divergent geopolitical interests.

H3: Opposing third party assistance increases the likelihood of civil conflict.

Understanding the onset of civil war requires a broad analysis that accounts for the effect of “grievance” and “opportunity” on civil war onset. When the two factors work together, they create an environment susceptible for political violence. One of the important opportunity factors is the state capacity. Grievances may arise as the result of state’s inability to provide a reasonable measure of security and political goods; factors that enable rebel groups overcome the problems of collective action. In such states, there is typically larger number of disaffected citizens that can be recruited by rebel groups, and less government capability to monitor and punish dissenters’ activities. Another way the state may contribute to escalation of violence is by implementing policies to discriminate against certain groups. Ethnically fractionalized states are assumed to be more prone to civil conflict if their governments carry out policies to deliberately discriminate against minorities, because opposition groups have easier time to mobilize ethnic groups due to social cohesion among ethnic groups. During this period, both opposition groups and the government are likely to seek outside support to strengthen their position. Intervention by third parties become likely under certain circumstances, such as the existence of ethnic affinity or some mutual interest between the intervener and the target state. In the next section, I

will perform an empirical analysis assessing the effect each of these factors on the probability of civil war onset separately.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test my hypothesis underlining the three key mechanisms--state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party intervention--on the onset of civil conflict, I use a mixed methodology approach of a statistical analysis cross-national data, and a case study of the civil war in Iraq and Syria. It is in this setting that provided an opportunity for ISIS to flourish. The case study provides a brief history about the origin of the group, but the primary goal is to provide an explanatory argument of how each of the three mechanisms played out in Iraq and Syria's civil war.

I proceed with a statistical analysis using logistic regression with country year random effects. I use panel data for years between 1960-99 for 160 countries. Using country year as the unit of analysis allow me to measure the determinants of civil conflict within a country appropriately. I estimate three models including my primary independent variables and several control variables. In the first two models, I exclude either political or economic discrimination, due to multicollinearity between the two variables, whereas in the third model I include both types of discrimination. The data are obtained from Gibler and Miller (2014) unless otherwise noted. My dependent variable—the onset of civil conflict—is dichotomous, coded 1 for all country years in which civil conflict started and 0 for all others. This variable is originally drawn from the Correlates of War (COW) project version 4.1 (Sarkees and Wayman 2010).³⁷ They define civil war as a conflict that involves fighting between a state and non-states actors who seek to take control of the government; killed at least 1,000 people from both sides. Thus, this depended variable is the onset of intrastate war for central control in a country year.

³⁷ Sarkees, Meredith R & Frank Wayman (2010) *Resort to War: 1816–2007*. Washington, DC: CQ.

Independent Variables

I use two variables--the state's bureaucratic quality and state's military capacity—to measure the state capacity. Both of these will be good indicators to measure the state's ability to counter internal challenges. The strength of state's bureaucracy, which I call the quality of governance, is primarily measured by the state's ability to extract revenue from the population and its overall GDP/per capita. I assume that wealthier states have a stronger military force and more professional law enforcement.

States with high bureaucratic performance are able to provide a range of political goods and services to their citizens, which are related to the reduction of grievances. High bureaucratic capacity is also characterized with less corruption, impartial judicial system, and a strong law enforcement, which are crucial elements for a state to counter potential rebellion in its initial stages (Fearon & Latin 2003). Furthermore, high bureaucratic performance will increase citizens' support and cooperation to the state, making it more difficult for potential dissent to recruit members of such societies. I measure state's bureaucratic quality based on two indicators: GDP/ per capita and state's ability to raise revenue through taxation. GDP/Capita may have some advantages; it is widely available for a large number of countries and it is highly correlated with a variety of measures of economic and bureaucratic capacity. I obtained the GDP per capita from Miller and Gibler (2014) dataset. As for tax ratio indicator, it serves two purposes: revenue increases allow the government to strengthen its military and administrative apparatus, which in turn enable the government to provide public goods and collective security to the citizens within its borders. Furthermore, it creates a bond between citizens and the state through the exchange of goods for protection. This is the state's ability to extract resources from individuals and groups in

society rather than the total revenue of government's income that includes both taxes and non-tax revenue. It is measured as "total revenue minus non-tax revenue and social security contributions divided by GDP" (Thies 2010).³⁸

To test the second hypothesis--the effect of ethnic grievances on the onset of civil conflict--I use data from the Minority at Risk (MAR) (Asal, Victor, Amy Pate and Wilkenfeld; 2008). MAR has collected detailed information on more than 283 politically active communal groups at the country level from 1945 to 2006. These groups are either mobilized or discriminated against, and thus "at risk".³⁹ To measure the effect of ethnic grievances on the probability of civil conflict onset, I test for the political and economic gap across these groups which MAR dataset is appropriate to measure the relationship between groups. This captures the idea that collective discrimination directed against members of the same ethnic group, it may mobilize collective grievances due to stronger bond and shared identity. The political and economic inequalities variables are aggregated on the state level coded on 5-category scale. The values range from 0 to 4 with higher values indicates extreme inequalities between groups. Countries are coded 4 where public policies are formed to restrict minorities from political and economic participation by contrast with other groups.

³⁸ Thies, C. G. "Of Rulers, Rebels, and Revenue: State Capacity, Civil War Onset, and Primary Commodities." *Journal of Peace Research* 47.3 (2010): 321-32. Web

³⁹ It is important to mention two things concerning (MAR) data: first, when I combined the political and economic variables from MAR with the data set by Miller and Gibler, I found that there are approximately 40 countries that have not been accounted for by MAR. I coded these countries as "0". This is understandable since MAR includes countries only if they have a "minority at risk". Thus, these countries either have very few minorities or do not discriminate in a way that would gain them entry into the MAR data set. Second, some of the observations for Tajikistan were missing; I set the missing observations at the values in the years immediately prior and after the missing observations. Measuring group differences and status can never be perfect statically and might suffer from objective bias. Nevertheless, I believe the data provided by MAR is appropriate in testing the underlying hypothesis, for it addresses intergroup differentials based on political and economic status of the group with respect to other groups or the dominant group in a given country

Finally, to test for the effect of third party assistance on the probability of civil conflict and under what conditions external actor intervention increases the likelihood of civil war; I use the natural log of total economic and military aid from the United States as marked in US dollars and updated by Miller & Gibler (2014). On one hand, this is a somewhat reasonable measure since the United States has been major provider of economic and military aid to many countries since the beginning of Cold War. This should give some insight of whether the third party assistance has actually increased the probability of civil conflict during the 39 years period. On the other hand, one of the two major powers, the former Soviet Union, also provided economic and military support to various groups and governments countering US interests during the same period. Nonetheless, there is no available data for USSR's economic and military aid or any other countries.

