

Ethnic Polarization and The Duration of Civil Wars

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From a policy point of view, knowing what makes civil war longer, and which are the propagation mechanisms that make conflict persistent is important in order to define the policies that need to be implement to stop civil wars, and to ensure peaceful post-conflict periods. Identifying the propagation mechanisms is important to design the adequate policies and institutional environment in order to reduce the propagation effect.

In this paper, we examine whether ethnic polarization is a possible dimension of the propagation mechanism of civil wars. We investigate empirically the influence of ethnic polarization on the duration of civil wars. We also discuss several theoretical models that can explain why ethnic polarization, or measures closely related to it, can affect the length of civil wars.

Our empirical estimation shows that the hazard function for the event of the end of a civil war is much lower for countries with a level of ethnic polarization over the median than for the rest of the countries. In fact, an increase of ethnic polarization from 0 to 1 multiplies by 2 the median duration of a civil war. This result suggest that we should pay special attention to countries that are polarized, in order to implement appropriate institutional settings and policies that reduce the feeling of grievance, that seem to be high in polarized countries.

Figure. Hazard function of civil wars: high versus low polarization countries