Control Variables

To account for other predictors on the probability of civil war, I will control for several variables whose omission would bias the results. These variables are mostly taken from the literature of state capacity and Fearon & Laitin's (2003) study of civil war onset and updated and expanded by Miller & Gibler. To control for the regime characteristics in a country, I use democracy data drawn from the Unified Democracy Score (UDS) project. UDS provides larger samples of countries and uses a Bayesian statistical estimate of the level of democracy in each country in a given year. In the literature of civil conflict, it is widely assumed that democracies and dictatorships experience less civil conflict as oppose to semi-democracy regimes, to control for this, I include Gibler & Millers squared score of UDS. Instability is also included to consider that instability weakens the state institutions, which in turn paves the way for rebels to engage in

political violence. Following Gibler & Miller's method, a country is considered unstable coded 1 if it experienced two-standard deviation change in its UDS score over a period of three years prior to country year observation.

I also control for a set of variables that is widely cited in Fearon & Laitin civil conflict analysis. I control for territorial contiguity because territories separated from the capital by long distance are assumed to create conditions that favor insurgency. States are considered as non-contiguous, coded 1 if they have territories with 10,000 populations separated from the capital by land, and 0 otherwise. Also, natural resources are considered to have an effect on the likelihood of civil war, because they either provide finance for the rebel groups or they are associated with corruption and weak governance. Countries coded oil-rich if they generate more than one third of their revenue export from oil. Finally, the natural log of mountain terrain is also controlled for as it is argued to provide insurgents with safe heaven while makes it harder for the government forces to find and monitor rebel groups in the mountain areas. Table 1 provides a summary statistics of independent and control variables.

Table 1: Summary statistics

	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Economic discrimination	1.612	1.684	0	4
Political discrimination	1.300	1.546	0	4
GDP/Capita	8.144	1.103	5.139	11.080
Tax ratio	0.155	0.087	0.002	1.185
US military aid	7.729	7.773	0	23.075
US economic aid	11.896	7.980	0	22.340
Democracy score	-0.139	0.971	-2.102	2.116
Democracy score 2	0.962	0.961	0	4.480
Instability	0.119	0.324	0	1
Mountain terrain	2.119	1.432	0	4.557
Oil	0.135	0.342	0	1
Population	9.062	1.465	5.384	14.052
Territorial contiguity	0.165	0.371	0	1

FINDINGS

The results are reported in Table 2. The models include civil conflict onset as the dependent variable (COW), ethnic grievances (political and economic discrimination across ethnic groups), state's administrative capacity (GDP per capita and tax ratio), and third party assistance (U.S economic and military aid) as the primary variables.

I began the analysis with the test for statistical association between the state's administrative capacity and civil war. I hypothesized that as the quality of governance increases the probability of civil conflict decreases. The quality of governance encompasses the state's ability to provide public goods and collective security to citizens within its borders. States with strong administrative capacity are able to reduce grievances through the provision of goods and services, and they tend to have stronger law enforcement, which is essential in monitoring and deterring potential dissent to take up arms against the states. I argued that the state's overall Gross Domestic Products GDP, and more importantly the degree to which a state is able to raise revenue through taxation associates with an efficient and effective bureaucratic system and a state's coercive ability.

In Table 2, the results in Models 1 and 3 show a statistically significant relationship between GDP/Per Capita and civil conflict. The estimate is negative, as expected, and significant at the 0.1 level. This is an indication that wealthier countries are less likely to experience civil conflict. This result supports earlier findings and not surprising given the importance of economic development for opportunity structure.

Table 2: Logistic regression analysis of civil war onset

	Model 1 (COW1)	Model 2 (COW2)	Model 3 (COW3)
Economic discrimination	0.227** (0.091)		0.238† (0.140)
Political discrimination		0.150† (0.087)	-0.014 (0.136)
GDP/Capita	-0.324† (0.203)	-0.246 (0.195)	-0.325† (0.203)
Tax ratio	-5.222* (2.483)	-5.442* (2.462)	-5.209* (2.486)
US military aid	0.006 (0.024)	0.004 (0.023)	0.005 (0.023)
US economic aid	-0.005 (0.034)	-0.006 (0.035)	-0.005 (0.034)
Democracy score	-1.637*** (0.576)	-1.563*** (0.567)	-1.639*** (0.577)
Democracy score 2	-1.570*** (0.526)	-1.532*** (0.518)	-1.571*** (0.526)
Instability	0.909*** (0.316)	0.947*** (0.316)	0.908*** (0.316)
Mountain terrain	0.180† (0.108)	0.193† (0.109)	0.181† (0.108)
Oil	0.216 (0.481)	0.119 (0.480)	0.216 (0.481)
Population	-0.037 (0.117)	-0.046 (0.118)	-0.037 (0.116)
Territorial contiguity	-0.798 (0.761)	-0.886 (0.761)	-0.795 (0.761)
Intercept	-1.663 (2.203)	-2.041 (2.218)	-1.643 (2.209)

Note: Standard errors are clustered on the country and are noted in parentheses. †p < 0.10 *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

The correlation between tax ratio and civil war is also significant. The relationship is negative and significant at the 0.05 levels in all three models. This indicates that as the government's ability increases to raise tax revenue from the population, the probability of civil war onset decreases. This makes sense for two reasons: first, taxation increases revenue which in turn boosts the government's administrative, as well as military capacity. States with higher revenues are in better positions to invest more in infrastructure, law enforcement, and military. Second, unlike dependency on oil revenue that is associated with less government accountability, corruption, and patronage (Ross 2015), the government's ability to extract revenue from citizens is conditioned upon its ability to return to society by providing goods and services. Thus, taxation is less associated with corruption.⁴⁰

Examining the relationship between economic and political discrimination on the onset of civil conflict. Model 1 shows that economic discrimination between ethnic groups is likely to increase the probability of civil conflict. The result in Model 1 reveals the correlation is positive and significant at 0.01 levels, indicating that as the economic inequality between ethnic groups increases, the likelihood of civil conflict increases as well. As for political discrimination shown in Model 2, the relationship is significant at the 0.1 levels. In Model 3, the relationship between economic discrimination across groups and the risk of civil war onset is still significant at 0.1 level, whereas the relationship is no longer significant between political discrimination and civil war onset. This is due to high collinearity between the two variables ($r=0.74$). Overall, this is an

⁴⁰ Ross, Michael L. "What Have We Learned about the Resource Curse?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 18.1 (2015): 239-59. Web.

important finding given the fact that some influential conflict literature have found very little or no effect of ethnic grievances on the onset of civil conflict. For example, the often cited analysis of Hoeffler & Collier finds that grievances in all forms of political and economic inequalities related to ethnic fractionalization is insignificant.

As for the effect of third party assistance on the likelihood of civil conflict, I found no significant correlation between third party assistance and civil war. This is not the result I expected, but I am not surprised given the fact that there is no data on economic and military assistance from the opposing third party, such as former Soviet Union relative to the United States during the Cold War. A number of empirical studies (for example Regan 2000, Regan & Meachum 2013) have found that almost all internal disputes attract the opposing third parties, and the opposing third party intervention increases the onset and duration of civil conflict. This was particularly evident during the Cold War era when the United States and USSR engaged in a number of proxy wars by providing military and economic aid to the opposing groups of the conflicts.

As for the performance of the control variables, democracy and political instability are highly significant. Mountain terrain is also significant in the probability of civil war onset. Population and territorial contiguity are not important predictors of civil conflict. Finally, Oil failed to reach any statistical significance. This is in contrast to a number of civil conflict literature associates oil with weak governance and corruption, two indicators that have been consistently attributed to civil conflict onset. Some of the findings shown in Table 2 are different from Fearon & Laitin's (2003) results. In their model, for example, population, oil, and territorial

contiguity are significant. However, in my findings they show no statistical significance. This could be due to the difference in time series; their time frame is between 1945-99, while mine is 1960-99.

To estimate the probability that a state will experience civil war would change given the minimum and maximum change in the variables proxy state's administrative capacity and ethnic grievances, while holding all other variables constant at their mean. According to Model 3, increasing economic discrimination between groups from minimum to maximum results an increase in the probability of civil war onset from 0.0016 to 0.0022, which is an increase by 37.5%. This is consistent with my hypothesis, as the level of economic inequality between groups increases, the probability of civil war increases. Similarly, the effect size for the tax ratio and GDP are significant on the onset of internal conflict. When the tax ratio is altered from the minimum to maximum, the probability of civil conflict decreases by 44% (from 0.0050 to 0.0022). As for the GDP, increasing the country's per capita income from minimum to maximum reduces the likelihood of civil war by 38% (from 0.0060 to 0.00228).

Overall, the implications of my first hypothesis support previous theories about the positive relationship between a more robust economy and higher state capacity. However, this is not to suggest wealth alone enhance state capacity in the absence of other measures taken by state to establish an effective government institutions. It is important how the state manage its wealth in a way to benefit average citizens through an efficient bureaucratic system, otherwise wealth may lead to more corruption and economic mismanagement, a recipe for grievances and violence. Therefore, measuring the state's ability to which degree can raise revenue from the

population is a good indicator of state's administrative capacity, because raising revenue requires an efficient bureaucracy to organize tax polls, process tax payments and punish those who do not pay their taxes. Moreover, higher tax ratio associate with less corruption since those who pay taxes expect efficient service delivery from the government.

The results of my second hypothesis that economic and political discrimination across groups increase the risk of civil war onset run contrary to the influential analyses of Collier & Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon & Laitin (2003), which they claim ethnic grievances in the form of political and economic inequalities become insignificant after controlling for the economic variables.

THE CASE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA'S CIVIL WARS: THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE (ISIS)

I have argued that three key mechanisms—state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party assistance—are important factors in explaining the onset of civil conflict. The first hypothesis, which suggest that states with low governance quality are more prone to civil conflict, have been tested and supported by statistical data analysis. Similarly, the second hypothesis that underlines the effect of political and economic inequality between ethnic groups on the onset of civil war is statistically significance. However, the third hypothesis that concerns with the role of third party intervention in the probability of civil conflict has failed to reach the statistical significance. In this section, I intend to provide an explanatory argument by underlining the role of the three mechanisms in the case of Iraq and Syria's civil war, which led to the rise of the Islamic State group, known as (ISIS). I primarily focus on the years between 2011-2013 when the Iraq's second Sunni resurgence and the Syria's civil war presented ISIS with an opportunity to flourish. I begin with a brief background about the Islamic State group, before moving on to explore each of the three hypotheses played out in Iraq and Syria's civil war.

Background

In the wake of US-led invasion of Iraq, thousands of local Sunnis and foreign fighters joined by Saddam Hussein's former loyalists rallied behind a Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi's group (*Monotheism and Jihad group*) stood out as the most ruthless Sunni extremist group fighting U.S forces and attacking Shiite civilians in an attempt to foment a sectarian civil war. In 2004, Zarqawi formally swore allegiance to Osama Bin Laden and changed the group's name to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). That same year, the US State Department

published a letter Zarqawi wrote to the al Qaeda leadership articulating his plan to attack Iraqi Shiites with the aim of igniting sectarian. Shortly after the publication of this letter, Zarqawi's group staged a series of bomb attacks on Shiites celebrating the "Ashura" holiday, killing at least 185 people.⁴¹ This led to a bloody sectarian war that claimed tens of thousands of lives from both sides. Following the death of Zarqawi by a US airstrike in 2006, the group declared itself as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). At the peak of Iraq's civil war in 2006-2007, the ISI emerged as the leading force among the Sunni militant groups.

However, the ISI's increasing indiscriminate attacks against civilians including the Sunni population led many local Sunni militants to defect it. The U.S command in Iraq saw this as an opportunity to formulate a resistance movement from the Sunni tribes against ISI. Sponsored by the U.S forces, the Sunni tribes in Iraq's Anbar province formed the "Awakening" movement to fight ISI and maintain security in their areas. An American counter-insurgency operation enforced by a surge in US troops along with the Sunni tribal uprising in Anbar successfully drove out ISI in the Sunni provinces of Iraq.⁴² Over several years, the group suffered a huge loss of leadership; most were killed in US air strikes. By 2011, ISI was reduced to underground isolated cells without central command structure.

How did ISI manage to resurface from a few isolated cells to an organization that no longer just considered a terrorist group with dozens of fighters attacking government forces and

⁴¹ Hunt, Emily. "Zarqawi's 'Total War' on Iraqi Shiites Exposes a Divide among Sunni Jihadists." The Washington Institute. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 Nov. 2005. Web.
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/zarqawis-total-war-on-iraqi-shiites-exposes-a-divide-among-sunni-jihadists>

⁴² Hasan, Shafqat. "Examining the Causes of the Islamic State's Resurgence in Iraq." Tarirsouri. 1 June 2014. Web.
<http://tahrirsouri.com/tag/islamic-state-of-iraq-and-sham/>

civilians, but a group that functions like a state controlling large swathes of territories within two states and maintaining extensive military capabilities? The central debate surrounding this question has since dominated journalistic analysis as well as a few scholarly articles. Most of these analyses have rightly attributed the rise of ISIS to the host of issues, such as the US-led invasion of Iraq, Iraqi government's discriminatory policies toward the Sunnis, regional rivalries between Saudi and Iran, and the Syrian civil war. In the following sections, I present an analysis focusing on the internal challenges, such as the quality of governance and decades of political and economic discrimination between the ethnic groups in Iraq and Syria, as well as the role of the regional powers. All of these, especially in the case of Iraq, weaken the state to deter internal challenges.

The second phase of ISIS resurgence begins with the second Iraq's Sunni uprising in 2011 when tens of thousands of people across Sunni provinces poured on the streets demanding an end to corruption and political and economic marginalization against the Sunni community.⁴³ The Iraqi security forces responded to the protests with the use of excessive force, resulting the death of many protesters. A reinvigorated ISIS and other insurgent groups took advantage of the situation. They began attacking Iraqi security forces and other government institutions. The popular discontent against discrimination and corruption turned into a full-blown insurgency in many parts of the country. In this period, ISI was able to defeat the incompetent Iraqi security forces in Anbar province and took control of the region.

Meanwhile, the Syrian popular uprising against the President Bashar Al-Assad's regime gradually turned into an armed conflict in mid 2011 presented ISI with another opportunity to

⁴³ Sly, Liz. "In Iraq, a Sunni Revolt Raises Specter of Civil War." The Washington Post, 6 Jan. 2014. Web. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-iraq-a-sunni-revolt-raises-specter-of-new-war.

expand its influence and territorial control. ISI began sending recruits and financial support to its fellow jihadi group Jabhat Nusra (JN) in Syria. During the first year of its formation in early 2012, the JN emerged as the most powerful Sunni militant group among the Syrian opposition. Joined by thousands of Sunni foreign fighters, the JN made significant military advances against the Assad forces from several fronts. A flow of cash and support from private donors and the Sunni sponsor states like Saudi Arabia enabled the group to provide humanitarian aid in the rebel-held areas winning the hearts and minds of the locals. Popular support for JN was so high that following the US designation of the group as the terrorist organization due to its link to al Qaeda protest broke out across Syria on their behalf, with people shouting slogan, “we are all Jabhat Nusra” (O’Bagy 2013).

In 2013 the Islamic state of Iraq (ISI) entered the Syrian civil war and rebranded itself as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Its leader, Abubr al-Baghdadi, unilaterally declared the merger of the two groups. This declaration was strongly rejected by the JN leadership insisting their operation and approach to politics was grounded in the Syrian identity. Initially, the ISI operatives faced opposition from the other armed groups when they attempted to take a place in Syria, but their financial assets from illegal oil sale, taxation, and private donations enabled it to recruit more fighters and obtain more weapons. In a matter of months, ISIS took over one third of the Syrian territories from the government forces and other rebel factions. In its July report, the Institute of Islamic Strategic and Socio-political Affairs (IISA 2014) published that ISIS has been able to carve out space through filling the vacuum left by the collapsed state. In the areas where the government forces have been withdrawn or the opposition groups have failed to

maintain their presence, ISIS has quickly stepped in to provide salaries, establishing courts, running bakeries and enforcing laws.

ISIS's military achievements in Iraq and Syria have not only led to an influx of foreign fighters to join the group, but also helped ISIS to establish legitimacy to become the leading jihadist organization that was once enjoyed by Al-Qaida. After, the fall of Mosul to ISIS in 2014, more than a dozen of Islamic extremist groups, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, have abandoned Al-Qaida to pledge allegiance to ISIS.

According to a report from the Foreign Affairs magazine, in November 2014, Ansar Beit Al-Muqadas, a Sunni militant group that operates out of the northern Sinai Peninsula, pledged allegiance to ISIS and its leader.⁴⁴ This alliance will give ISIS an access to several Sunni militant groups in North and sub-Saharan Africa. With dozens of supporters and sympathizers in Algeria, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, and Tunisia, ISIS is poised to transform this massive area, drawing support from alienated citizens fed up with autocratic regimes. Territorial Control has also given ISIS the advantage to extract financial resources from oil production, taxing local citizens, ransom, and looting.

This kind of finance source has made it more difficult for the United States and the international community to effectively reduce the group's coffers. Although, the long term prospect for ISIS to effectively maintain that economic activities and translating it into military power might be poor, given that ISIS is an extractive entity (Hansen and Lewis 2015), the longer the group maintains its control over these resources, the harder becomes to defeat ISIS militarily.

⁴⁴ Al-Anani, Khalil. "ISIS Enters Egypt." *Foreign Affairs*. N.p., 2014. Web. 26 Oct. 2016.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-12-04/isis-enters-egypt>

Like a state, ISIS has also established a bureaucracy in the territories under its control. Newly obtained documents published by the Guardian newspaper suggest that hundreds of ISIS cadres have set themselves to work creating rules and regulations for daily activities, as well as establishing 16 centralized departments including one for public health and natural resources that oversee oil and antiquities.⁴⁵ Finally, ISIS has been very successful in utilizing social media and Internet webs to recruit supporters. In addition to establishing several accounts offering religious education and combat training to potential supporters around the globe, ISIS targets Arab youth by publishing pictures and videos to illustrate the brutality of the Arab regimes that needs to come to an end with the help of both local and global potential members (Shamieh & Szenes 2015).

Unlike several Islamic armed groups, ISIS has taken lethality into a new stage by committing mass execution, suicide attacks, possible genocides against non-Muslim minorities, and enslaving women and children. Some of ISIS's violent actions are seen as an extension of Zarqawi's brutal methods at the early stages of insurgency in Iraq. After all, ISIS is an evolution of Al-Qaida's Jihadist ideology. Explaining why some Islamist terrorist groups are more lethal than others, Piazza (2009) argues that Islamist terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaida tend to be more lethal, whereas Islamist armed groups that are categorized, as "strategic" with local constituency are less lethal. This is primarily due to the differences in their broader goals and constituency concerns.

Al-Qaida and its affiliates are less concerned about a particular constituency in achieving their broader goal, which is driving out the western occupation in the Muslim countries and

⁴⁵ Malik, Shiv. "The Isis Papers: Behind 'death Cult' Image Lies a Methodical Bureaucracy." Theguardian (2015): n. pag. Web. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/isis-papers-guardian-syria-iraq-bureaucracy>

establishing an Islamic state in the Muslim world. In contrast, strategic groups like Hamas in the Palestinian territories has a much more limited goals such as liberating certain territories, overthrowing a specific government, and creating an independent state. ISIS seems to be the combination of both strategic and universal. While ISIS like Al-Qaida uses terrorism tactics to send signals to a broader audience around the world, the group has also been working toward an immediate goal by establishing an Islamic state in the territories under its control, running bureaucracies, and engage in a more conventional warfare with its enemies. In line with Asal & Rethemeyer's (2008) analysis, the lethality of the group might be more the consequence of the combination of territorial control, organizational capital, and religious ideology.

To conclude, what ISIS has achieved in a short period is far beyond of what Al-Qaida has ever achieved since its inception almost three decades ago. The answer to this question lies in the availability of opportunities presented by the state weaknesses and decades of political and economic grievances along sectarian line in both Iraq and Syria, as well as the role of third party in the region.

Iraq's Civil War

As violence spiked in Iraq's capital city of Baghdad in 2006, the Bush administration engaged in a semantic war with the American Media over whether the conflict in Iraq is appropriately described as a civil war. The death toll was already rising by thousands of fatalities had long surpassed the 1,000 battle threshold that would qualify it as a civil war. Primarily, civil war in Iraq began as urban guerrilla warfare struggled by Sunni insurgent groups hoping to drive out the United States and to regain the power held by Sunnis under Saddam Hussein. It escalated in 2006 with the proliferation and intensification of violence by the Shiite militias, who

ostensibly sought to defend Shiite ethnic groups from the Sunni insurgents and who pursued this end with ethnic cleansing and a great deal of gang violence (Fearon 2007).⁴⁶

In the aftermath of 2003 war led by the United States, Iraq's state capacity has dramatically declined. The state lacked an effective bureaucratic system to provide basic goods and services immediately resulted in demonstration across several Iraqi cities demanding the basic services such water and electricity. Moreover, in the absence of strong law enforcement and military forces, the state failed to effectively police and monitor its borders, leaving it vulnerable to infiltration by thousands of former jihadist foreign fighters.⁴⁷ As the result, the country became the hub for many veteran jihadists, who previously fought the Russian invasion in Afghanistan. The combination of local resentment and an influx of foreign fighters created a recipe for internal conflict.

The inability of the government to address the citizens grievances, as the result of a weak bureaucratic system, ineffective law enforcement and judicial system provided the opportunity for the armed groups to recruit members of various communities into their ranks for financial gains. Most importantly, the decision made by the head of U.S interim administration in Iraq, Paul Bremer to dissolve the Iraqi army had arguably accelerated the recruitment process by the armed groups. The disbanded of Iraqi military left tens of thousands of former Iraqi soldiers and officers with no job, making them more susceptible to join the Sunni insurgency.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Fearon, James. "Iraq's Civil War." *Foreign Affairs* 86.2 (2007): 2-15. Web. 24 Oct. 2013.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2007-03-01/iraqs-civil-war>

⁴⁷ James Paul - Global Policy Forum. "Global Policy Forum." *Staticide in Iraq*. N.p., Feb. 2007. Web. 26 Oct. 2016.

<https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/168/37095.html>

⁴⁸ Thompson, Mark. "How Disbanding the Iraqi Army Fueled ISIS." *Time*. Time, 28 May 2015. Web. 26 Oct. 2016.
<http://time.com/3900753/isis-iraq-syria-army-united-states-military/>

Although, Iraq began rebuilding its security apparatus slowly, and held its first free election in 2005, the newly formed government was not able to make any significant progress toward achieving prosperity and security due to power struggle between the ethnic Shiite majority, Sunnis and the Kurds. Like many countries in the Middle East, Iraq is divided along sectarian, ethnic, and regional lines, which they have deep suspicions toward each other. After the fall of Ottoman Empire, the French and the British formed the contemporary Middle Eastern states in a way that best served their own national interests, rather than the interest of the locals. Within these newly created states, different ethnic, religious and national groups were clubbed together into one state, or the same national group was divided among different states (Kumaraswamy 2006).

Each state was confronted with the problem of defining their national identity. To overcome this identity crisis, some of the secular Arab rulers in the 1950s advocated for pan-Arabism, which referred to a unified Arab country in the Middle East and North Africa that strongly opposes foreign intervention. The Arab defeat of 1967 war marked the decline of pan-Arabism and the resurgence of pan-Islamism, which advocated for the unity of Muslims under an Islamic state. This period had seen the gradual radicalization of the region and the proliferation of various Islamic armed groups that posed direct challenges the state authorities in various countries of the Middle East. Meanwhile, the presence of Islamism has provided the Middle East and North African authoritarian regimes necessary conditions to further strengthen their state capacity and deter any popular mobilization for political reform. Often times, strengthening state capacity in the Middle East was rather consolidating power into the hands of one ethnic group by repressing the dissents and minorities. This was the case in most of the Middle Eastern countries,

especially in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Hussein's three decades rule of repression against the Shiite and Kurdish further widened the gap between the country's ethnic groups. Similarly, Hafiz Al-Assad's Alawite regime in Syria had brutally repressed the Sunni majority depriving them from political any participation.

Meanwhile, the threat of Islamism and oil forced the West to continue supporting the authoritarian regimes of Middle East. Thus, much of the secular and educated elements of the middle class has deterred from mobilization for political reform due to the presence of nondemocratic Islamic threat (Bellin 2004).

While the overthrow of Hussein's regime marked the end of decades of discrimination against the Iraqi Shiite majority and the Kurds, it has unleashed the Pandora's box that would pave the way for a long political instability and sectarian conflict in the country. Rather than using the opportunity to create a comprehensive, democratic government, the Shiite-led government used the occasion to redress the past injustices by attempting to exclude 35 percent of the Iraqi population from the economic and political process. Thus, the Shiite central government failed to deliver another essential components of the political good, that is free and open participation in the political process, respect and support for national and regional political institutions, and tolerance of dissent and differences.

In the dawn of U.S troops withdrawal in 2011, the PM Nuri Al-Maliki's Shiite government began to intensify its repressive policies against the Sunni communities by imprisoning hundreds of Sunni dissents under the pretext of anti-terrorism measure and de-Ba'athification law. He took over all of the key security positions, purging its competent

elements in favor of people loyal to him and supplemented with sectarian Shiite militias (Crisis Group 2014).⁴⁹ The Sunni Awakening militias that played a significant role in driving out the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was prevented from integrating into the Iraqi security forces out of fear that they would create a parallel military structure that would present an armed Sunni opposition. The government institutions including the judiciary system were heavily politicized in favor of the incumbent Maliki.

As the economic and political marginalization against the Sunni community was increasing toward the end of 2011, the eruption of another civil war was becoming more likely. The Iraq's Sunni community saw Maliki's policies as an attempt to further repress and isolate them. The Sunni tribes developed animosity towards the central government. The weakened militias and marginalized Sunni population presented an opportunity for Islamic State of Iraq and other terrorist groups to regain influence by exploiting the Sunni grievances.

Maliki's repressive policies to further marginalize the Iraqi Sunnis led to pockets of demonstration in the Sunni city of Fallujah. The protests quickly spread across Sunni regions of Iraq and joined by hundreds of thousands of Sunnis protesters demanding an end to political and economic marginalization toward the ethnic Sunni community. This period of turmoil provided an opportunity for ISIS to grow by recruiting many disaffected members of the Sunni community. Although many Sunnis later deny any affiliation to ISIS due to the ruthlessness of the group, the Iraqi Shiite government's implementing policy of discrimination toward the Sunnis as the result of the institutional incompatibility and sectarian divisions, led the Iraqi

⁴⁹ Middle East briefing N38."Iraq's Jihadi Jack in the box." International Crisis Group, 20 June 2014. Web. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-s-jihadi-jack-box>

Sunnis to accept ISIS as an alternative. The quick spread of the protests and the growing insurgencies against the Shiite government of Baghdad was evident that the members of the Sunni community were driven by the sense of strong grievances along ethnic line.

Meanwhile the Iraq's neighbors, notably the Sunni Gulf states led by Saud Arabia and Shiite government of Iran, were playing an active role in the developments behind the scene. The Iranians were providing political and military support to their Shiite brethren in Baghdad in their fight against Sunni insurgency.⁵⁰ After the resurgence of ISIS and the withdrawal of US troops in Iraq, the Iranian government stepped up their support to the Iraqi government by sending military advisors and soldiers to fight ISIS along the Shiite militias and the government forces. To confront the Iran's dominance in the newly created Shiite government in Iraq and its broader hegemonic ambition in the Middle East, the Saudis began to openly support the Iraq's Sunni factions with the hope to undermine the Iraq's Shiite government and the Iranian dominance in the country. The two countries' proxy war in Iraq reached its peak during the Shiite-Sunni civil war in 2006, when the Sunni insurgency led by Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), ISIS's predecessor, directed most of its attacks against the Iraq's Shiite militias backed by Iran, the Shiite population and their holy shrines.

The Iranian-Saudi rivalry began with the creation of the first Shiite state in the wake of Iranian revolution in 1979 that generated new challenges for the Sunni states in the Middle East, notably Saudi Arabia. The Iranian Shiite leaders began openly questioning the religious legitimacy of Saudi Sunni and accused them of being an agent of the West in the Gulf. Ever

⁵⁰ Kim, Ghattas The. "The Saudi Cold War With Iran Heats Up." Foreign Policy - Comments. N.p., 15 July 2015. Web. 26 Oct. 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/15/the-saudi-cold-war-with-iran-heats-up/>

since, the two countries have been locked in a “cold war” with each other using the sectarian divide to further their ambitions in the region. The transformation of Iran into a Shia power induced Saudi to accelerate the propagation of Wahhabi ideology that is antagonistic to Shia Islam. Many of the groups responsible for the sectarian violence that has occurred in the region since 1979 revolution can be traced back to Saudi and Iranian sources. This regional rivalry has ramped up after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which resulted in the establishment of the first Arab Shiite state.⁵¹ The liberation and empowerment of Iraq’s Shiite majority after the US invasion was the beginning of a broad Shiite revival that will upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and the Middle East for years to come (Nasr 2006).

Syria’s Civil War

The conflict in Syria began as a protest against the corruption, lack of economic opportunities, and repressive political system that have been accumulating over decades; encouraged by the wave of protests in the Arab world “, the Syrian people in 2011 began peaceful demonstrations demanding radical economic and political reforms in how Syria was governed. The lack of response to these demands was followed by severe and sustained military action against those who protested, and this violence drove some in the opposition to seek help from foreign governments in the region, namely the Sunni Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Many of these governments are keen to shatter the age-old alliance between Syria and Iran, and the fall of the Assad regime would help them greatly; for this reason, they offered military and financial aid to the opposition, but only on the condition that the “new Syria” would cut links

⁵¹ Walker, Martin. "The Revenge of the Shia." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976) 30, no.4 (2006): 16-20. Print.
<http://archive.wilsonquarterly.com/essays/revenge-shia>

with Iran and with Hezbollah in South Lebanon. The Iran-Syria alliance, as some assume, roots in their common Shiite identity. Iran has backed Syria because both ruling cliques claim affinity with the heterodox Shia who are minority in an Islamic world and populated by orthodox Sunnis. But this alliance drives less from spurious religious ties than it does from geopolitical interests. Iran's main goal is to shrink the influence of the Sunni pro-western states. Therefore, Iran needs all the allies that it can find to ensure that its regional interests are protected.⁵²

As the Syrian unrest escalated into armed conflict, this new sectarianism spread; it became popular because it legitimized violence against others – even those who were not part of the regime. The regime's acts of war against its own people across Syria only encouraged further resentment against the regime and the Alawites, a Shiite ethnic minority to which the President Bashar Al-Assad's family belongs. Syria is a majority Sunni Muslim country, but the top positions in the security apparatus are in the hands of the Alawites. While, the root cause of the conflict in Syria was not primarily driven by the presence of ethnic diversity, ruling the country by an ethnic minority who monopolized all the economic and political aspects of the country added to the resentment and frustration among the Sunni majority.

Like Iraq, Syria's borders were invented in large part by French colonialists, forcing together several disparate groups. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire, and out of its ruins France took control, roughly in 1920, of a stretch of Ottoman territory on the eastern Mediterranean, today known as Syria and Lebanon. This territory was, and remains, quite ethnically and religiously diverse. The French colonialism set up modern-day Syria in a way that

⁵² Barfi, Barak, John Allen Gay, J. Michael Cole, and Amitai Etzioni. "The Real Reason Why Iran Backs Syria." The National Interest. N.p., 24 Jan. 2016. Web. 30 Oct. 2016.
<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-real-reason-why-iran-backs-syria-14999>

contributed to tension between ethnic and religious groups, which eventually became important for today's war. When the French took over, the Alawite minority who were long prosecuted by the Sunni majority joined the French colonial authority. In particular, they joined the new constructed Syrian military—a development the French welcomed as a means of cementing their power. European colonialists often promoted minority groups that would rely on them to maintain power, so the relationship was symbiotic. After the French left, the Syrian military took over in 1963 and the government quickly became dominated by the Alawites. The rule of the Alawite coupled with the state of emergency that had been in place since 1963 had decisively alienated the Arab Sunni majority.⁵³

Unlike Iraq, Syria was not a weak state. It had a strong security apparatus that monopolized power over its territories, and had institutions that to some level was capable of providing public services and collective security to Syrian citizens. However, like the rest of Arab world that has experienced the “Arab Spring”, decades of severe economic and political inequalities between groups coupled with weak economy and widespread corruption in both public and private sectors led to social unrest. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, the country's ethnic divisions, the regime's brutal response to peaceful demonstrations, and the involvement of third parties, played a vital role into quickly turning peaceful protests into a civil war. The Syrian civil war is now a multifaceted conflict with many moving parts. These moving parts are just more than an insurgency between a rebel group and the government. It has ethnic tensions, the introduction of world and regional powers, and terrorism.⁵⁴

⁵³ Lynch, Mark. "The Political Science of Syria's War." Foreign Policy. The Political Science of Syria's War Comments. N.p., 19 Dec. 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2016 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/19/the-political-science-of-syrias-war>

⁵⁴ "I AM SYRIA." I AM SYRIA. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2016. <http://www.iamsyria.org/conflict-background.html>

Two indicators associated with state capacity—military capability, and the quality of governance—had mixed results in the pre Syrian civil war. The former is defined as the state's repressive capacity to deter potential challengers, and the latter measure the government's ability to provide public services, which is related to the reduction of grievances. Prior to 1970 when the first Assad regime established, Syria experienced a serious of political turmoil as the result of power struggle between the contending groups, the Sunni majority and the Alwite minority. When Hafz Al-Assad assumed power in 1971, he focused on establishing a strong military, which eventually was instrumental in cracking down the Muslim brotherhood popular uprising, particularly in the city of Hama in 1982.⁵⁵ For some years, Assad managed to contain the discontent—partly by granting subsidies on food and partly by curbing the already-hated political police—but the fundamental issue was not resolved. Prior a decade to 2010, the Syrian economy made some progress, but the regime struggled with a number of interrelated political and economic challenges, such as the decrease in oil reserves coupled with an ongoing drought and mismanagement of water supply system that has led to dislocation and migration of hundreds of thousands of people from the countryside to under-serviced cities.⁵⁶ Moreover, decades of rent seeking and patronage created an economy were largely dependent on state subsidies. It became clear if the government were to maintain social and political stability, it needed to make radical changes in its economic and administrative structure. But, the existing government institutions and agencies lacked the capacity to implement a sound economy to deal

⁵⁵ William, Polk. The Atlantic. 10 Dec. 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2016.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/understanding-syria-from-pre-civil-war-to-post-assad/281989/>

⁵⁶ Haddad, Bassam. "The Political Economy of Syria: Realities and Challenges." The Political Economy of Syria: Realities and Challenges | Middle East Policy Council. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2016.
<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/political-economy-syria>

with these challenges. According to media sources, the subsequent Assad regimes focused most of their energies on foreign politics due to the ongoing conflicts with Lebanon and Israel, and left Syria to be run mainly by members of his family and the intelligence services.⁵⁷ As time went on, corruption became deepened, creating a new upper class of people close to the Alawite ruling family and the Sunni majority who made up the lower and middle class felt deprived from economic and political participation, fomenting anger and hostility toward the regime and towards the Alawites in general. When the opportunity arose during the wave of the “Arab Spring”, the Syrian people whom largely made up of the Sunnis took to the streets demanding an end to corruption, economic and political discrimination against them. On one hand, decades of economic and political discrimination against the Sunni community made it easier for the opposition groups, and later the Sunni insurgency to garner large support among the Syrian Sunni community. On the other hand, the overwhelming support to the Sunni opposition groups mostly from the Sunni Gulf states and from the international community emboldened the opposition groups to respond to the compromises that Assad regime made from the beginning, thus leading to escalation of armed conflicts.

⁵⁷ Nassar, Nadim. "What Caused Syria's Civil War?" World Watch Monitor. N.p., 16 Aug. 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2016. <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/08/2648161/>

CONCLUSION

In this paper I argued that three key mechanisms—state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party intervention—affect the probability of civil conflict onset. I provided empirical evidence that poor governance increases the probability of civil conflict onset by limiting the state’s ability to provide public goods and collective security. Conversely, States with strong bureaucratic capacity are more capable in addressing citizens’ grievances, thus decreasing the probability of civil conflict. Furthermore, bureaucracy may not only relate to social service provision, corruption and economic mismanagement, but also a factor that determines the government’s ability to monitor and identify potential rebel groups before it is developed into a full blown insurgency.

Most importantly, I found that economic and political inequalities across ethnic groups (horizontal) have strong effect on the risk of civil war onset. This suggests that economic and political disparities increase the probability of civil war when they coincide with ethnic fractionalization. Although, this is not a new finding, as the idea of horizontal inequalities have been the focus on several studies in civil conflict research, this finding is nevertheless important for two reasons; first, the relationship between ethnic cleavages and civil war should be studied based on group level rather than individual level. Measuring ethnic grievances based on linguistic and cultural differences does not tell us much about the level of economic and political inequalities between groups. Second, this paper reconciles the “opportunity” and “grievances” model, suggesting that both ideas are not mutually exclusive, and complement each other.

Lastly, I hypothesized that third party assistance in the form of military and economic aid to the opposing sides of the internal dispute increase the likelihood of civil war onset. Following the literature focus on the effect on third party intervention on the prospect of negotiation settlement, I suggested that when the opposing third parties with geopolitical interests provide economic and military support to either the government or the opposition, they increase the risk of civil conflict onset. Providing economic and military aid to both rebels and government risks any prospect for peace settlement through negotiation and help both sides to sustain their war once the conflict began.

To test this hypothesis, I failed to find any significant relationship between the third party assistance and civil conflict onset. The correlation between third party intervention and civil war onset has been found in several studies (for example Regan & Meachum 2013). Empirical evidence has shown that third party intervention has led to the onset of civil conflict in several countries such as, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Ghana. During the Cold War, both major powers, the United States and former Soviet Union provided military and economic aids to many of their proxy groups around the world. Yet, data is only available for the United States' economic and military aid to foreign countries. This can impede in finding any significant relationship between third party assistance and the risk of civil war onset. Different statistical analysis and more data might produce different results.

In the last section, I present a case study of civil war in Iraq and Syria, analyzing each of the mechanisms that effect the civil war onset in both countries. In the case of Iraq, the dramatic decline in state capacity after the US-led invasion in 2003 coupled with sever economic and

political discrimination against the Sunni minority played a significant role in the onset of 2006 sectarian war and the second Sunni uprising of 2012. Prior, during and after the conflict, Iran and the Sunni Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia continued to play an active role by providing political and economic support to insurgent groups and the government. In Syria, decades of economic and political discrimination against Sunni majority paved the way for the 2011 unrest instigated by the popular “Arab Spring”. Although, the state capacity was relatively strong, the government’s use of excessive force to put down the protests drove many Syrians to take up arms and join Sunni insurgency.

Syria became another arena for the Iran-Saudi rivalry. The Iranian began to support the Assad regime with arms and soldiers on the ground, while the Saudis and other Gulf states provided arms and financial aid to the Sunni opposition groups. As the result, ISIS is emerged. Five years after, civil war in both countries is still raging resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of people and millions of refugees.

By identifying these causal mechanisms-state capacity, ethnic grievances, and third party intervention—this paper provides a broad understanding into the root causes of civil conflict, and has important policy implications. First, implementing policies to redress grievances could be an important tool for resolving an ongoing conflict. It is quite clear that an ongoing conflict will produce severe grievances, an environment only insurgent groups can benefit from. This will pose obstacles to settlements through negotiations. Grievances can be reduced by improving administrative quality, such as increasing the adherence to the rule of law, reducing corruption and creating a more effective and efficient bureaucracy. This largely depends on a strong

economy. Economic growth should be supported because it tends to be associated with more competent governments. To this end, the international community and international organizations should develop programs and direct their efforts into improving the governance in countries experience political instability. Finally, conducting an effective counter-insurgency is an important element in reducing insurgent, as well as terrorist groups. The international community and major powers should condition their support to governments fighting insurgency on their employing of effective counter insurgency that do not, through their brutal killing of innocent people, create more insurgency and terrorism.

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